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Date: 08/06/2015
Words: 17260

Master Thesis Political Science:

Freedom *from* Thought

An Egoist Conception of Liberty

'The world has suffered long enough under the tyranny of thoughts; under the terror of the idea; she awakens from the heavy dream and follows the joyful interest of the day.'

- Max Stirner (Stirner 1848, 100)

Introduction

Who has never daydreamed about moving to a deserted island? Have you ever stared at birds flying by and thought to yourself: wouldn't it be *liberating* just to fly away, leave it all behind? Such thoughts usually cross our minds in moments of stress, when we feel the weight of social pressure to perform most. They may be ushered in by an important deadline at work, a dreaded tax letter, or simply pop up when the daily grind starts messing with our heads. In such moments we wish to throw off society's yoke; the demands modern life confronts us with. Presumably, almost everyone has such thoughts from time to time.

When I long for freedom, it is usually *this* kind of freedom that is the object of my desire. Whatever the drawbacks a life spent in seclusion in some far-away place must have, at least you would need not trouble yourself with making a good impression or living up to the expectations of others, nor even your own. Neither does the bird, nobody tells him where to fly to, nor does he worry about whether his song measures up to that of the next bird.

Western philosophers probably privately share the same daydreams. Perhaps they dream about not having to wear a tie in the morning or triumphantly burning a paper they have been struggling to complete and publish. Nevertheless, when they theorize about freedom, they seem to have something completely different in mind.

None of the distinctions philosophers draw between different kinds of freedom are uncontroversial. Let us set these scruples aside for the sake of argument, to examine whether one of these concepts captures the freedom we long for in the daydreams discussed above. Perhaps the most salient distinction drawn in political philosophy is the one Isaiah Berlin defended in his classic essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*: that between negative and positive liberty (Berlin 1969). On first reflection, negative liberty, the absence of constraints external to the agent from pursuing whatever it is he desires to do seems hopeful (Carter 2012, 1). Since birds can fly, they are not hindered by walls or mountains like we are. On closer scrutiny, however, we discover that birds face many obstacles of a different kind. Trees in which they would build nests are cut down, winter forces them to move, they have to be on guard all the time for predators looking to eat them, et cetera. Positive liberty, self-determination, the ability to choose who you want to be *as a person* does not capture this kind of freedom either (Carter 2012, 1). Although impossible to prove, it seems reasonable to suppose that birds do not reflect on their identity, let alone consciously *choose* one. Simply put, birds are not persons. Birds are driven by instinct, not rational deliberation on what constitutes the good life. An eagle does not reflect on who he is as an eagle, like we do when we wonder what kind of person we should be.

Charles Taylor proposes to draw the distinction in a slightly different way (Taylor 1985). He differentiates between opportunity and exercise-concepts of freedom, roughly corresponding to negative and positive liberty respectively. Philosophers in the former camp argue that 'being free is a matter of what we can do, of what is open to us to do, whether or not we do anything to exercise these options' (Taylor 1985, 213). Thus conceived, birds and hermits are slaves in comparison to an individual taking part in society, especially in the developed world. I could get up at this moment and within an hour engage in thousands of different activities unavailable to birds and hermits. The options available to me range from banal activities, such as seeing a movie in the cinema or eating at a restaurant, to devoting myself to a religion of my own choosing. How much more limited is a bird: what's he to do except for flying and chirping? Similarly, a hermit in some remote forest or deserted island also has very few options available to him compared to us.

The second group Taylor identifies, exercise concepts, are theories of freedom in which being free means 'effectively [having] determined oneself and the shape of one's life' (Taylor 1985, 213). Perhaps there is reason to think the hermit's life is free in this sense. After all, he *chose* seclusion himself, maybe even leaving a life others forced him to lead behind. We must reject this hypothesis. Whether seclusion is self-imposed or not plays no part in our daydreams, or not in mine at least. When I daydream about freedom I imagine myself already in that carefree situation, not choosing to place myself in it. Intuitively, it seems to me that someone who did not choose freedom, a man stranded on a deserted island after a shipwreck for example, also possesses this kind of freedom. This is not to deny, of course, that you could also dream about freedom in the self-determination sense.

In fact, the arguments in this paper do not have to be understood as criticisms of freedom in either of these senses. Concepts discussed in philosophy are rarely unambiguous. Considering the role freedom has played throughout the centuries, across different cultures, in the private as well as in the public sphere, it would be rather strange if freedom was an exception.

Indeed, twentieth-century's most prominent scholar on freedom, Berlin, makes no claims to the contrary. He recognizes that 'it is a term whose meaning is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist' (Berlin 1969, 168). Berlin will only discuss two senses of the word, but does cautiously assert that 'they are central ones', and identifies them taken together as freedom 'in its political sense' (Berlin 1969, 48, 169). Notwithstanding Berlin's careful formulations, these statements *suggest* (1) that most other notions of freedom are invalid or arbitrary and, more importantly, (2) that these two (groups of) notions are the only two senses of freedom that are relevant for political theory.

Both these claims are mistaken. Although the notion of freedom I will develop in this paper, which we might call *freedom as spontaneity*, is rarely discussed by western philosophers, there are at least

two schools of thought in which it plays a central role: individualist egoism and philosophical Taoism. Individualist egoism refers to the thought of the nineteenth-century German philosopher *Max Stirner* and those who held similar views. Taoism is an umbrella term for one of China's great religious and philosophical traditions. By *philosophical* Taoism, however, we should understand the philosophical ideas found in ancient philosophical texts. These ideas are traditionally associated with *Laozi* ('Old Philosopher'), whom historians presume was a mythical figure, and *Zhuangzi* ('philosopher Zhuang'). In actuality, however, ancient Taoist texts probably had a great number of authors and were expanded throughout the centuries (Hansen 2014).

Although separated by hundreds of years and the products of two distinct cultures, individualist egoism and philosophical Taoism show a remarkable degree of congruence. In my opinion, it would only be a slight exaggeration to conceive of Stirner as Europe's own Taoist sage. The Taoist sage and Stirner's 'own man' or 'free-born' are free in the same sense of the term (Stirner 1844, 148). Moreover, the freedom which can be attributed to them is one animals possess without effort. The hermit, whatever we might find unappealing about his lifestyle, also seems to be in a better position to achieve freedom as I will define it below.

Recently, Stirner's thought has received renewed interest amongst academics. Multiple philosophers, most notably Saul Newman, point to striking parallels between Stirner's thought and *poststructuralism* (Koch 1997; Newman 2001; Newman 2005 & Newman et al., 2011). The latter term refers to the ideas of a diverse collection of continental philosophers inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche, including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Although there certainly are striking parallels between postructuralism and individualist egoism, conceiving of Stirner (merely) as a forerunner to poststructuralism obscures important differences between the two schools of thought.

