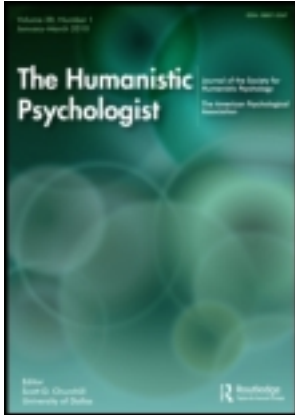


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ARTICLES

Freedom and Determinism

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The question, scope, and meaning of human freedom have been a philosophical preoccupation since antiquity. The question of freedom is juxtaposed to its antithesis, namely, determinism, or more specifically, causation. One cannot sufficiently address the question of freedom without attending to the question of determinism because this antipode is dialectically constituted; hence they are mutually implicative constructs. Psychoanalysis' single contribution to this debate is that it postulates an unconscious activity that is both a problematic and a remedy, that is, both a conundrum and a plausible solution to the question of agency. It lies in the notion that internal forces operate on causality and intentionality outside of human consciousness, and particularly, self-conscious awareness; yet they derive from within the experiential subject and are predicated on a logic of internality that is self-generative, purposeful, and agentially instituted as determinate teleology, what has been traditionally called *psychic determinism*. What I argue throughout this article is that psychic determinism is propelled by unconscious intentionality, which situates the locus of mental life within an unconscious agency responsible for determining the material expression of conscious choice and action. What we call psychic determinism is actually the expression of an underlying freedom, the freedom of unconscious expression. More specifically, freedom and determinism are bifurcations of the same ontological process that is executed by the unconscious ego in all mental productions. In other words, psychic determinism is the expression of its own freedom, and freedom is the instantiation of its determinate powers. Rather than view causation in its customary fashion as the sufficient condition(s) for the occurrence of an event devoid of freedom, future succession, or expressive value, I champion a conception of causality that is self-organizing and self-activating from within its own natural parameters. In this way, freedom and determinism are the same.

In his *Five Lectures*, given during his historic trip to Clark University, Freud (1910/1957) tells us that “mental processes are determined” (p. 29).¹ He continues to proclaim that

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¹All references to Freud's texts refer to the original German monographs compiled in his *Gesammelte Werke, Chronologisch Geordnet* (1940–1952/1968). Most translations are mine. Because most English-speaking psychologists and psychoanalysts neither own nor readily have access to these original texts, I have cited *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*.

“psycho-analysts are marked by a particularly strict belief in the determination of mental life” (p. 38). What exactly does Freud mean by this? Does he mean that all aspects of mental life are caused? If so, by what? Are mental processes the product of antecedent events or activities that follow fixed universal laws governing the course of future affairs and actions following a particular trajectory of causation informed by the necessity of nature? Is such a trajectory permeable or unalterable, predetermined toward a teleological end or subject to plasticity? To what degree is determinism subject to purposeful choice, intentionality, volition, agency, and trans-mogrification versus the rigid requirements of fixed necessity? Is determinism compatible with freedom, even if they dialectically operate on mutual yet disparate levels of parallel processing? How does the role of motivation answer to the freedom versus determinism debate?

Brenner (1955) declares that a fundamental hypothesis underlying the theoretical edifice of psychoanalysis is the principle of “psychic determinism, or causality” (p. 2), which is the doctrine that nothing in the mind happens randomly or by chance. Therefore, there exists a “causal connection” between every mental production and psychical events that precede it in some form of deterministic manner whereby there is no metaphysical possibility of indetermination, accidental occurrence, arbitrariness, or meaningless phenomena to transpire. Psychoanalysis is premised on the notion that there must be an original cause (or causes) for every psychic event, and following the principle of sufficient reason, there must be an adequate answer to this proposition based on a rational, hence meaningful, explanation. Psychoanalysis speculates that this so-called cause is motivated by an unconscious wish or intentional state of affairs that is not transparent to consciousness. Such psychic causality is responsible for all productions of conscious life, from dream states, fantasies, and parapraxes or faulty function (*Fehlleistung*), to clinical symptoms found normatively throughout the human race. Therefore, psychic determinism becomes an indispensable pillar of psychoanalytic thought.

Hartmann (1939) is content in dismissing the philosophical problem of freedom “because it is so equivocal in meaning” (p. 10), instead adopting a pragmatic approach that focuses on freedom from symptoms, and freedom to act (also see Waelder, 1936b). For Hartmann, freedom is the exercise of control by the ego; for Kohut (1977), it emanates from the “center of initiative” within the self (p. 245). Menninger (1955), on the other hand, defines freedom as something of a “shibboleth” that “tends to disappear when one attempts to define it” (p. 803). Freud (1901/1960) observed that we have an attitude toward the insistence of personal freedom as a compulsory feeling or conviction, despite the fact that we are not entirely in control of all our conscious thoughts, affects, and motor actions when under the influence of everyday psychopathology, thus drawing into question the legitimacy of free will. If freedom takes its conscious form as a feeling of conviction or compulsion guiding one’s actions, then is there any real difference between drive and psychic determinism? If one extends this line of argument further, namely, that freedom is inner compulsion, then it would not be entirely incorrect to assume that the ultimate form of freedom is suicide, thus observing Nietzsche’s (1886/1989) thesis: “The thought of suicide is a powerful comfort: it helps one through many a dreadful night” (p. 91). Perhaps this is one reason why Lacan (1947/2006) says that “madness is freedom’s most faithful companion” (p. 144).

Throughout this project, I endeavor to foray into an admittedly indelible topic, one that may surprisingly take us into unsuspected territory. Psychoanalysis may offer us a potential solution to the longstanding philosophical conundrum of reconciling freedom with determinism by showing that what we call *psychic determinism* (*psychischen Determinismus*), and hence tend to

equate with a lack of freedom in our experiential lives, is actually the expression of an underlying freedom, the freedom of unconscious expression. What I further argue is that freedom and determinism are dialectically informed modes of unconscious intentionality orchestrated by unconscious agency. More specifically, freedom and determinism are bifurcations of the same ontological process that is executed by the unconscious ego in all mental productions. In other words, psychic determinism is the expression of its own freedom, and freedom is the instantiation of its determinate powers. This is not a tautology: Each activity has inverse relations despite being dialectically constituted. The end result, I suggest, is that both freedom and determinism are modes of causation. Freud is interested in describing and explaining phenomena that derive from previous states of psychic motivation that give rise to psychical events or mental processes. What I intend to show is that these derivatives emanate from a psychic state of unconscious freedom, and are themselves the expression of such freedom, a free causality.

