FREEDOM AND THE PERSONAL

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IMPASSE

In the everyday, we go on as if there is something called freedom: we hold ourselves and others responsible; we feel at times we could have done otherwise; sometimes we regret things we have done; it often seems up to us how we act. But when we try to identify just what we mean by calling an action "free," the concept becomes elusive, and can even seem contradictory. I think this is because science sets the tone for the discussion, particularly the vocabularies of physics and chemistry. My raising my hand is a physical change in the world, which means that it goes back to other physical changes, movements of muscles and so on. While the explanatory factors can be understood quite broadly, to include phenomena like electromagnetism or gravity, they have to be part of the physical realm, the area covered by physics and chemistry. If it is like this, a physical change has to be explained by other physical changes *ad infinitum*. This does not look good for freedom.

Some suggest that there might be causes of a different sort, like thoughts or deliberation processes, and that these might be behind the actions we call "free." But if thoughts and deliberations are to cause something physical to happen, they need to incarnate themselves into the physical order. I cannot pick something up with the thought of a hand. The deed requires an agent that is physical, and the agent has to be moved in turn by something that is physical. If thoughts or deliberations come into play, it is surely because they can be reduced in the end to physical things, neural happenings for example. Simon Blackburn says that when I decide to get out of bed, a rather self-important mouthpiece announces a free decision and declares that it is responsible for it. But the action is in fact a sum of neural and other happenings that are quite unknown to the mouthpiece, so that the free decision is really, as Blackburn says, a product of numerous unnoticed smaller processes, and the result is "the sum total of your systems."[1] He quotes an author who says he has come to realize he is not an absolute sovereign issuing edicts, but rather "a … constitutional fiction, a face on the postage stamps, a signature at the bottom of decrees written by unidentified powers… invisible courtiers working in parts of the palace that I have never entered, and could never find my way to."[2]

If we try to introduce freedom against this conceptual background, we need something that breaks with the chains of causality, so that it somehow occurs without connecting to the physical causes that

[1] Simon Blackburn, *The Big Questions: Philosophy* (UK: Quercus, 2016), 35.
[2] Blackburn, *The Big Questions: Philosophy,* 32 (quoting Michael Frayn).

precede it. The "random" can seem a promising candidate to fill the niche. But it quickly becomes apparent that randomness does not help when it comes to explaining freedom, given a random event cannot be attributed to an agent in any strong sense. The result would be, as Robert Kane observes "a fluke or accident rather than a responsible choice."[3]

There is a further contemporary discussion that assumes the processes of physics and chemistry, but holds that clusters of processes sometimes develop higher levels, acting in a way that is top-down, so that some of the action in the world is not just a product of the micro levels, but comes from above. The position is divided between those who hold with Kant that the higher level is just a way of talking that helps us make sense of a complex whole, as Kant regards biological talk,[4] and those who hold that the higher level has a genuine causal force of its own, though one that is in continuity with the micro-physical level. Nancey Murphy takes the second option, believing that this sort of theory is enough to safeguard spirituality and a basic compatibilist freedom that does not have to resort to metaphysical entities like souls.[5]

I think that all these attempts are problematic, and I want to approach the question of freedom from a different angle. I'll suggest that the key moment in understanding freedom is the move into personal life, especially the point where we start to speak to another person. This move is a good deal stranger than we realize, perhaps because it is so close to us, assumed in everything we do, and therefore never quite in focus in the way that other things are. An emphasis on the personal relocates the problems rather than solving them. But as we know from general life-problems, relocation can be a useful start.

THE PERSONAL: AN EXAMPLE

I'll begin with an example of the human animal moving into the area of the personal, the place where talk of freedom first makes sense. The example comes from the middle of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and concerns an incident in the early life of the elder of the monastery, who is called Zossima. At the time of the incident he is an officer in the guards, holding the attitudes and habits that belong to a guards officer, and seeing the world out of this sort of background. Zossima says he looked on the common soldiers "as cattle," and that all the officers did this. He has the exaggerated notions of honour that are part of this worldview. His story tells how he came to change. He is attracted by a woman in the society he frequents, and thinks that she is attracted to him. When he comes back after a two-month absence, he discovers she has married someone else, and he learns she was in fact engaged to the other man at the time he knew her before. He thinks everybody knew this except him, and feels he has been made a fool of. He later recognizes