Due to the quite striking resemblance between the terminology employed both by Stirner and by poststructuralists, these differences are easy to miss. In order to elucidate the difference the two theories of freedom, I will therefore use a different conceptual apparatus. That is, the terminology introduced by Harry Frankfurt in his classic paper 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person' (Frankfurt 1971). In a remarkable essay, 'The Way of the Wanton', David Velleman also employs this terminology to discern an alternative to western conceptions of freedom in Taoist thought (Velleman 2008). By formulating both Stirner's and the poststructuralist conception of freedom in the same terms, I hope to expose the difference between both conceptions in an intelligible manner.

Apart from Stirner's writings and those of other individualists egoists, I have never encountered a conception of freedom as spontaneity in the works of western philosophers. In order to find a similar notion, we have to turn East, to the Taoists. This absence in western philosophy should be

attributed to the radical way in which Stirner breaks with the western tradition, one that is obscured by interpreting him as a poststructuralist. In the concluding chapter, I will discuss what this break entails for political theory.

Chapter 1: Persons, Wantons & Freedom

§1.1. Frankfurt on Personal Identity

In 'Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person', Harry Frankfurt attempts to formulate a definition of a 'person', as distinct from a 'human being' in a mere biological sense. As the title of the paper suggests, Frankfurt argues that what differentiates persons from other creatures is to be found in 'the structure of a person's will'. Human beings are not alone in having desires, higher species of animals even appear to be capable of remembering things and engaging in rational deliberation (Frankfurt 1971, 3).

In order to see what separates persons from other creatures, Frankfurt argues we must distinguish between two different kinds of desires: first-order and second-order desires. First-order desires are simply desires to do or not to do something: you might have a first-order desire to eat cake or write a philosophy paper (Frankfurt 1971, 7). Desires of the second order are 'desires about desires' (McKenna & Coates 2015, §5.2.1). You might, for example, want to have the (first-order) desire to please your boss. The desire *to have* this desire to please your boss the next day you meet him, is a second-order desire. Simply having a second-order desire does not imply that it will be fulfilled. Perhaps you have, besides your desire to please your boss, also a strong aversion to him. When you arrive on work you are overcome by this disgust, and act, instead of on the desire to please your boss, on this stronger first-order desire: you curse at him or even hit him (Frankfurt 1971, 8).

Besides incompatible first-order desires, your second-order desire could also conflict with other second-order desires (Ellis 2013, 24-25). Sticking with the example, you might have, in addition to the second-order desire to desire to please your boss, a second-order desire to stand up for yourself. This second-order desire has a corresponding first-order desire to stand up for yourself as its object. Imagine that you have decided that what you really want is to stand up for yourself, and believe this to be more important than keeping your job. In this case, you might nevertheless still have the opposite second-order desire. You still desire to be nice to your boss and keep your job. The latter second-order desire, however, carries less weight for you.

Frankfurt differentiates between second-order desires we want to actually move us to act and second-order desires we hope will not do so. In my example, the desire to want to stand up for yourself is one of the former, the desire to be nice to your boss (to keep your job) one of the latter kind. Second-order desires which we hope will actually move us to action, Frankfurt calls 'second-order volitions'. He argues that it is 'having second-order volitions, and not having second-order desires generally' that is ' essential to being a person' (Frankfurt 1971, 10).

Frankfurt thinks these second-order volitions, besides serving to clarify what we mean by a person,

also offer a solution to another famous philosophical problem: the freedom of the will. Having free will must mean more than having freedom of action, 'the freedom to do what one wants to do'. We do not regard (most) drug addicts as being free, yet they seem to be acting on their (first-order) desires when they succumb to their addiction. Instead, we can attribute free will to someone when 'he is free to will what he wants to will, or to have the will he wants'. In other words, having free will means being able to act on your second-order volition(s). Conversely, we are unfree when we are not able to act in conformity with our second-order volitions or when such conformity is the result of pure coincidence (Frankfurt 1971, 15, 19).

The example of the drug addict I borrow from Frankfurt. He introduces three different types of addict to elucidate his views: the unwilling, the willing and the 'wanton' addict. All three addicts are similarly afflicted physiologically; addicted to the same drug, to the same degree. Thus, addiction sparks the same strong first-order desire to take the drug in all three of them. The first, the unwilling addict, hates being addicted. Perhaps he has visited rehab, at least he is struggling to give up on his habit. When confronted with the drug, however, his addiction induced first-order desire to use it is too powerful to withstand and he ends up taking it. This unwilling addict does not take the drug out of his own free will, on the contrary, he is 'helplessly violated by his own desires'. Although this addict perhaps only has one second-order desire regarding his drug use, his second-order volition to quit, Frankfurt claims he has 'conflicting first-order desires'. That is, a first-order desire to take the drug induced by his addiction and a first-order desire not take it corresponding to his second-order volition to be freed of his addiction, to be a healthy person (Frankfurt 1971, 15).

Unlike the unwilling addict, the willing addict does not struggle with his addiction at all. On the contrary, he is 'altogether delighted with his condition' and 'would not have things any other way'. Think of a teenager who feels using drugs is cool; that being a drug addict makes him a real rebel. What if this teenager would seize being addicted to the drug, perhaps because his parents force him to go to rehab? In that case, he would try to make an addict out of himself once more. The willing addict therefore uses drugs 'freely and of his own free will' (Frankfurt 1971, 19).

Even though we may not be able to tell just by looking at him, the third kind of addict, the wanton addict, differs from the other two addicts by *not being a person* in the sense Frankfurt understands the term. He does not have any second-order desires, let alone second-order volitions. This addict 'does not prefer that one of his conflicting desires be paramount over the other; he does not prefer that one first-order desire rather than the other should constitute his will' (Frankfurt 1971, 12-13). He might still have conflicting first-order desires, like the unwilling addict: perhaps he also has a first-order desire to look after his health. Neither does his lack of second-order volitions imply that he is less intelligent than the other two addicts. He might still 'deliberate concerning how to do what he wants to do' (Frankfurt 1971, 11). Sticking to the example: he might be better in procuring the

drugs than his unwilling and willing fellow drug users.

According to Frankfurt, the wanton addict does not use the drug out of free will either. Conversely, it would also be incorrect to call his drug use unfree. After all, the wanton is not 'violated by his own desires', like the unwilling addict. There is no 'person' his desires could violate: 'the freedom of his will cannot be a problem for him'. Since he has no second-order volitions, he need not worry that he is overcome by first-order desire(s) conflicting with one (Frankfurt 1971, 15).