THE FREEDOM VERSUS DETERMINISM BINARY

Philosophy has historically been preoccupied with the freedom–determinism binary, and in the rise of modernity, from Leibniz and Spinoza to Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, it was almost exclusively concerned with the problem of evil, moral agency, and theodicy. For the medieval, modern, and idealist philosophers, freedom is ultimately conditioned by God, whom is the ground for the condition of freedom itself. It is neither necessary nor desirable for us to import that kind of fantasy into our discussion. What is germane, however, is to explore how freedom and determinism are grounded, hence constituted, *within* psychical processes that do not presuppose the ontological necessity of a Creator, Absolute Ground or Principle of the Ultimate. Because we are experiential embodied beings that inhabit spacetime, we must offer a naturalized account that is subject to objective verification, logical coherence, and phenomenal lived experience. Because we are often introduced to the freedom–determinism binary in an antithetical fashion, where there is no immediate discernable sense of synthesis, hence already setting the tone for a discursive discourse on incompatible opposites, we are less accustomed to entertaining the notion that freedom and determinism are dialectically informed constructs that are necessarily manifested in any form of definition, demarcated scope of inquiry, psychological dynamic, or philosophical category that attempts to investigate their meanings.

The traditional philosophical doctrine of determinism subscribes to a natural science worldview where it is assumed that all present states of affairs are necessarily predicated on antecedent events that brought those occasions or experiences into being in the first place, and that they are propelled from universal causal laws that operate within nature itself independent of consciousness. It may be argued that the scientific revolution fortified such a binary in its insistence that every occurrence, including all possible future events, could be explained from a reductive (parsimonious) paradigm that implicitly eradicates the principle of freedom. In other words, determinism is the view that everything has an original cause, is absolutely dependent upon such causes, is governed (mastered) by preexistent ontological forces, and operates in accordance with necessary (nonaccidental), predefined (established), or fixed (nonnegotiable) natural laws that impel the coming into being of all things or proceedings. There are hard and soft determinists, from the extreme (fatalism) to the liberal (voluntarism), whereby free will is either negated

in toto or allowed under certain circumstances, just as there are sundry forms of determinism that owe their allegiance to the forebear of history, one's environment, genetics or heredity, language and the symbolic order, cultural forces, scientific, mathematical, or logical explananda, or at the other extreme, theological providence.

Within the history of science, logical positivism, and Anglo-American analytic philosophy, it may be argued that the relationship between cause and effect assumes a linear notion of time followed by rigid parameters. The effect is always preceded in time by its cause, which follows a regularity of succession. To say that A causes B, is to say that whenever A happens it is followed by B, or that an instance of A is always followed by an instance of B. Following formal rules of inference, these logical propositions are presented in the form of modus ponens:

$$\begin{array}{l} p \supset q \\ p \\ \hline q \end{array}$$

From this standpoint, cause and effect cannot occur simultaneously nor have a variable sequence. In other words, a cause cannot follow its effect. Nor can an effect be the cause of a future effect. In my opinion, these definitional properties have palpable limitations. Why would we assume that a cause cannot generate other causes in the effects it produces? This implies that an effect is a terminal end point or finality in itself, when it could be a springboard for a new beginning or generative process that amplifies on its developmental or epigenetic constitution. A series of original causes as archaic events could readily be interpreted as the primordial forces behind the process of becoming that are gathered and assimilated within a self-organizing organism that is self-activating and self-governed. The notion that cause and effect is a temporal, invariable sequence is to beg the question of determinism.

Freud (1906/1959) was clearly a determinist, and in the context of explaining faulty achievements (*Fehlleistungen*), he specifically tells us so: "I demonstrated that a whole number of actions which were held to be unmotivated are on the contrary strictly determined" (pp. 104–105). In fact, Freud (1916–1917/1963) views the whole scientific *Weltanschauung* as pledging a worldview that takes "the determination of natural events" (p. 28) as a requisite part of its platform. The reason why Freud believed in strict determinism is that he could not buy into the notion of indeterminism, that is, the possibility that volition could occur independent of psychophysical antecedents. And for good reason: How could thought transpire without a brain-stem? He, furthermore, could not entertain the idea that anything could be indeterminate or subjected to crass unpredictability or acausality. For Freud, certain natural and logical laws govern internal (psychical) events and their transactions, and under the right circumstances, they are ascertainable. He insisted that every mental event has an antecedent motive or *function* that brings about or impels a psychic process to express itself; and he thought that it is, indeed, possible to trace such events back to their earliest primordial determinants (Freud, 1900/1953), despite conceding that we may hit an impasse in fully understanding the motive or its meaning.²

²One such example is when we encounter "the dream's navel" (*der Nabel des Traums*), which leaves an "obscure" (*Dunkel*), convoluted, and indiscernible mass (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 525), thus occluding any clarity of meaning.

Jones (1924) subscribes to a deadlock view of freedom and determinism and makes the general presumption that the two constructs are logically incompatible, when this supposition begs the question in the first place. Jones' "incompatibility thesis" assumes that freedom and determinism are irreconcilable, when, in my opinion, he commits a false dichotomy by failing to see how they are dialectically related, and hence are mutually implicative categories.

Let us first begin with the notion of determinism. Determinism can be viewed as a natural thrust or process, that is, as belonging to nature, or that which is *given*. We are thrown into a body as part of our facticity, as well as a family and social context, and the broader cultural environs that geographically, linguistically, economically, and politically influence our experience of self and world. These ontological antecedents exist *a priori* and unequivocally condition our being in the world. We are restricted by various natural laws that the field of physics is adept in explaining; and just as we cannot defy gravity, we can hardly deny the objective presence of the past and the historical contingencies that have shaped our experience of contemporary societies. These ontological features are part and parcel of our collective historicity and comprise empirical facts that inform our epistemological foundations of biology and culture.