[3] Robert Kane and Carolina Santorio, *Do We Have Free Will?* (United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 7.
[4] Kant calls biological teleology a "regulative" and not a "constitutive" conception. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, II, I, 376, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 24.
[5] She recounts her reply to a reporter who thought that clones were zombies, and wanted a condemnation of cloning: "don't worry. None of us has a soul and we all get along perfectly well!" Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

that all these assumptions are false. But at the time, as he says "I was incapable of reflecting and was all eagerness for revenge." So he insults the other man, the woman's husband, and forces him to a duel. The night before the duel he returns home, as he says "in a savage and brutal humour," and hits his servant, two blows full in the face. He sleeps a while and gets up at dawn, a beautiful day with the birds singing. He feels troubled, and wonders what is troubling him. He suddenly realizes it is what he did to the servant the night before. He remembers hitting him, and the servant keeping his arms down, as the text says "his head erect, his eyes fixed" standing before the man hitting him "as though on parade." And Zossima says "all at once the whole truth in its full light appeared to me," what he was going to do, to kill a good man in a duel, to deprive the man's wife of her happiness. He runs to the servant and kneels down before him and asks forgiveness. The servant is utterly appalled, and doesn't know what to say. Zossima rushes off to the duel and faces the first shot, which grazes his cheek. He throws his pistol into the bushes, says thank God no one has been killed, and asks forgiveness of those present. They are not amused, and tell him he is disgracing the regiment. He says he is resigning to join a monastery. Finally they say "that explains everything, we can't judge a monk," and burst out laughing.[6]

I want to suggest that the moment where he goes and asks forgiveness of the servant illustrates the move into personal life, the basic move that lies at the heart of free action. It is a strange move, and I want to look more closely at some of its elements, with four main comments.

FOUR COMMENTS

The first comment is that if we look at Zossima's world before he asks forgiveness, there is no obvious cause for the action, nothing specific that could explain a change. It's not as though new information has come in during the night. Everything still encourages Zossima to treat subordinates as cattle and to maintain the honour of the regiment at all costs. The story suggests however a way of describing what has happened that is of a different order, beginning with the point that the change occurs after Zossima wakes up on a summer's morning. The text implies that he has somehow woken up in a larger sense, that the truth has now appeared to him "in its full light." Waking up has served in the history of ideas as a metaphor for our coming out of our private illusions into the real world that we share with others. There is a statement attributed to Heraclitus "awake we have a common world, asleep each enters a private world."[7] Within the viewpoint of one who is asleep, there is no motivation to wake up and enter the common world. Even when we hear something like the sound of rain in a dream, our first tendency is to fold it into the dream so that it becomes a further part of the dreamed story. Waking up requires something of a different order, a move to a different level, where we are not simply living further parts of the dream, but exist beyond the

[6] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Airmont Books, 1966), 266-272.
[7] Plutarch, *On Superstition* 166c. Cf. *Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 120.

dream so as to be able to look back at it as a whole. The tradition describes this move as *reflection*, coming to a higher level regarding the things that affect us. Reasons for making the reflective move are often available only after we have made the move. After we have woken up, we see there are good reasons for waking up, given it brings us into the only world that matters. But such reasons are not available before we wake up. So this is the first comment on the story of Zossima, that he has woken up to the real world out of a state in which he thought he was seeing the world, but was really living in a kind of dream. It implies that coming to reality does not take care of itself, but requires effort, and is in the end a moral achievement.

The second comment is that if we compare his asking forgiveness with any of the actions of his previous life, the asking forgiveness strikes us as free, while his other actions were not free in the same way. What he did when he was a guards officer now seems part of a cultural nexus that the world imposed on him, where he adopted a whole range of beliefs and practices without noticing. Even his ideas of what was good or bad came out of the culture, so that they were not really his. This has the striking implication that while his move into personal space seems good and free, his previous life does not look particularly free. It is not just that some of his choices were bad; they seem also to have been deficient as choices, in that they did not rise to the standard required for a truly free choice. There are obvious problems here. We know of evil actions that are perfectly planned and executed and don't seem deficient as actions at all. And we blame people for bad actions, showing that we see them as responsible for what they do, and in some sense "free" when they do it. For all its difficulties, the view that freedom is always connected with goodness, and that bad actions fail to rise to real freedom has a weighty authority, in that St. Paul seems to affirm it. Either we are free and good, or we are "slaves of sin" (Rom 6:20). Some Gospel discussions point to a willed ignorance here, for example, the statement about those who close their eyes because they fear what they will see if they open them (Matt 13:15). Mary Midgley mentions the example of a staff-officer in World War I who burst into tears on seeing the mud that his staff had required soldiers to advance across, and woke into a kind of guilt, in that he realized he had presumably known at some level how it was, but had kept the knowledge from himself, choosing to act as if he did not know, so as to fit in with others, and to be well thought of.[8]