The wanton addict, moreover, is not 'neutral' with regard to his first-order desires either, since this presupposes that he has reflected on them but could not decide either way. The wanton's disregard for his own preferences must be attributed instead to his 'lack of capacity for reflection or to his mindless indifference to the enterprise of evaluating his own desires and motives' (Frankfurt 1971, 13). This enterprise, of course, consists in forming second-order volitions. Alternatively, we could express the difference between the wanton addict and the two others by saying that the former does not reflect on his identity. He does not *identify* with one of his first-order desires. Conversely, the wanton does not refuse to identify or reject any of his first-order desires either. By contrast, the unwilling and willing addicts do *identify* with one of their first-order desires: the desire not to take the drug and the desire to take the drug respectively. According to Frankfurt, this identification justifies both claims to having freely willed an act *and* claims to the contrary. Consequently, Frankfurt believes the unwilling addict can justifiably waive moral responsibility. He may make 'the analytically puzzling' statement that 'the force moving him' was 'a force other than his own' (Frankfurt 1971, 13). Compare the wanton addict, he is 'in respect of his wanton lack of concern, no different from an animal' (Frankfurt 1971, 12). Moral categories like praise and blame do not apply to animals. It would be absurd to argue that, say, a lion cannot be held accountable under certain conditions. Similarly, unlike the other two figures, the wanton addict can neither be held accountable nor excused. These moral categories only apply to *persons*, not to animals or wantons.

§1.2. Second-order Volitions and Conformism

According to Frankfurt, forming a second-order volition presupposes that we already have a corresponding first-order desire. You cannot, for example, want the first-order desire to work hard be the one that actually moves you to action, without already having a first-order desire to work to begin with. What you are hoping for in this situation is that your desire to work will 'win' over other conflicting first-order desires, say your desire to be lazy. Frankfurt argues that this is a *general* precondition for all second-order volitions, he writes:

'It could not be true both that *A* wants the desire to X to move him into action and that he does not want to X. It is only if he does want to X that he can coherently want the desire to X not merely to be one of his desires but, more decisively, to be his will' (Frankfurt 1971, 15).

However, he quite dramatically qualifies this claim in a footnote, worth quoting at length:

'It is not so clear that the entailment relation described here holds in certain kinds of cases, which I think may fairly be regarded as nonstandard, where the essential difference between the standard and the nonstandard cases lies in the kind of description by which the first-order desire in question is identified. Thus, suppose that *A* admires *B* so fulsomely that, even though he does not know what *B* wants to do, he wants to be effectively moved by whatever desire effectively moves *B;* without knowing what *B's* will is, in other words, *A* wants his own will to be the same. It certainly does not follow that *A* already has, among his desires, a desire like the one that constitutes *B*'s will' (Frankfurt 1971, 15).

Differently put, in these 'nonstandard' cases, a second-order volition is a desire to have desires not previously had. The person forming such a nonstandard volition is not yet aware of (some) of the first-order desires he shall desire move him to action because he holds that volition. David Velleman proposes an alternative interpretation to make sense of this footnote (Velleman 2008, 174). He stresses on a number of occasions that he does not claim Frankfurt intended his theory to be understood as he presents it. Giving a correct interpretation of Frankfurt is not my purpose either and, as it happens, I think Velleman's account is more accurate.

On his reading, a second-order volition is 'by definition, wanting that one actually do *X* because of the desire to *X* ... [it is] a reflexive way of wanting to *X*.' (Velleman 2008, 174).

This is bound to be vague and confusing. Perhaps an example of a 'nonstandard' case in Frankfurt's footnote might help. Imagine a little girl who absolutely adores the pop star Shakira. After a concert she forms the second-order volition 'I want to be exactly like Shakira, want to want the same things she does and act in a similar manner, even if it involves overcoming conflicting first-order desires'. If she were to discover that Shakira eats broccoli, she hopes she will both want to eat it and actually do too. She is such a big Shakira fan that the fact that she hates eating vegetables (has a strong first-order desire not to eat vegetables) does not detract from her strong desire to be like her idol.

What Velleman is arguing is that this second-order volition on its own is enough to conclude that the little girl desires to eat broccoli, even if she has yet to discover the nature of Shakira's diet. In line with Frankfurt's footnote but at odds with the text, Velleman urges that we cannot conclude from the presence of a second-order volition that it must have been *preceded* by a corresponding

first-order desire. This means that a second-order volition can give rise to first-order desires the individual previously did not have (Velleman 2008, 175). The little girl hated broccoli before she idolized Shakira, now she suddenly wants to eat broccoli!

He adds, moreover, that a 'second-order volition … cannot have the content that one be effectively moved by the first-order desire alone' (Velleman 2008, 175). In other words, it is wrong to say that the little girl *just* wants to enjoy eating broccoli, be moved to eat it by this first-order desire alone. Instead, her second-order volition implies she *also* wants to be moved by her desire to be like Shakira: 'The content of a second-order volition must be that one be effectively moved by the first order desire as reinforced by this very volition' (Velleman 2008, 175). Furthermore, the contrary supposition makes second-order volitions 'necessarily self-frustrating'. If the girl's second-order volition would have the alternative content 'I want to be moved solely by a first-order desire to eat broccoli', being moved by this second-order volition would mean she has not fulfilled her volition (Velleman 2008, 175).

According to Frankfurt, a second-order volition explains why people might be justified in waiving responsibility for their actions. His second-order volition enables the unwilling addict to 'make the analytically puzzling statements that the force moving him to take the drug is a force *other than his own*', that he did not act out of free will when he succumbed to his addiction (Velleman 2008, 13). Conversely, Frankfurt also argues that the very possibility of a subject having free will presupposes a capacity for forming second-order volitions. The willing addict freely uses drugs regardless of his physiological addiction, because his first-order desire is 'overdetermined' (Frankfurt 1971, 19). By reflecting on *what he wants to want* and concluding that it is using drugs, the willing addict 'reflectively endorses' being a junkie, being an addict is what he *identifies* himself with (Frankfurt 1971, 13 & Christman 2008, 158).

'Nonstandard' cases like the little girl's contradict the idea that a first-order desire 'endorsed' by a volition is more 'authentic' than one that is not. Consider the girl's aversion to broccoli and her new-found appreciation for the vegetable after becoming a Shakira fan. In this case, it seems very odd to conclude that the latter desire is 'more her own' than the former. On the contrary: she would have hated broccoli if she had not known that Shakira likes it. Her aversion to broccoli was originally 'hers', her new-found appreciation for it has an external source: Shakira's love for broccoli.