But not only is our thrownness given, so too is our unique individual and autonomous ways of encountering, perceiving, assimilating, and organizing lived reality as a meaningful creative function or act, what we may call the *phenomenology of freedom* that is inherent in the very structure of experience itself. Psychoanalysis has typically focused upon the structural and behavioral parameters of freedom defined as *freedom from* versus *freedom to*, such as freedom from disabling symptoms or neurotic misery, and the ability to live and act in functional and adaptive ways derived from *conflict-free* spheres of experiencing the world. In the humanities, especially within the context of *freedom for* liberty, or *freedom of* rights, the emphasis has been on freedom from bondage, constraint, and intimidation or duress caused by others versus freedom to think, perform, act, dream, and imagine. These capacities to do things are enabled by degrees of contextual variance, malleable parameters, and multitudinous objects of choice within a penumbra of possibilities available to the human subject. This is generally referred to as the distinction between positive and negative freedom, whereas one is self-determining or in control over their life versus the degree to which one is free from interference from others. Although the former emphasizes autonomous rule and self-regulation, the latter focuses on the condition of not being prevented from doing something, hence giving rise to Bentham's term "negative liberty," which is the absence of coercion. Whether we view freedom as a conditional state of relational affairs oriented toward a libertarian notion of free will, where there are degrees of freedom both from within and without, we must still concede that freedom has real limits.

Psychoanalysts are used to interpreting the notion of freedom to the analysand through the language of defense, such as a need to escape from emotional pain, or to be set free from oppressive childhood complexes, and this is why the philosophical attraction of freedom is important to an individual. Certainly the historic signification of emancipation and liberty is attractive to collective democracies for tangible reasons; however, for our purposes, the real issue becomes explaining freedom as an agentic function within deterministic confines: namely, the fact that we are born into a specific body, culture, and language without any consultation in the matter whatsoever. We have no more control over the empirical fact that we are the product of our biological parents' procreation or union, and were born into a particular family in a particular time and geographic space, than we have over the scientific discovery that the earth

revolves around the sun. However, within those confines, we still enjoy degrees of freedom to experience, think, and act within the found givens of our embodied cultural existence. Therefore, it is philosophically compatible and justifiable to say that we are thrown into determinate circumstances that we interpret to be indeterminate in terms of its potentiality and possible meanings. From this perspective, there is no need to retain the rigid bifurcation between freedom and determinism because both are equally plausible, complementary, and dialectically coconstituted, experiential realities.

What I wish to displace is the assumption that a so-called free act is caused from inner mental states *devoid* of other conditions, such as our mind-brain dependence or external stimuli. No psychical act (e.g., will) is independent from our embodied constituencies, such as antecedent neurophysiological processes or environmental situations. This antiquated polarization reinforces the untenable notion that free will is the product of *uncaused events*, when causation may be viewed as the dialectical union of freedom and determinism. This is why Aristotle (1984) used the term *cause* (αιτία) to mean the reason or explanation for something happening.

The contrived binary between freedom and determinism has been historically successful because it signifies a psychological artifact and wish that the human species needs to promulgate to have a convenient meaning at its disposal for answering the painfully fraught subjective reality that we all, at times, feel both determined and free. How do we reconcile such a contradiction in our lived experiences? How do we answer to the psychological paradox this antipode generates within the human subject? If determinism is the foreclosure or erasure of possibility, and freedom is being-toward-possibility, then are we able to provide an adequate solution to this conundrum?

FREUD ON FREE WILL

It is rather ironic that Freud had theoretically secured the radicalization of freedom within the human psyche, but had not realized that he had done so. If he had, he would have never dismissed the notion of free will, because, according to his thesis, our will is determined by unconscious forces that give rise to its conscious counterpart; and therefore, consciousness would be the derivative and materialization of unconscious process. In other words, consciousness is the ontological extension and expression of unconscious structure (Mills, 2002). Here it is more appropriate to refer to *freed will* as the product of determinate unconscious agency, that is, the conscious instantiation of unconscious intent.

Because Freud, himself, bought into the freedom–determinism binary and did not conceive of a dialectical relation between the two polarities that form a reciprocal (categorical) unit, he was further seduced by the hard determinism of his day. Freud (1916–1917/1963) believed that human beings “nourish a deeply rooted faith in undetermined psychical events and in free will, [however,] this is quite unscientific and must yield to the demand of a determinism whose rule extends over mental life” (p. 106). Notice that Freud uses the word *faith* (*Glauben*), as in a need or wish to believe. Earlier he tells us that:

Many people, as is well known, contest the assumption of complete psychological determinism by appealing to a special feeling of conviction that there is a free will. This feeling of conviction exists; and it does not give way before a belief in determinism. Like every normal feeling it must have

something to warrant it. But as so far as I can observe, it does not manifest itself in the great and important decisions of the will: On these occasions the feeling that we have is rather one of psychical compulsion, and we are glad to invoke it on our behalf. . . . According to our analyses it is not necessary to dispute the right to the feeling of conviction of having a free will. If the distinction between conscious and unconscious motivation is taken into account, our feeling of conviction informs us that conscious motivation does not extend to our motor decisions. (Freud, 1901/1960, pp. 253–254)

Here Freud nicely draws attention to our “feeling of conviction” of personal freedom, the experiential quality of which exists and is a normal human emotion. He takes objection to the notion that this feeling and the will are one and the same, and in effect disputes that it plays a vital role in volitional processes of great importance. Here I would argue just the opposite. This disposition, what Freud equates with a compulsion, is manifest in the will, and, I argue, is the motive, intent, or causal thrust behind the compulsory nature of the will. It is only on the condition that one feels so passionate or driven about “great and important decisions” that the will feels its “right to the feeling of conviction.” To reappropriate William James, not only do we have the will to believe, we have the right to believe. Here freedom is actualized through the will, but originally motivated by unconscious determinants that are also the instantiation of its freedom. Despite the hypothesis that conscious free will is informed by unconscious determinants, such determinism is the agentic expression of its freed will, or more appropriately, its intentionality, that secures an avenue for free expression in consciousness. Hence, we have faulty achievements, paradigmatically, the slip. It is only on the basis of a contingency—an accident—that you can intend to say one thing but reveal what you really think, the meaning and motive of which is masked in the slip. The unconscious intention is revealed only on the condition that it was an unintentional or faulty occurrence. Here you have the free reign of unconscious intentionality unconstrained by the boundaries or parameters of conscious restraint or culture.