The third comment on Zossima's action is that while we feel that his action is free, or perhaps that it brings him into a realm of freedom, he is carried along into it almost as though he cannot do otherwise. We all have experience of this, where we are carried by a momentum that seems to come from inside us. A needy person comes before me and I find I cannot ignore them. In fact, I could probably ignore them if I worked hard to shut them out. But if I just let myself go I am carried into the personal, and find myself responding to them in a personal way. Perhaps the beatific vision is like this. We cannot stop ourselves enjoying, loving, and affirming the vision of God when it is in front of us, so that we act as if we have no alternative. Yet we are never so free as when we do this. Perhaps the converse also applies, that if we shut

[8] Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge, 1984), 63.

ourselves off and hold ourselves apart from the personal call, we are in a willed unfreedom (perhaps in hell). There's a scene in the last of the Narnia books where the dwarfs remain sceptical and suspicious even after Aslan has won the victory and returned. They refuse to accept that anything significant has happened, and determinedly re-interpret what is before them so that it gets folded back into unredeemed life. Aslan says of them: "They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and so afraid of being taken in that they can not be taken out."[9] This points to the fact that entry into the personal, the area of freedom, is part of the completion of a human being, something we were meant to do, so that the basic momentum of our life leads towards it. In as much as this point is taken as fundamental, it shifts the emphasis away from a definition of freedom as an ability to do *otherwise*, to a definition that sees free action as an action that truly comes forth from us, bringing us to completion in the personal life we are made for.

My fourth comment is about how Zossima's move relates to the very existence of the persons who participate in it. His asking forgiveness allows the servant to exist and be present in the world in a way that he could not be present before. While the servant has existed in other people's worlds as a part of their projects, he has never been allowed to exist as he really is. He does not know how to respond to the new situation, and is nonplussed when his master kneels before him. The point is seen in a further example, a story recounted to Thomas Nagel by the British analytic philosopher Stuart Hampshire, concerning a time when Hampshire was an intelligence officer with British forces in France after the D-Day landings. He had to interview a collaborator being held by a French resistance group, who was thought to have valuable information. The leader of the group told Hampshire before the interview that whatever the man said or didn't say, they were going to shoot him. The first question the man asked Hampshire was whether if he gave useful information, Hampshire could guarantee that he would be turned over to the British, and his life spared.[10] Hampshire is faced with a choice between lying to the man and perhaps obtaining valuable information, or telling him the truth and risking that he will say nothing. We notice that if Hampshire lies, and says that the man's life will be spared, the man is importantly prevented from properly acting or even *appearing* in the situation. He is reduced to a part of the world that Hampshire projects and manages, and not allowed to exist in his own right. Interestingly, it also seems to follow that if Hampshire lies, he himself is not present in any world that he shares with the man either. He is like a puppet-master in relation to a puppet show world, where the puppet master does not show himself within the action of the show. We notice therefore that a move like Zossima's enables people to exist in the world in a way that they are not otherwise able. This points towards a further aspect of personal life, that persons need one another if they are to exist as persons, and bring the personal into existence. Personal life is not something we can achieve on our own.

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[9] C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier, MacMillan, 1970), 148.
[10] Thomas Nagel, "Types of Intuition," *London Review of Books* 43, no. 11 (3 June 2021).

FREEDOM AS A CHOICE FOR THE PERSONAL

How does the move to personal life relate to what we normally call "free choice," which includes the many choices we make in the everyday? Such choices either reinforce the move into personal life, or try to withdraw from it, so that they can reasonably be seen as parts of a single lifelong choice one way or the other. The key point is that a choice for personal life proceeds from the person who pursues it, and is not imposed from outside by a culture or a set of life-drives. This proceeding from itself seems to be the essence of freedom. If Zossima has a sense of compulsion when he asks forgiveness, it comes from within, from his own drive towards completion. As noted above, this does not mean he could not resist the move if he tried, though it takes an effort (the Gospel talks about "hardening the heart", Matt 13:15). Seeing freedom as referring to a personal life that proceeds out of itself shifts the definition away from a focus on being able to do otherwise, which is sometimes called "freedom of indifference." It focuses rather on the fulfilment the human is meant for, finding itself in personal life, and rejoicing in this.