Compare the unwilling addict. The latter's first-order desire to use drugs featured in his deliberation when he decided he wanted to get clean, to no longer be a junkie. He consciously questioned himself: is my desire to use drugs one I want to have? The little girl, on the contrary, never reflected on the desirability of eating broccoli, when she decided she wanted to be like Shakira. Her first-order desire is not 'authentic', not 'hers'. Simply put: she did not choose to want to eat broccoli, she chose to want to be like Shakira.

Contrary to Frankfurt's assertion in the footnote, we have ample reason to think cases like these are anything but 'nonstandard'. Although this is an empirical rather than a philosophical issue, we have reason to believe that adults have a lot of second-order volitions similar to that of the little girl. Most people have a need to *belong* to something bigger than themselves. Consider individuals who want to get in touch with their cultural roots. Second-order volitions of the form 'I want to be a member of group x' often demand overcoming powerful conflicting first-order desires. There is a tribe in the Amazon whose members believe that in order to become a man, you have to gather bullet ants and let them sting you for ten minutes. The rest of the tribe requires its young men to repeat this procedure twenty times before they are considered 'true men'. It seems absurd to suppose that these men already had a first-order desire to let themselves be stung by ants before forming a second-volition to want to become true men[1].

It is not hard to think of less extreme examples. Presumably, not all Christians would have liked the shape of the cross without being Christian. Their second-order volition to 'live as a Christian should' sparks a (first-order) liking for it. Generally, people have a desire to have sex, also before marriage. The powerful first-order desire not to follow their instincts in devout religious young people surely derives its force from being *endorsed* by faith, accompanied by a second-order volition to pay heed to God's commands: not to sin. The converse not only seems unlikely but even *unchristian*: what religious person would submit that he became a Christian to have a compelling reason not to have sex before marriage?

Second-order volitions that *could* induce first-order desires include moral categories, *duty* for example. Pious Christian teens feel they have a duty to behave themselves towards God. Statements referring to a sense of duty to explain behaviour can be understood as evidence for thinking the person in question has a second-order volition similar to that of the little girl. Of course, this is not to deny that many of these volitions are of a more agreeable kind than wanting to be like a pop star.

Consider three men who run into a burning building to save its occupants. We do not say of a man who acts in that manner to save his family that he was moved to act by of a sense of duty. Such a man presumably already loved his wife and children and had first-order desires to see them alive and well. First-order desires, moreover, powerful enough to overrule any understandable aversions he harbours against running into burning buildings. With a man who does the same for complete strangers, however, we suspect that a first-order desire to help others *on its own* would not be sufficient to overcome powerful conflicting first-order desires. This must be a man with true moral character, in possession of a strong second-order volition to be a good person. It is because this second-order volition *endorsed* his (first-order) desire to help people that it (or *he* if Frankfurt is

1 These claims are supported by a documentary 'Initiation With Ants' which aired on National Geographic, 21/12/2007, available on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGIZ-zUvotM

correct) overcame his aversions. Indeed, the common wisdom is that the latter man deserves *moral* praise, while the former does not, or only to a limited extent. Differently put, the father who saves his family could very well have been a *wanton.* Merely letting the strongest first-order desire(s) determine his behaviour would have sufficed for him to run into the burning building. On the other hand, the latter could only have been a *wanton* in the counter-intuitive scenario that he had an unusually strong first-order desire to help others. In any other situation, the man who saves complete stranger can truly lay claim to *moral* praise. A second-order volition led him to risk his life, i.e. his desire to do so was truly his own will. The father on the other hand, would presumably have saved his own family even if doing so conflicted with his second-order volition. Imagine that he had a second-order volition to 'care for as many people as possible' and, as it happens, there was an orphanage across the street, also on fire. He knew that if he were to run into the burning orphanage, instead of his own house, he could have saved many more people. In this case, the father is 'violated by his own desires'. Similar to the unwilling addict, he did not act out of free will when he ran into his burning home. On the contrary, the first-order desire to save his family was too strong for him to resist.

The third man is a soldier, not unlike the heroes we see in action movies. On a tour of duty, he runs into a burning house to save the life of one of his enemies, a dangerous terrorist. This man's first-order desire to help the terrorist presumably played no part in his deliberation when, earlier in life, he formed the second-order volition 'to be a good man and help human beings'. On the contrary, he has always hated terrorists. Were it not for his strong sense of duty, that he feels 'defines him', the motivating force of his second-order volition, his identity, he would have set the building on fire himself. If cinema is a good indicator of public opinion, the soldier is just as moral or even more so than the man who saves complete strangers instead of a known terrorist. Nevertheless, his first-order desire is very similar to that of the little girl's desire to eat broccoli. He would definitely not want to be moved by his first-order desire to help the terrorist alone. In fact he would not be able to look at himself in the mirror if this was the case. For this reason, it would be more accurate to say, contra Frankfurt, that what induced the soldier to risk his life was 'a force other than his own' (Frankfurt 1971, 13).

Moreover, what if I am right in thinking that second-order volitions which do not pick out an already existing first-order desire, but induce one instead, are anything but nonstandard? What if they include a host of widely shared desires to 'belong', religious imperatives and moral duties?

When these second-order volitions are frustrated by conflicting first-order desires, the agent is not justified in asserting that 'the force moving him' was not his own. On the contrary, it is these second-order volitions that introduce first-order desires into the subject's psyche, desires he never deliberated on.

In these cases, a more natural way of differentiating between desires that belong to an individual and those that do not is the following. The little girl's first-order desire not to eat vegetables and the soldier's desire to kill terrorists are their own, the desire to eat brocolli and the desire to save the terrorist are not. These latter first-order desires have their origin, not in the subject, the little girl or the soldier, but in a second-order volition they have adopted for reasons other than having these first-order desires.

Frankfurt might be right in inferring that, unlike a wanton or an animal, a person's ability to form second-order volitions, his capacity for 'reflective self-evaluation', allows him to question his own motives (Frankfurt 1971, 7). However, the same 'reflective self-evaluation' also allows people, by seducing others to adopt a second-order volition, an *ideal,* to repress their desires or cause them to adopt first-order desires they would not entertain otherwise. These desires are solely conceived of *as desirable* because they come with the 'package deal' a principle or an ideal offers. The soldier, for example, only wants to save the terrorist from a burning building because that is what a 'good man' is supposed to do. Similarly, the little girl only wants to eat broccoli because 'it's what Shakira eats'.