The tendency we are conditioned to commit without realizing it, I suggest, is that the term *free will* (*freien Willens*), which is customary parlance, is assumed to signify a conscious act; therefore, the implication is that we are not justified in superimposing that intentional act and linguistic usage on unconscious processes. I challenge this assumption. We could conservatively relegate the term *will* to consciousness, however, this would not resolve the question of how the will is ultimately conditioned, motivated, or informed by antecedent forces. Here we must appeal to original ground, or the unconscious conditions that make conscious will possible. In a nutshell, this is the psychoanalytic contribution to this debate. For Freud, the desiring subject is split or divided into competing agencies that have different unconscious wishes, conflicts, and defenses that stand in embattled relation to one other, each exercising their degree of intentionality and counter-intentionality that often lead to compromise formations. Incompatible and reactionary unconscious desires skirmish over their bid for unique and differentiated expressions, which make their way into modified forms of consciousness and behavior. Although the end product of a compromise may be argued to typify a lack of freedom on the part of the conscious subject, on a more primordial level, it is the triumph of unconscious metamorphosis negotiated through agentic mediation. To me, this constitutes an act of freedom, but not necessarily free will. This is why Schopenhauer (1818/1958) uses the expression *liberum arbitrium indifferetiae* to connote a will that is free in the metaphysical sense before it takes its form as conscious phenomena.

In certain places in his writings, Freud pessimistically concludes that free will is an illusion, which seems to be the consensus of many analysts, past and present (see Jones, 1924; Menninger, 1955; Modell, 2011). Freud (1919/1955) soberly casts observation on the fact that the ego is disillusioned by clinging to fantasies of all its possible future states of fulfillment it cannot achieve, and those that have been “crushed” by “external circumstances,” hence a reminder that the reality principle is laboriously at work in eradicating “our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will” (p. 236). Here I would argue that Freud confuses the internal thrust of the spirit of conviction with the assumption that external reality always vanquishes those so-called fantasies, when both are operative within any given moment and give rise to a dialectical tension. But Freud (1930/1964) also speaks of a “desire for freedom” (p. 96), which usually manifests in response to some form of injustice; and this desire, itself, serves to further the development of civilization. Here freedom evolves through the context of a moral discourse that serves a pragmatic good, and also exposes the motivation of freedom inherent in desire itself. To desire is to experience an internal valuation that is free in itself, that is, as the ground of its own independent self-experience. Here Freud lends privilege to the autonomy of the individual over that of society. “The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization,” for man “will always defend his claim to individual liberty against the will of the group” (p. 96). In other words, our will to freedom is aroused when we feel oppressed by others.

These statements show both an ambivalence and commitment to the phenomenology of freedom, whereby a libertarian notion of personal free will is contrasted against the imposition of collective constraints. Freud’s reference to the desire, urge, or wish for freedom (*Freiheitsdrang*), which is often associated with a drive or compulsion, is once again interpreted as having both causal, hence deterministic, versus unconstrained—viz. free—characteristics that impel desire itself. We should not assume that desire is merely a product of consciousness or will, but rather, that it fuels the drives (*Triebe*) or instinctual activity that must secure an object choice for satisfaction. In other words, desire and drive inform urges or pressures that are felt within conscious affect states Freud (1915/1957) describes as a “feeling of compulsion,” or in Vergote’s (1997) words, “pulsional desire” (*Désir pulsionnel*). Here freedom is allowing a feeling to take hold in us that compels our desire to think and act, and this must be mediated by an agent (originally governed by unconscious agency) in its choices and possible range of actions it has at its disposal. Because drives have an aim (*Ziel*) or purpose, which are only satiated or frustrated by objects selected or repudiated by the (unconscious) ego, there are, by definition, elements of freedom ontologically inscribed in the very constitution of the drives. Therefore, even if we were in agreement with Freud’s renunciation of free will, it would not negate the notion that degrees of freedom enacted through unconscious determination condition the will based on a prior form of teleology. I elaborate on this point shortly. But before I do so, it is important that we address what is perhaps Freud’s most famous reference to freedom in the psychoanalytic lexicon, namely, the fundamental rule or free association (*freien Assoziation*).

In his comments on the evolution of the free associative method, Freud (1923/1955) observed that everything that occurred to a patient’s mind from a certain starting point also stood in relation and internal connection to that starting point guided by a “strict determination of mental events” (p. 238). Freud once again focuses on parapraxes as the prime example, which are “strictly determined” (*streng determiniert*) yet “revealed” as an “expression” (*Äußerung*) of “suppressed intentions” (*unterdrückten Absichten*) or a “clash between two intentions,” at

least one of which was unconscious (p. 240). Notice that Freud uses the language of intentionality. When he speaks of strict determinism, he is evoking the notion that events are determined from within by intentional unconscious processes. So even when he states in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920/1955) that neurotic symptoms are “determined by early infantile influences,” their “fate” (*Schicksals*) is largely “arranged by themselves” (p. 21). The ambivalent tension in Freud’s use of deterministic language must be interpreted within the context of an unconscious agency determining the directionality or trajectory of these conscious productions.