Once the step into personal life is accepted as basic, there are various levels at which everyday choices sort themselves out. Some of these choices follow directly from the original step into the personal, and are immediate consequences of the original choice, for example the choice to support a family. But many secondary choices are just handed over to our drives and inclinations. Buying at the supermarket probably goes on largely in this way. We buy this and not that largely because we like it. There is a third important level, where we work on our inclinations and reactions and try to refocus them, so that they support personal life. We reform our character, developing good habits and so on, so that our life is drawn into a unity where our very inclinations support goals and obligations of personal life. So the suggestion is that we make a single large choice, something that is probably too big even to call a "choice" in the usual sense, and our lesser choices are related to this, either following it directly and realizing it in a particular situation, or being judged indifferent relative to the single large choice, so that they can be handed over to inclination or chance. Finally, there are attempts on our part to reform our inclinations so that they automatically support personal life, the traditional work of formation and education in virtue.

I think that this sort of account carries conviction when we hear it. The problem is that once we recall the facts of micro-causation at the physical or chemical level, all conviction disappears, and a nagging interior voice tells us that regardless of how we look at it in the everyday, *in the end* it must come down to swarms of particles moved by other swarms. To conclude this paper I'll ask how a personal view of freedom sits to the organic underpinnings of choice, the undoubted fact that neurons have to fire and so on, if we are to do anything at all. I'll focus on just one implication of the micro-physical determinist view, the point that it denies the agency of organic wholes in the world, and that this means it denies their existence as well. The importance of this has been pointed out recently by the philosopher Helen Steward, who insists that if micro-physical determinism finishes up by denying the agency of organic wholes, it can't be right. I think

that this discussion also shows two important further points about the relation of personal freedom to its organic underpinnings.

THE UNDERPINNINGS OF FREEDOM

Helen Steward illustrates the question of agency with a pair of examples that contrast the behaviour of fragments of potassium on the one hand, and the behaviour of a hungry dog on the other. If we place fragments of potassium in water, they zip around on the surface, catch alight, transform themselves chemically, and eventually settle into a new stable configuration. We have no trouble seeing this whole event in all its detail as determined by the initial states and positions of the materials, along with the laws that govern their behaviour. The precise trajectory of the movements follows inevitably from the size and shape of the pieces, where they hit the surface, the angle at which they hit the surface, the temperature of water, and the shape of the containing beaker, so that as Steward says, "if we knew all these variables … we might be able to say where precisely the potassium would go."[11] This is to say that given the initial state and the workings of physical laws, there can be only one outcome. The event is explained deterministically, every phase being seen as simply unfolding what has gone before, so that there is no flexibility in what happens. Steward expresses this by saying that at the time of the interaction, nothing is left "to be settled … *by the potassium*…"[12] She means that the potassium does not take the situation in hand so as to settle something that could have gone another way. What happens just happens *to* the potassium; the element does not take the situation in hand so as to affect the outcome. Steward compares this to the case of a hungry dog presented with a dish of tempting food. While we can predict that the dog will eat the food, she insists that the detail of the activity is not settled in advance in the same way. How fast the dog eats, how often it chews each mouthful, which bit it eats first, all these things "are settled by the dog itself…," and are not settled years in advance by "circumstances and the laws of nature."[13]

In some ways Steward's argument is not very good. A naturalist determinist would insist that if we knew enough about what caused the dog to have the character it does, and if we knew its exact neural makeup along with all of the starting circumstances, we *could* in fact predict all the details of the event. But the significant point is not the argument itself but the conceptual distinction Steward is trying to establish between a world of mere materials and a world that contains agents. She points out that if we hold micro-physical determinism, and regard the movement of the dog as if it were exactly like the movement of a piece of potassium, the dog disappears altogether as an acting organic whole. She says of the determinist view: "(t)his picture transforms (the animal) from a being with agency into a mere machine, essentially a mere *place* in which various inevitable interactions occur."[14] Instead of an agent doing things or settling