From a moral point of view, the first-order desires that are included in package deals like the little girl's volition to be like Shakira can be praiseworthy, but they may also be deplorable. Most people would consider running into a burning building to save strangers a commendable act. On the other hand, most terrorists and war-criminals were presumably not born with a desire to murder. They often offer justifications for the horrors they commit by referring to second-order volitions. Religious extremists, for example, usually do not claim to commit murder for kicks, but argue that a true believer slaughters the unfaithful. Similarly, I do not think most soldiers enjoy killing, but they probably do believe that a good soldier follows orders. In these cases, a second-order volition, 'be a true believer' or 'be a good soldier', *induces* a first-order desire to kill, instead of being preceded by it. Simply put, although a second-order volition might stop a psychopath from acting on his rotting impulses, it can also make good men commit horrible atrocities.

Chapter 2: Poststructuralism & the Self Made Man

§2.1. Voluntary Servitude & Constraint

Both Stirner and postructuralists concern themselves with the phenomenon of 'voluntary servitude', an idea introduced to western thought by Étienné de la Boétie in the 16th century. In the 'Discourse on Voluntary Servitude', Boétie set himself the task of discovering 'how it can happen that a vast number of individuals…can allow one man to tyrannize them, a man who has no power except the power they themselves give him…and who could never wrong them were they not more ready to endure it than to stand in his way' (de la Boétie 1548 quoted by Newman 2011, 189-190).

Reflecting on this phenomenon, Stirner and postructuralists came to the conclusion that human beings must have a *desire* to be dominated, and therefore *voluntarily* submit to authority. Voluntary servitude is instilled in people, not by constraining citizens or by sanctioning deviant behaviour, but by *constituting their subjectivity* (Newman 2005, 14).

An institution that claims authority over its members, whether it be a state, church, ideological movement or even a company, borrows its power by having its members *identify* with it. This identification fulfils the desire already recognised by de la Boétie: a desire to be ruled over.

A second-order volition, if it can indeed *induce* first-order desires, seems to be exactly the kind of mental process that an institution can exploit to get people to voluntarily *restrain themselves* when their first-order desires run counter to the institution's interests.

A patriot, for example, gladly serves state interest. He does not consider his country as a power external to himself, demanding his service. Instead, he has internalized or identified with this 'external form', the nation (Newman 2011, 8). Something similar might happen to the little girl. If she sticks to her second-order volition to be like Shakira, she might in time come to conceive of *herself* as a star. After all, *becoming* a star, becoming like Shakira herself, was the very reason she adopted the second-order volition. She did not *just* want to eat broccoli, she wanted to *be* like Shakira. When a friend asks her why she eats broccoli, she could respond by referring to Shakira's diet. However, she could also refer to herself. If she feels she has satisfactorily fulfilled her second-order volition, perhaps she would respond: I eat broccoli because that befits the diet of a star, *like myself*.

By analogy, suppose someone asked a soldier 'fighting for France' in the Napoleonic wars: Why are you risking your life for the French government, or (more daring) for the dreams of Napoleon? I imagine that, if he would consider himself a patriot, he would answer that he gladly serves the interests of *his* country. He *is* a French citizen, what is in the interest of France is therefore also in

his interest. Thus, by a process of identification, the subject can be brought to equate his interest with that of the institution or 'ideal' he has identified with. He no longer believes to be serving an entity different from himself, the political elite or Napoleon. Instead, he believes to be serving himself by serving the nation to which he feels he belongs.

Stirner and poststructuralists argue that there is a sense in which the patriot is *constrained*, even though he is neither physically barred from pursuing other options nor deterred with sanctions if he refuses to enlist in the army. Ideology, religion or even the glitter and glamour of the pop industry exert a different kind of power over the individual. These institutions dominate individuals by deception, using identification they trick subjects into believing that what is in the interest of the institution is also in their interest.

What would it mean to be *free* of this insidious form of constraint? The poststructural conception of freedom and freedom as spontaneity are two distinct answers to this question. Because of the fact that both Stirner and poststructuralists agree that there is a sense in which identification (can) constrain(s) us, it is tempting to presume that they must also agree on what it would mean to be free of that constraint. In the next two sections, I will discuss the poststructural and the individualist egoist conception in turn, in order to show that this is not the case.

§2.2. Poststructuralism & Freedom of Identity

Poststructuralism is a loose term, referring to the writings of a very diverse group of thinkers. I do not claim that the conception of freedom I will work out in this section is one all poststructuralists would support. That said, the philosophers who recently put forward a poststructuralist interpretation of Stirner do ascribe this view to him, one that is reminiscent of Foucault's later writings, which I will discuss in the next section.

A conception of freedom that allows one to make sense of the idea that constraint is somehow involved in the patriot's decision to risk his life for his country, or the little girl's decision to want to eat vegetables she thinks are disgusting, cannot be an opportunity concept. Via identification, the French State influences the desires of the patriot. It loads the dice as it were, predisposes him to favour one option over others: he chooses to fight for his country instead of staying at home with his family. Presumably, he would not have made the same decision without considering himself to be a true patriot, without identifying with his nationality.

As one might expect therefore, poststructural freedom is an exercise concept (Filling 2014, 12). This implies that the patriot is somehow barred from shaping his own life. Since poststructuralists

mostly refrain from giving straightforward definitions, I am grateful to John Filling for the following, taken from an overview of different conceptions of freedom. He defines poststructural freedom as follows: '(1) *x*, a socially-constructed subject, is free (2) from *y*, the present social context that constitutes her subjectivity, (3) in and through *z*-ing, resisting the present context/subjectivity, constructing new contexts/subjectivities' (Filling 2014, 12).

This definition obviously requires elaboration. Filling discusses poststructural freedom under the heading 'Feminist Freedom'. Indeed, patriarchy is one of the institutions that can constrain individuals by 'subjectifying them'; by interfering with their desires. Consider an example that has become a cliché: a talented woman deliberating on whether she should pursue a career. In line with the cliché, imagine she was raised by conservative parents who taught her that a woman's proper place is at home, caring for her children. As a consequence of her upbringing, she has come to identify herself with this patriarchal ideal of womanhood. Because of this, she decides to abandon her career and be a stay-at-home mom. Nobody forced her to make this decision, it is what she feels she *should* do, given that she *is* a woman. Thus, the institution of patriarchy 'becomes constitutive not only of what women are allowed to do but of what they are allowed to be as well: how women … conceive of themselves, what they can and should desire' (Hirschmann 1996, 52 & Filling 2014, 12[2]).

Similarly, the prominent feminist theorist Judith Butler argues that gender is a social construct, 'fiction'. Specific practices connected with this fiction compel us to regard identities as necessary and natural. In these practices or 'gender constituting acts', one manifests one's manliness or femininity (Butler 1988, 520, 522).