On the one hand, Freud (1916–1917/1963) wants to champion a determinism over free will when it comes to psychic events; yet, on the other hand, he extends a notion of agency to unconscious choice that freely selects objects for instinctual gratification. An argument can be made that he distinguishes free will (a conscious construct, which he wants to subordinate in causal efficacy) from freedom, which in principle does not strictly adhere to conscious determinism. In fact, he wants to emphasize the “higher degree of freedom of association” (pp. 106–107). But this freedom of association is *influenced* by unconscious determinants. Because psychoanalysis has long established that mental events are *overdetermined*, that is, influenced by a multiplicity of forces and sources of motivation operative within the mind all at once, what Waelder (1936a) calls the principle of multiple function or co-determination, the notion of strict determinism becomes tenuous when we analyze the minutia of these distinctive causal processes. Therefore, the term *influence* seems to better capture the inherent (albeit at times intangible) power, malleability, and multifarious nature of determinism.

Freud never tires in emphasizing the notion that nothing is arbitrary, indeterminable, or unconnected in psychic associations or correlations that hook up certain verbal disclosures or behavioral enactments with their prior shapes or antecedents that are “always strictly determined by important internal attitudes of mind” (1916–1917/1963, p. 107). In this context, what is free is not unbounded, but rather connected or linked to particular mental elements that form a signifying relation in the psyche based on prior unconscious organizations. Here determination is *linkage*, hence a relational dynamic.³ It is not a predetermined cause or state of affairs that bring about a fated or preordained end, but rather an intricate connection or combinatory of signifiers that have semiotic associative functions derived from such intrapsychic attitudes. So the freedom inherent in association is the *recovery* of the linkage or set of relations to previous internal mental elements, contents, and processes that were not previously known or consciously articulated; hence they are unconscious derivatives, yet they form the psychic background that produce such associations to begin with.

If these internal attitudes ultimately produce the ground of association, then they, themselves, are either strictly determined, or they are subject to determination from other forces. Yet this strict determination, I argue, is being issued or directed by an unconscious agency. How is it

³Recall that it was Hume (1748/1975) who refuted the notion that there was a “necessary connection” between cause and effect. Instead he argued that the regularity of succession between antecedent causes and resultant effects exhibits a temporal precedence which is *conjoined*, not that a prior occurrence necessarily creates an effect. Hume rejects the claim that temporal precedence necessarily causes events because necessity cannot be observed to exist. All that is observed is the conjunction of cause and effect that follows a regular succession. There is no necessary connection between the two series in time, only that one follows the other; and hence the human mind attributes strict determinism to temporal events rather than simply viewing them as successions that are conjoined. In other words, there is no necessity, only relational linkage. One does not necessarily bring the other into being, only that they are interpreted to be joined together or united.

that we can trace back the link to a previous state of events, but we cannot trace back the point of origin, that is, to the issuing agency itself? It is because the issuing agency is ultimately free and grounds its own ground through the expression of psychic material that makes its way into consciousness, which is the horizon of its own becoming. Although we may trace back the content, if conditions are favorable, to points of origination, we cannot directly uncover the ground of grounds, because our conscious agency or free will is already participating in a process that cannot peel open its own agency without becoming self-reflectively aware of its freedom in doing so. The conscious content of free association is *derived* from our own internal mental life, a derivative of our own agentic organization and free expression. Whether intended or not, Freud's thesis on free association radicalizes the ontology of unconscious freedom.

PSYCHIC DETERMINISM AS TELEOLOGY

In Chapter 12 of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud sets out his clearest views on psychic determinism, what he equates with “purposive ideas” (*Zielvorstellungen*) and “motivations” that inform our conscious thoughts and actions (1901/1960, p. 240). He reiterates that nothing in the mind is accidental, undetermined, or arbitrary, for conscious choice and action are attributed to “determinants from the unconscious” (p. 243). In offering a number of clinical facts from case studies and examples from his own self-analysis, he traces back the associative network of connections that emanate from an unconscious determinism where “the existence of highly composite thought-processes which are quite unknown to consciousness” (p. 247) become disclosed through dreams, slips of the tongue and pen, forgetting, errors, misreadings, mislaying objects, failures in memory, bungled actions, superstitions, and chance phenomena. Freud believed that chance is the residue of design. In other words, pure chance occurrences do not exist in the psyche, rather they are influenced by unconscious causal-motivational factors that are teleologically constituted.

Freud's (1901/1960) use of “purposive” language is no coincidence. In fact, such psychic determinants have a “hidden motivation” (p. 271), hence a *telos*, aim, or end goal, that may be revealed through parapraxes or unveiled through an analysis of associations and their relational linkages to earlier, even archaic, origins. As discussed before, these associations are free (*freien*) insofar as they reveal “in every case a disturbing ideational content—a complex;” in other words, intrapsychic conflict “determined by an ideational content that is operative” in the mind (1906/1959, p. 105). Freud (1906/1959) further tells us that such spontaneous thoughts or actions, such as fiddling with things, humming a tune, or playing with objects belies the hidden motivation “that is not arbitrarily chosen but will be determined by their relation to his secret—to his ‘complex’—and may, as it were, be regarded as derivatives of that complex” (p. 109). Therefore, Freud attributes purposeful ideation to psychic determinism that may reveal clandestine motives through conscious derivatives. Here, not only is psychic determinism an unconscious operative process, it operates *a fortiori* as teleological intent. For how could an intention be revealed unless it was already purposefully conceived in the first place?

Because unconscious ideas are purposive and motivational, not only is the notion of psychic determinism compatible with teleology, it is presupposed (Flew, 1970). The principle of psychic determinism presupposes unconscious intent, the cardinal characteristics of which include a motive, purpose, aim, and final end. But contra Aristotle, unconscious motivation oriented toward a finality or end-state is not predetermined in its path or outcome. The unconscious ego must secure an avenue and object choice in thought, affect, fantasy, and action that satisfies

the aims of drives. Recall that Freud (1915/1957) delineates the components of a drive (*Trieb*) as constituted by a source, force, object, and aim. Because drives are in themselves incapable of being known directly, an unconscious *Ding an sich*, so to speak, they may only be known through their phenomenal appearances. Yet Freud enlists the help of consciousness in procuring satisfaction for the drives by selecting objects of desire, and here we may compare psychic determinism to Aristotelean causality, which emphasizes overdetermination.