[11] Helen Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 80 (2017): 195-215, 201.
[12] Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," 202.
[13] Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," 203.
[14] Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," 205.

things, we have what she calls "a kind of epiphenomenon, arising out of the hive of activity taking place in the cells, muscles, blood vessels, etc."[15] This recalls Blackburn's account of a decision made by countless invisible processes, rather than by an agent. If it is this way, "agency" is just a collective name for a swarm of micro-happenings. For the older philosophical tradition, as well as for the view of everyday commonsense, this means that the dog is not really there any more. We can see this in the case of a human person who acts as if he or she was just a collection of drives, always following the impulse of the latest drive, and giving up any larger human task of "settling" things through human decision. A philosophy teacher of mine was once visiting a family in the old East Germany, the socialist republic, and got talking to the son of the family, a boy of ten or so. He asked the boy what sort of person he admired, who did he think was a figure worth imitating. The boy replied "in church it's Jesus; at school it's Lenin." This is the answer of someone to whom things are happening, but who does not take anything in hand so as to settle it, and who lives his life as if he were like a piece of potassium zipping around in water. In an important sense, he is not really there at all. What he calls his life is just a collection of happenings that occur according to causal law in a particular space. As Steward puts it, he is really just a location occupied successively by different forces, "a mere *place* in which various inevitable interactions occur."[16]

I think this shows something about what it means to *be* something quite generally. It is not enough to be materials in space, even materials that hang together to make a swarm, and which exercise an effect on things around them. A waterfall or an eruption is like this, something that is a whole only in the eye of an observer who makes it so. By contrast, something first becomes an entity when it *takes itself up* in some way, by trying to become something, prioritizing certain of its drives over others, "settling" something, as Steward puts it. A dog or cat or a human exists by taking itself in hand, heading towards a certain kind of life, becoming something in *trying* to be something, so that it does not just say "whatever" to the future, as does the boy in East Germany. Even a cat or dog grasps itself as a whole like this, and sets out to complete itself, realizing implicitly that certain futures represent completion, while others imply ruin. The move where it grasps itself as a whole with particular interests is the beginning of a kind of reflection, where in a shadowy and implicit fashion, it starts to constitute itself as a unity. With the animal, this is only ever implicit, to be read off the behaviour of the animal. A bird refuses to alight on the lawn to eat the bread that has been put out, because it knows the family cat is lurking nearby. Certain of its drives are prioritized over others, so that it does not just allow whatever might happen to happen, but takes things in hand, aiming at a whole life. This aiming at completion is what constitutes the animal as an entity, and takes it beyond just a collection of materials, what we have referred to as a "swarm." It becomes an acting whole, something that has a relation to the materials that make it up.

The human seems to do this reflexive move in a way that is very radical. Zossima takes up a relation to *all* the drives that hold him in their grip, so that in some sense he is beyond them all, and this constitutes

[15] Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," 208.
[16] Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," 205.

what we call "freedom." Whether a person can really move outside all the drives like this is controversial. Some maintain that what happens in Zossima's case is that one set of drives, those that belong to an officer in the Russian guards, conflicts with a better set of drives that he picked up from somewhere else, and the better set, which includes a sense of human dignity, eventually wins. Robert Kane describes a conflict between two "recurrent and connected neural networks,"[17] where one eventually prevails over the other. While Kane still wants to defend a strong notion of freedom, most who hold to this sort of model would settle for a "compatibilist" approach, that "freedom" means simply that one of our internal networks wins the battle, and nothing is imposed on us from outside. This view would see humans as not too different from cats and dogs, who also prioritize certain interests over others in particular situations.

I think this is not right, and the strangeness of human life is best described by seeing the human as able to take up a relation to all its life-drives, so that the reflection is complete. When I move into the area of the personal by talking to another, what I say is guided not just from within my own drives and interests, how *I* see the world, but also by my knowledge of what *the other* will understand if I use certain words. In a sense I take over their point of view, and situate myself in a place where I look back at the whole of what I am, seeing myself as the other sees me. All of the thoughts and feelings and inclinations of my starting point are relativized, so that the other is present not just as an object caught in the projections of my interests, but as something that exists beyond them. We can see an approximation of this pattern even in our relations to animals. I see a mouse first of all as a nuisance that I want to get rid of. But I realize that when I see it in this way, I am seeing it simply out of the projections of my own interests, in that my view is a function of my desire to keep my house clean and my cheese safe and so on. The mouse is a nuisance only for the projections of these interests. Once I realize this, I am aware that the thing also exists beyond my interests as something in itself, a vulnerable little creature concerned with feeding its family, something I could make friends with. I think we first acknowledge this sort of thing in our exchanges with other persons. While this occurs at a level beyond exchanges with animals, it is nonetheless in continuity with the basic reflection that characterizes all of life.