She discerns two forms of political action by which patriarchy and the accepted gender roles connected with it have been challenged: 'There are thus acts which are done in the name of women, and then there are acts in and of themselves, apart from any instrumental consequence, that challenge the category of women itself' (Butler 1988, 523). An example of the former strategy is first-wave feminism. Early feminists did not set out to expose the category 'woman' as a fiction, they argued that she should be given the right to vote and make her own decisions. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *both* a 'Vindication of the Rights of Woman' and a 'Vindication of the Rights of Men (Wollstonecraft 1792 & 1790). She still believes that gender, 'being a woman', is not merely a fictional social construct: 'I plead for my sex – not for myself', she wrote (Wollstonecraft 1792, 65).

Butler favours the latter, alternative strategy. She writes of feminists who aim at liberating 'woman' as 'a subjected class': 'As Foucault claimed about those humanist efforts to liberate the criminalized subject, the subject that is freed [the oppressed woman] is even more deeply shackled than

2 Filling cites a passage only slightly different from this one taken from a different edition of Hirschmann's paper.

originally thought' (Butler 1988, 530). Real emancipation can only be achieved by exposing the category 'woman' itself as a social construct masquerading as the inescapable nature or essence of all persons of the female sex.

An example of this latter, more radical strategy, is transvestism. When confronted with a transvestite in real life (as opposed to a mere actor in a play or film) people often do not know how to refer to this person: is it a man or a woman? The transvestite does not merely force us to confront the fact that there is a difference between sex and gender. This person also 'constitutes a reality that is in some sense new, a modality of gender that cannot readily be assimilated into the pre-existing categories that regulate gender reality'. This alternative gender forces us to recognise that gender as such is merely a social construct, 'constituted by the performance itself'. Hence, it shows others that gender does not express an underlying feminine or masculine essence or nature (Butler 1988, 527).

Although Butler does not explicitly connect this second form of resistance to freedom, the transvestite seems to be free in exactly the same way as the subject in Filling's definition. Consider a transvestite born with the male sex. He starts out with a gender identity, 'being a man' (1). All his life other people, his family and peers, have expected him to behave in a masculine manner that suits his sex in the present socio-cultural context. 'He' resists this present social context, masculinity as it is understood in his society (2), through constructing a new context or subjectivity (3). That is, he refuses to conform to the masculine ideal, and instead 'constructs' a new context by engaging in behaviour that deviates from the norm. This presupposes that the transvestite does not simply copy female behaviour. Indeed, transvestites often do not merely emulate women or men, but also exaggerate certain feminine or male characteristics and leave out others. There is a whole drag queen and/or king culture, which people associate with live performances and glamour. We could say that (some) transvestites do not adopt a feminine gender role but something wholly new, 'a modality of gender' that does not obviously fit into the accepted gender categories. Perhaps he considers himself neither a man nor a woman but something different altogether, a novel third gender: a modality of gender that challenges the present patriarchal notions.

Being free in the poststructural sense then, means being critical of whatever identity society, other people, presumptuously understand you to have because of *what* you are instead of *who* you choose to be. Identities, poststructuralists argue, are not natural or necessary, but social constructs. The free individual in the poststructuralist sense chooses his own identity and actively takes part in shaping it. He understands that identities do not reflect an underlying fixed essence or nature, new identities can be constructed and old notions of oneself can be discarded. Poststructural freedom, in other words, is *freedom of identity*.

The patriotic soldier I discussed above is unfree on a poststructural account because he does not recognize the social character of identity. He is a Frenchman because he was born in France, his

identity is the product, not of his own design, but of pure coincidence. Resisting his nationality, the present social context that constitutes him as a Frenchman, does not even occur to him. That would be unpatriotic, morally wrong.

On first reflection, the poststructural conception appears less adequate to explain how the little girl is unfree, when she forces herself to eat broccoli. Nevertheless, I believe it can. The little girl does not resist the present social context, she internalizes what those around her regard as being 'cool'. She wants to be like the skinny and sexy popstar Shakira, as one would expect of a little girl these days. In other words, she conforms to the culturally salient notion of what a girl *should* want to be like. Perhaps it helps understanding if we imagine a boy idolizing Shakira, instead of a girl. A boy would indeed be challenging the present social context. Unlike the little girl, he challenges the perception others have of his identity. In doing so, he confronts his peers with the illusory character of boyhood. He gives his peers an opportunity to discover that the 'fact' that boys like boyish things is not so natural and necessary as they supposed. More importantly, he deviates from the norms regarding what boys should want to be. His identity is free because he resists pressure to conform to established notions while reflecting on and deciding who he wants to be as a person.

§2.3. Foucault & the Care of the Self

The poststructural conception of freedom is implicitly present in much of Foucault's later writings, in which he reflects on ethics. By ethics, he understands 'the intentional work of an individual on itself in order to subject itself to a set of moral recommendations for conduct and, as a result of this self-forming activity or "subjectivation," constitute its own moral being' (Robinson 2011, introduction). Simply put, ethics for Foucault concerns the way in which we constitute our own identities. Similarly to Butler, Foucault argues philosophy should be 'a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression' (Foucault 1984b, 45). The critic opens up 'the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think … it [critique] is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of *freedom* (Foucault 1984b, 46, emphasis mine). What part of the identity society ascribes us with, or which we uncritically hold ourselves to be, can be changed? Also, what *should* we change about ourselves? Trying to answer those questions is what 'critique' really means. The transvestite is one example of a *free* individual who transgresses the societal norm, in this case gender. He boldly experiments with his own subjectivity, his own identity.

According to Foucault this is the 'attitude' or 'ethos' of enlightenment. He discerns this 'ethos' in the works of Charles Baudelaire and in Immanuel Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment?'. 'Modern man, for Baudelaire', he writes, 'is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his

hidden truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself' (Foucault 1984b, 42). The enlightened man engages in a 'permanent critique' of himself (Foucault 1984b, 43). In other words, the modern man is free in the poststructural sense.