Just as a drive has a source derived from its biological embodiment (material cause), it also has a force or pressure (efficient cause) that propels it to act, a complexity in its organization (formal cause), and a motivational object it purposefully chooses to secure gratification (final causality). Here there is a continuity and interdependence among all causal phenomena. If every psychic act has a sense or purpose, causality and teleology are inseparable ontic processes. This is why multiple motivations exist in the mind and can be expressed or revealed in a single act, which arise from concurrent forces that exert their influence on the “mutually opposing action—of two different intentions” (1916–1917/1963, p. 44). Furthermore, several motives may inhere in a “single psychical cause,” which Freud (1910/1957) insists “always have a meaning” (p. 38). Here he joins company with the great philosophical rationalists who believed the universe is intelligible and governed by natural laws that have a purposeful and meaningful structure based on rational necessity. But with one exception: Teleological structure is self-organizing, hence not predetermined or fixed in its end result or constitution. The unconscious mind executes freedom of choice in its aims, objects, and paths toward achieving fulfillment, which it can inhibit, delay, negate, or seize upon through dynamic determinants. And if dynamicism is the touchstone, then freedom and determinism are not mutually exclusive processes.

A possible answer to the freedom–determinism binary rests on our understanding of overdetermination, where there is purported to be a confluence of forces operative upon the mind all at once, each one of which could potentially influence and bring about a whole host of psychical effects; and therefore our psychic register requires a more sophisticated form of information processing than a mere economic principle of mental functioning. There exists a supervenience of various psychophysical pressures whereby each force depends upon the efficacy of the others and their inherent mutual relations. They may each have a disproportionate amount of organization, zest, and intensity, which may exert various degrees of impetus and order within the psyche, or congeal all at once to bring about an effect(s) where there are multiple valences, each having their own causal efficacy. This level of complexity introduces the necessity for agency to answer to these problematics and overdetermined demands placed on the psyche to mediate the multitude of dynamic determinants that inform our dispositions and affects, desires and defenses, and cognitive metarepresentations that impel us to think, feel, and act.

Unconscious thoughts have a certain degree of order, force, intensity, directionality, and loci that are teleologically organized and expressed through circuitous routes that find their way into conscious productions, whether that be through impulses, emotions, fantasy, behavior, or the speech act. In this way, we may explain such productions as being directed by agentic currents guided by *unconscious intentionality*. Here I do not wish to subscribe to the same train of thought as the phenomenologists who insist that intentionality is a psychical activity and property of consciousness. Contrarily, I maintain that psychic acts derived from unconscious determinants have telic aims that are intentional (*intentus*) and *about* objects, hence purposeful and goal oriented, and that they are internally aimed toward or directed at mental objects. They are, furthermore, directed by an unconscious agency.

Just as dreams and fantasies are subjected to the organizing principles of condensation, displacement, compromise formations (contaminations), and distortion, so too do symptoms have a manifest “sense,” purpose, or “intention” (Freud, 1916–1917/1963, p. 269) that symbolically represent internal conflicts or wishes, the origin of which are varied and complex, issuing from the differentiation and transmutation of competing unconscious motives, such as repressed or dissociated impulses. And here psychic determinism is essentially identical to the doctrine of freedom: from dream content to parapraxes, neurotic symptoms, and psychopathology, “unconscious thoughts find expression as modifications of other thoughts” (Freud, 1901/1960, p. 278). In the context of the psychopathology of everyday life as normativity, these unconscious modifications that inform conscious enactments operate “with a *freer use* of the means at hand” (p. 278, italics added). In other words, unconscious thoughts are transposed—that is, set free—by modifying themselves through the slip, faulty achievement, or “incorrect function” they signify.

Earlier we observed how Freud (1901/1960) confirmed that our conviction of having free will, which informs our conscious motivations, does not annul our belief that such conviction is also informed by unconscious motivations that work in tandem with conscious intentions and volition (see p. 254). Here we may situate the locus of freedom in the unconscious “*capacity for expressing itself*” (p. 279, italics in original). Notice that Freud emphasizes a capacity or faculty of potentiality. In this context, causation is the capacity to move from inherent potentiality to determinate actuality. In other words, causation is a developmental process that derives from original conditions and progressively unfolds through a series of mediations and modifications to achieve a completed state. Not only is freedom compatible with determinism, it becomes the ground for determinate expression. But in order to have freedom, we must have agency.

UNCONSCIOUS AGENCY

Is unconscious experience caused? Or is it causal? This hegemony is, of course, a false dichotomy, yet one reflective of our typical discourse in conceiving causation. If our analysis of freedom and determinism, so far, has borne any fruit, we have concluded that the two constructs are dialectically constituted and mutually implicative. Therefore, you cannot have one without the other. However, are we going about this question the wrong way? Is it possible to conceive of freedom and determinism as identical processes, rather than emphasizing the dichotomous perspective highlighted at any given moment? Put another way, is there an inverse relation to each pole that collapses into an indistinguishable synthesis? In other words, this polarity only makes sense if we fail to articulate the supraordinate holistic process that binds this dichotomy into a formal unity.

As we have intimated, for there to be psychic determination or causation, there must be a *determiner* or source of activity that executes this formal act of bringing about mental functioning to begin with, what we may equate with unconscious agency. Freud was never able to adequately answer to the question of a unifying agency because he divided the mind up into competing “agencies,” “systems” (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 537), or “entities” (Freud, 1923/1961a, pp. 23–26) culminating in his mature, tripartite structural theory of 1923. Although Freud did offer an adumbrated attempt to explain how the I (*Ich*) epigenetically developed out of the It (*Es*) as a differentiated and modified agency derived from its initial natural embodiment (see

Freud, 1923/1961, p. 25; Freud, 1926/1961, p. 97), he was not able to explain this developmental process with any precision.