This also suggests an answer to the troubling question about whether freedom implies a break in the micro-physical order, some kind of gap in the causal chain. I think there is a gap, but not the one usually described. The gap is not between the microphysical order and a free action, but between an entity that exists and acts as a whole, and the materials that make it up. The sort of model that has dominated philosophical naturalism since Descartes sees no gap here, in that the acting whole is simply the latest stage of a seamless continuity of particles in causal relation to one another. When I say that I raise my arm, I really mean that the parts that make me up are moving in a coordinated way to produce what I call an "action." But if we take the possibility of acting wholes seriously, an interesting gap opens up between the acting whole and the parts that make it up, at least in the sense that the whole cannot be reduced to a mere

[17] Robert Kane, "Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on Free Will and Indeterminism," *Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 5, (1999): 217-40, 225-26.

sum of parts. When it acts, its parts move because the whole is acting. The neurons fire because the dog is running to its bowl. Aristotle noticed the strangeness of this situation, where parts exist and act because they belong to a whole that exists and acts. The structure is paradoxical because the causality flows the other way as well – something Aristotle well realizes - in that we also say that the dog is running because its neurons are active in a certain way. At the very least, if they were not active, the dog would not be running.

Is it plausible to believe in the existence of acting wholes of this sort, which "have" their materials in such a way that the materials are directed towards the life of the whole, rather than the whole being seen just as the latest state of the materials? To be convincing, the position requires an account of how such an acting whole might be constituted. Even for those who believe in the existence of acting wholes, the matter is controversial. The most common contemporary explanation falls back on emergent properties coming forth from complex configurations of materials, which then exercise downward causation on the materials.[18] I do not like this sort of explanation, and think that it concedes too much to a worldview based in physics and chemistry, and ultimately understands living things in terms of artificial things.[19] An Aristotelian view, which I would support, objects that it misses the fundamental character of life-phenomena. For an Aristotelian these are not emergent properties, because they are not properties at all. Rather they are more fundamental. When life-phenomena depart, it is not as if an entity has lost a property; rather it has *ceased to exist altogether*. Its very identity as an acting whole while it is alive comes from the peculiar drive towards completion that we call *life*, the having of life-interests, and if it loses these, it simply ceases to be.[20] The point can perhaps be seen by contrast with an example of an artifact like a vacuum-cleaner. However sophisticated the vacuum-cleaner becomes, so that it is able to clean the house on its own and even to climb the stairs to do so, it has no *interest* in a clean house, or in anything else. It is not directed to a natural completion in the way the simplest animal has interest in a life-completion, something that constitutes it as a whole. The point exemplifies the significant difference between an acting whole, which "has" its materials, and an artifact, which "is" its materials. The peculiar unity of an acting whole is deeply mysterious, and needs more discussion than it usually gets.

Freedom is not therefore an uncaused force that inserts itself into the microphysical order. It presupposes rather that there are acting wholes, which exist in as much as they are trying to settle something. This means that they have the beginnings of a reflexive move, where some drives are privileged over others. The human performs this reflexive move radically, so that the human agent exists beyond the point where

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[18] Steward, who is a strong defender of acting wholes, interprets them in terms of emergentism and "downward causation." Cf. Helen Steward, *A Metaphysics for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 246-7 and Steward, "Action as Downward Causation," 215.

[19] See for example Steward's description of different levels of biological entity in terms of "integration of subsystems," Steward, *A Metaphysics for Freedom*, 245.

[20] Aristotle makes the point that a lifeless body is not a living body that has lost a few properties. The only thing the two have in common is the name "body." Cf. *De An.* 412b10-413a10.

it is simply controlled by its interests. With this, personal life is in play, a life proceeding out of itself. The actions that bring this into existence and complete it are actions we call free.