Foucault does not have a narrow understanding of the Enlightenment, as a term referring to the thoughts of certain western philosophers from the seventeenth century onwards. He discerns a similar 'ethos' in the Greek and Roman world. Ancient Greek philosophers display a concern for identity formation, in a practice they referred to as 'parrhesia' which translates to 'truth-telling'. Foucault carefully differentiates parrhesia from two other practices we might confuse with it: prophetic truth-telling and the sage sharing his wisdom (Foucault 2011, 15-16). A prophet, he writes, 'does not speak for himself', he presents those who listen to him with absolute truths. Because of his connection with a deity or insight into a transcendental realm, he has special access to these higher truths which us lesser human beings lack. The sage, in his wisdom, has a similar special access. Moreover, he usually remains silent, only speaks when he feels like it and when he does, it is in riddles. The 'parrhesiast' stands in sharp contrast to both these figures. Unlike the prophet, he 'does not reveal what is to his interlocutor; he discloses or helps him recognize what he is' (Foucault 2011, 19). The parrhesiast is 'the unlimited, permanent, unbearable questioner' (Foucault 2011, 18). Unlike the sage and the prophet, he attempts to be as clear and frank as possible. He speaks, not to disclose knowledge of absolute and general truths but 'to tell individuals the truth of themselves hidden from their own eyes, to reveal to them their present situation, their character, failings, the value of their conduct, and the possible consequences of their decisions' (Foucault 2011, 19). Furthermore, unlike the silent sage, he feels it to be his duty and task to speak. An excellent example of a parrhesiast is Socrates, who felt it was his duty to take men aside and question them. Not even the prospect of being executed could stop him from carrying out this task (Foucault 2011, 18). Parrhesia was a Greek version of what Foucault calls 'care of the self', a practice in one needs an honest *guide* who wants to help you. You need your own Socrates to properly care for yourself, not an individual or institution seeking to steer your development to further its own gain.

For the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, this care of the self was 'a privelege-duty, a gift-obligation that ensures our freedom while forcing us *to take ourselves as the object of all our diligence*' (Foucault 1984a, 47, emphasis added). Seneca, Foucault points out, describes the practice using juridical jargon, you should 'appear before the judge', indicating 'the division of the subject into a judging authority and an accused individual'. Another metaphor Seneca calls upon is that of an 'administrative review': 'the master of a household checking his accounts' (Foucault 1984a, 63). The household here refers to one's own personality, which requires attending no less than one's material possessions. The Romans taught that care of the self 'implies a shift of one's attention: the latter

must not be dissipated in an idle curiosity, either that of everyday agitations and of absorption in the lives of others' (Foucault 1984a, 65). We should 'keep in mind that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself' (Foucault 1984a, 64-65). Foucault himself certainly holds that there is *freedom* in caring for the self, freedom in *genuine* self-reflection. In an interview he asserts: 'Thought is *freedom* in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem' (Foucault 1997, 117, emphasis mine).

§2.4. Poststructural Freedom in Frankfurt's terms

Being free or constrained on the poststructural account depends *on the way in which we engage in self-reflection.* In other words, it depends on *how* we decide what person we want to be; how we form second-order volitions.

On the one hand, a free man goes about this task *autonomously.* Not necessarily by himself, he could use an honest guide he trusts to point out his flaws: his own Socrates could certainly be of great help. The free man is autonomous in the sense that he recognises that creating one's own identity is a *personal* obligation: *you* must invent yourself. Identity should be the product of a 'relation of oneself to oneself', not of 'absorption in the lives of others'. On the contrary, we must be ready to radically depart from the established norms if necessary and face the negative consequences this might entail. Not even the prospect of death discouraged Socrates to challenge his own presuppositions and those of his fellow citizens. Similarly, a transvestite bravely faces the prospect of humiliation or even physical assault by others. This, the free man knows, is a small price to pay to be one's own master in matters of identity.

A second criterion the poststructural conception imposes on forming secondary volitions is that they must remain open to reconsideration and improvement. The free man does not *discover* his identity as an eternal essence, his 'soul', but recognizes that it is his creation. As such, it is never *fixed* once and for all. The free man engages in a *permanent* critique of himself, his personal development is a life-long project.

Chapter 3: Freedom as Spontaneity

§3.1. Stirner and the Fixed Idea

The term 'egoism' has resulted in grave misunderstandings regarding Max Stirner's views. Individualist egoism is not a plea for shameless self-enrichment, at least not in a narrow economic sense. Confusing *egoism* with *egotism,* critics have mistaken Stirner for 'an ideologue of the petite bourgeousie' or, even worse, 'a proponent of a sort of Ayn Rand -like individualism and economic self-interestedness' (Newman 2011, 2[3]). Neither does Stirner argue that we should not be altruistic, refrain from acting *for the sake* of others instead of our own. Stirner would argue that altruism thus understood is an impossibility. He held psychological egoism, the view that, whether we are aware of it or not, all our actions are ultimately motivated by a concern for our own well-being (Shaver 2010, 1). Evidently, many people deny that psychological egoism is true. Moreover, most people would add that it is *immoral* to be exclusively self-interested. If psychological egoism is true, even the behaviour of the latter is, unbeknownst to them, still motivated by a concern for their own well-being. Stirner therefore describes them as *involuntary egoists* (Stirner 1844, 37, 163). After all, if psychological egoism is correct, they are egoists condemning egoism. Stirner would argue that this behaviour is still self-interested, the involuntary egoist longs for 'exaltedness'. If his sacrifice succeeds, he will be rewarded with a righteous feeling, which is also pleasurable (Stirner 1844, 37).

Although an involuntary egoist feels he should *sacrifice* his own well-being his motivation to do so is not necessarily furthering the well-being of other *individuals*. In fact, Stirner is almost exclusively concerned with a different kind of entity that people believe *deserves* their sacrifice: spirits, gods, ideals and principles. He refers to these taken together with the terms 'fixed ideas' or 'spooks' (Stirner 1844, 43).

Although he discerns an endless variety of fixed ideas, they have two characteristics in common: they are *alien* and *sacred,* the latter implying the former (Stirner 1844, 38). Alienness means that there is something 'uncanny' or strange about a fixed idea. God is a 'higher' being, not to be found in material reality. Similarly, one need only open an introductory work on meta-ethics to discover that the ontological status of moral principles is anything but agreed upon.

By *sacred* Stirner means that a fixed idea is beyond criticism, to an involuntary egoist his God or moral principle is '[u]ndislodgeable, like a madman's delusion' (Stirner 1844, 44). For a religious person, it is a *sin* to question the existence of God. To a proponent of human rights, someone who believes in the *sanctity* of human life, it is *inhuman* or *immoral* to kill. This is not to say that an

3 Newman does not support these claims, but offers them as examples of mistaken interpretations of Stirner's thought.

involuntary egoist might not tolerate scruples about specifics, even engage in them himself. A democrat, for example, for whom democracy is a fixed idea, could 'revolt against the existing state or overturning the existing laws; but to sin against the *idea* of the state, not to submit to the *idea* of law, who would have dared that' (Stirner 1844, 88)? The word *fixed* is intended to signify how, in the mind of an involuntary egoist, his principle or God is not to be questioned.