In *Origins: On the Genesis of Psychic Reality*, I offer a systematic psychoanalytic metaphysics articulating the birth of psychic agency (Mills, 2010). Here I argue that structures of subjectivity are, themselves, conditioned *a priori* by an unconscious agency that is responsible for all forms of mental life to materialize and thrive, including consciousness. My reasoning relies upon the principle of sufficient reason, namely, that there must be an original ground for every mental event that stands in relation to every mental object. In many respects, the principle of sufficient reason is no different than the doctrine of psychic determinism: all activity of mind must precede from a prior state of organizational processes. Psychic activity does not pop up *ex nihilo*; it must surface from an unconscious organizing principle I have metaphorically called the *abyss*. This unconscious abyss is, itself, a crude form of agency that performs executive functions and initiates determinate choices and actions through intentional maneuvers we are accustomed to refer to as drive derivatives, wishes, fantasies, defenses, compromise formations, self-states, dissociative enactments, or otherwise anything we may label as belonging to unconscious experience. The locus of this abyss rests within an agentic function that may be properly attributed to an unconscious ego that possesses formal capacities to execute intentional choice aimed toward purposeful ends, what we have already described as unconscious teleology.

How am I to convince the reader that we all possess unconscious agency? Let me begin by asking how could memory, representation, and semiotics be possible? Without an internal executor or agency that performs formal functions of perceptual processing, categorization, retention, synthesis, unification, semiotic linkage, and information exchange, how could human experience be encoded, organized, transmuted, and transmitted via speech and behavior? Where would such activity come from? How could it be carried out if it was not initiated from an inner sense of functional form?⁴ In other words, consciousness is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for explaining these psychic processes that, by definition, transpire outside of consciousness. Unconscious productions have a certain force and presence enacted by a formal (impersonal) agentic ego that lies at the heart of all teleological activity. How else could we explain mental events that are operative within psychic regions or territories unknown to immediate consciousness when they appear unannounced? Appealing to neuroscience, biology, or brain discourse gets us nowhere. Cognitive science cannot answer the question of agency because it makes consciousness an epiphenomenon, hence properties of the brain that possess no causal powers of their own. And if we are content in boiling down mind to brain states, then what becomes of freedom and agency?

The coming into being of psychic reality may be understood from the standpoint of a developmental monistic ontology whereby there is a progressive unfolding of desire into an organizing and unifying process system we equate with the unconscious ego as an impersonal executive–synthetic agency. This agency is merely formal, hence it is not a personal agent or subject in any proper sense, which is commonly ascribed to human consciousness or selfhood. The abyss is initially immersed in its own corporeal sentient embodiment and awakens as appetitive motivational longing, its initial Being-in-relation-to-lack. The abyss erupts from its self-enclosed original unity as pulsional desire. Such desirous rupture is in response to feeling its

⁴In *The Facts of Causation*, D. H. Mellor (1995) ends his book by concluding that “the form of inner sense is causation” (p. 243).

need, urge, or craving to experience and satiate the lack, which takes various initial forms that eventually breach into consciousness as ego proper. Originally, desire takes itself as its initial object through a form of prereflective self-consciousness I refer to as *unconscious apperception*, the pure experiential self-sense belonging to precognitive unconscious thought. The development of unconscious subjectivity ultimately follows an organic process based on a series of dialectical mediations beginning as unconscious apperception and culminating in self-conscious reflection, the sublated domain of conscious human experience. Yet this initial rudimentary process of desirous rupture and apperception constitutes the birth of the human psyche, for mind is an epigenetic, architectonic self-organizing achievement expressed as a dynamic, self-articulated complex totality or psychic holism.

Unconscious mind is a *series of spacings* that first instantiate themselves as a multitude of *schemata*, which are the building blocks of psychic reality. A schema is a desirous–apperceptive–ideational unit of self-experience that is teleologically oriented and dialectically constituted. Schemata may be viewed as microagents with semiautonomous powers of telic expression that operate as self-states as they create spacings within the unconscious abyss. Schemata may take various forms, from the archaic to the refined, and instantiate themselves as somatic, sensuous, affective, perceptual, and conceptual (symbolic) orders within the psyche, each having their own intrinsic pressures, valences, intensities, intentional and defensive strategies, and unconscious qualia.

The microdynamics of schematic expression can be highly individualistic in their bid for freedom, creativity, complexity, and agentic intent, and are tantamount to the instinctual and defensive processes we are accustomed to attribute to unconscious mentation in general. The difference here is that schemata are inherently both free and determined, or perhaps more appropriately, freely determined, that is, they are self-constituted and determinate within the natural parameters in which they find themselves and operate. This means that schematic expression is highly contextual and contingent; yet schemata exist in a multiplicity of process systems that commune, interact, and participate in a community of events that mutually influence the unique constitution of each schematic structure within the sea of the mind. This overdetermination of psychic processes ensures that unconscious agency ultimately underlies the constitution of all mental functioning.

The multitudinous complex microsystems or communities of schemata evolve from an interceptive source we may properly attribute to an unconscious ego or processor as the locus and executor of subjective agency. While schemata persist and sustain their existence within the abyss of psychic reality, the unconscious ego is the synthetic unifying agency of mind. Furthermore, it is the unconscious ego that assigns agency to schemata, which allow for their autonomous actions. In this way, agency allows for both unconscious freedom and unconscious determinism, for schemata are autonomous self-organizations that teleologically define and execute their own course of actions. Here emanations from the abyss conform to a sort of *free determinism*, where psychic life arises from, and is animated by, its own generative forms of self-organization and self-expression—at once given, forged, and constructed. In this way, with qualifications, *freedom and determinism are modes of self-causation*.⁵ In other words, mind is generated by unconscious process that fashions its own being.

The unequivocal centrality of agency in the constitution of mind becomes a pivotal and indispensable concept for understanding psychic complexity and justifying the existence of

⁵The reader should not assume that I am suggesting that agency is a self-caused cause, such as God in religious terms. What I am attempting to convey is that the experiential subject fashions its own self-organization and self-expression through its own determinate powers of self-definition and self-articulation. This is, in part, the essence of freedom.

determinate freedom. Unconscious agency is ultimately responsible for all aspects of psychic functioning, from the most elemental and primitive to the most sophisticated, because, following the principle of sufficient reason, psychic reality must stand in relation to its original form. From unformulated and inarticulate unconscious experience to reflective self-conscious reason inherent in the formation of self-identity, all psychic activity derives from its original ontological foundations.

THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN FREEDOM

In *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, F. W. J. Schelling (1809/2006) concludes that “free is what acts only in accord with the laws of its own being and is determined by nothing else either in or outside itself” (p. 50). This is the hallmark of German idealism. The will (*Willkür*) defines and grounds its own ground, and is the positing and assertion of itself without imposition, a common theme from Fichte to Hegel and Schopenhauer. Perhaps it was Plato (1961a, 1961b) who first canonized the priority of choice within will as a defining element of the soul (see *Phaedo*, 99b; *Laws* X, 904c), later finding a foothold in Whitehead’s impersonal account of the cosmos as a valuing, emotive process system in its bid for freedom, further leading Sartre to advance his thesis on radical freedom, which became the creed and rally cry of the existentialist movement.

Freedom itself is a contradiction—the word contradicts itself (ME *fre* < OE *frēo*, to love). To be free is to have no origins, no home, no attachments, hence no determination or conditions, yet it is dependent on contingency, which defines its conditions. Free will, in particular, is a contradiction, for if will were truly without constraint or conviction, it would not will, hence determine, anything. Perhaps we can conclude that freedom is a tautology: It appeals to itself by conditioning its own conditions, a redundant repetition. In this way freedom, as it was for the idealists, is a return to a self-constituted form of self-posit.

If something is caused, then how can it be free? Can something be causally free, that is, free to cause despite being free of causation? And if we are either caused or causally free, are we still free to cause through the act of determination? If psychic determinism is a form of mental causation, and freedom is something that is absolutely undetermined, then how can this dichotomy be reconciled? If freedom and determinism are viewed as complementary modes of self-causation, then perhaps this dialectic may begin to close the conceptual divide and offer a plausible solution to this conundrum. From this standpoint, freedom and determinism are self-activating forms of causation organized as the dialectical instantiation of potentiality and actuality.

I believe it is fair to presume that definitions of freedom and determinism are subject to grammatical relativism and mean different things in different linguistic contexts. If ‘free’ means without constraint or conditions, then it does not exist. For how can anything be devoid of causality? Pure freedom would have no foundation or ground of being, hence no organizational structure, place of agency, or mechanism for initiating action.

Although the term *determinism* usually signifies the philosophical doctrine that all events or decisions are preceded by antecedents that conform to natural laws independent of human will, to determine is to decide conclusively and with authority, to regulate or give direction to (especially after deliberation), or to cause or bring about a conclusion, hence to limit, terminate, or end (Lat. *determinare*, to limit: *de-*, off + *terminus*, boundary). Determinism has freedom

engraved within its very definition, as evinced in the words *determined* namely, what was decided or resolved; *determinate*, firm in purpose or resolute; and *determiner*, the agent that chooses.

If freedom is defined as inherent autonomy guiding the parameters of choice and action, then it is teleologically constituted, rather than strictly determined by a biological urge (*Trieb*) based on an economic principle of self-regulation or teleonomy oriented toward a predetermined finality. This is one reason why Sartre was so opposed to psychoanalysis: because he interpreted, wrongfully I might add, that Freud's model of the mind collapsed into material reduction. Sartre (1946/1957) is notorious for his romanticized view of human freedom, to the point that he denies determinism because we *are* freedom: We are not free not to be free. Yet he adds this important stipulation: Although freedom is absolute, our power over situations is constrained. This crucial distinction allows Sartre to conclude that, despite our thrownness or the environmental dilemmas we face, we are always able to choose because we cannot do otherwise, even if our choices are severely truncated or unsavory. Because the range of human choice and action is (in principle) infinite, and therefore ultimately unpredictable, freedom virtually has no bounds. But this conclusion is, in the end, a theoretical abstraction that belies pragmatic reality. Unbounded possibility is a fantasy guiding conscious choice fueled by unconscious identifications. In this sense, Sartre's absolute libertarianism is tantamount to determinism—we are condemned to freedom. Like psychoanalysis, Sartre views the human condition as being both inherently free to choose, yet within confines that are, themselves, a form of bondage. However, what differentiates existentialism from psychoanalysis, is that, for Sartre (1943/1956), choice is restricted to conscious deliberations of judgment, although he does allow for a form of unconscious self-deception, what he calls bad faith (*mauvaise foi*); namely, negation or the denial to choose authentically. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, shows how choice is predicated on unconscious determinants that bring particular choices into concrete existence through thought, affect, and action. For Sartre, the end of freedom comes with death. But for both Freud and Sartre, death conditions freedom.

If it is at all possible to garner some consensus on the nature of this topic throughout the history of Western philosophy, perhaps it is this: The essence of human freedom lies in the *capacity to choose*—to make decisions that motivate our direct, concrete personal actions—with a variety of overdetermined sources—sources that are multifarious and not simply mechanical, linear, or preordained by a fixed tropism with no other options or available avenues for alternative responses. The capacity for choice always ensures that, under the same circumstances, “I could have done otherwise,” that there are alternative courses of action at any given moment, and that the future is not predestined or fated. This means that the concept of freedom is intimately tied to the *capacity to act* performed by an experiential subject who decides to summon or seize upon such capacities to begin with. This definition naturally extends to unconscious processes, for the capacity to choose is enacted upon by unconscious intentional dynamics. Such capacities are also indispensably tied to the ontology of agency, which is the driving force behind motivation, choice, and action. In this context, freedom and determinism are identical.

To determine is to bring about, through intentional or volitional action, a state of events whereby one is free to choose the grounds for the sake of which to desire, imagine, contemplate, and behave. This equally applies to an unconscious will, for any psychic activity must derive from an agentic organization informed by the abyss of desire. The capacity to choose the grounds, that is, the contextual or contingent conditions upon which we think and act, lies within the powers and imagination of the human mind. In this way, causation qua freedom is our form of

inner sense. If determinism is causation, and freedom is the actualization of possibility via agentic choice, then causation is an ontological determinate power responsible for the actualization of freedom. Freedom and determinism are the same.

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