For the woman deciding what life to live in the example I used above, her gender, her 'womanhood', is a fixed idea. Although there are individual human beings of the female sex, medical science has never discovered 'womanhood' hidden beneath the skin. Hence, womanhood is *alien*. Moreover, she treats her gender as a fact: it is how she was born. Questioning whether she actually is a woman and what this entails in the current patriarchical context does not even make sense to her: showing that, for her, womanhood is *sacred*. Lastly, even though she might rather pursue a career than have children, she feels this is *unbefitting* for a woman. Thus, she *sacrifices* her own well-being on account of her 'womanhood'.

For the patriot, nationality is a fixed idea. He feels it deserves his sacrifice, in fact, he is ready to give his life for his country. It is also alien: being a French national is obviously unrelated to one's physique, as is even more apparent here than with womanhood. Thirdly, questioning one's nationality is considered unpatriotic, exemplifying sacredness.

The little girl is also 'possessed' by a fixed idea, as Stirner would put it. She is ready to sacrifice her own well-being to become a star; she would even eat broccoli if that is what it takes! Most grown ups are aware of the fact that popstars are physiologically similar to other human beings. Were we to place Shakira in an x-ray device, we would observe her organs, not her 'coolness' or 'stardom'. Hence, the little girl's ideal is *alien*. There is also a certain 'sacredness' to her ideal. The fact that the terminology used to describe modern showbusiness resembles that used in religion, 'idol-worship' for example, is unsurprising from an individualist egoist perspective. Imagine a friend of hers tells her that Shakira's music is uninspired rubbish. How would she respond? If she is sufficiently enthralled by the excessive marketing surrounding the industry, she would retort that only someone decidedly *uncool* would have such an opinion.

§3.2. Stirner, the first poststructuralist?

Poststructuralists obviously have a lot in common with Stirner. Both offer the same answer to the question posed by de la Boétie. Voluntary servitude operates via deception, institutions have their members *identify* with them to fulfill its own interests. De la Boétie was puzzled by the fact that people voluntarily serve others, apparently without any benefit to themselves. Stirner and poststructuralists point out that this is not how things appear to the servants. The latter do not feel

that they are serving an entity outside themselves. On the contrary, because of identification, they feel they are serving themselves: you serve the king because you *are* his subject. They have identified with an 'external form' or, as Stirner would put it, they are 'possessed' by a fixed idea.

Poststructuralists also urge us to rid ourselves of these fixed ideas. For the free man on a poststructural account, self-development is an ongoing project. Thus, one's identity is not *fixed* once and for all. You do not discover it as an unchanging essence hidden beneath the skin but *invent* it yourself. Moreover, the poststructralist reflects on who he wants to be as a person, forms second-order volitions, autonomously. He does not uncritically accept notions others impose on him as 'facts'. In fact, he treats anyone who feels he can decide for others what they are with great suspicion. The identity of a poststructuralist then, is not alien: it is his own creation. Neither is it sacred to him. A poststructuralist's identity is not beyond criticism, on the contrary, the poststructuralist is always prepared to reconsider himself, to question who he is as a person and who he should become. One could understand Stirner as making a similar point when he informs us: 'I am creator and creature in one' (Stirner 1844, 135).

Proponents of the poststructural interpretation therefore conclude that Stirner conceives of the subject and freedom in a manner very similar to poststructuralism. He opens the door to 'a certain radical freedom ... from subjectification'. By showing us how we deceive ourselves with fixed ideas, he presents us with an 'ethics of voluntary, wilful inservitude' (Newman 2011, 204). Newman argues Stirner's insights lead 'to a kind of radical ethical responsibility ... a responsibility to think and act without essentialist conditions and absolute guarantees' (Newman 2011, 10). In Stirner, Newman thinks, the subject is no longer conceived of as having a permanent identity, 'but rather an open field of action, flux and becoming'. 'This is what Stirner means by *ownness*', he continues, 'which is a much more radical form of freedom than the narrow, marketized conception dished up to us by liberalism'. (Newman 2011, 8). Stirner's conception of freedom is 'freedom understood in terms of self-ownership, autonomy *and freedom to determine one's own identity* (Newman 2011, 8, emphasis mine)'. Simply put: it is poststructural freedom. Another proponent of the poststructuralist interpretation cites Isaiah Berlin's description of individualist egoism, who also implicitly interprets Stirner as a poststructuralist. Berlin wrote: 'Stirner believed that all programmes, ideals, theories as well as political, social and economic orders are so many artificially built prisons for the mind and the spirit, means of curbing the will, of concealing from the individual the existence of his own infinite creative powers, and that all systems must therefore be destroyed, not to which is a new form of idolatry; only when this has been achieved would man, released from his unnatural fetters, become truly master of himself and attain to his full stature as a human being' (Berlin 1978, 106 cited Thomas, 2011, 115).

Although there certainly are interesting similarities between individualist egoism and

poststructuralism, these scholars overlook one important point in which the two radically differ: their notion of the self. Stirner regards an individual neither as a 'socially constructed subject' nor as what one might call a 'self-constructed subject'. He denies the poststructuralist claim that it is possible to *invent* yourself. There is no *genuine* way to form second-order volitions, to create one's own identity. If we ask a poststructuralist what a person is who has rid himself of fixed ideas, he would respond by saying that this must be an enlightened individual, a self-made man. Stirner's answer to the question of what lurks behind the veil of our fixed ideas is of a wholly different order. He argues that every individual human being is an 'Unman' (Unmensch): 'An abyss of lawless and unregulated impulses, desires, wishes, passions, a chaos without light or guiding star' (Stirner 1844, 146)!

The Unman refers to our 'extra-conceptual' existence in the world (De Ridder 2011, 150). Stirner is a nominalist, he regards concepts as mere abstractions. The nature of a creature, human being or beast, cannot be exhausted by a concept, nor any set of concepts. Every individual human being is 'unique', which is a better translation of the German 'Einzige' than 'Ego', the word the translator used for the title of the only book Stirner ever published: *Der Einzige und Sein Eigentum*. 'They say of God', Stirner writes, 'names name thee not'. That holds good of me: no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me; they are only names' (Stirner 1844, 324).

Newman rightly argues that Stirner has no 'notion of a true, authentic self, of which all thoughts and actions are simply a reflection'. Indeed, he does not have *a notion* of the self, because it is non-conceptual. This does not mean that he therefore 'invites us to experiment with our subjectivity, to consume and recreate it at will' (Newman 2011, 11). We have no notion of the self *because the self is not an object of thought*, but the Unman: a creature of flesh and blood.

Stirner breaks with the western philosophical tradition in a sense poststructuralism does not. The individualist egoist does not seek to rid himself of fixed ideas so he can invent himself, to become 'enlightened' as Foucault understands the term. On the contrary, Stirner wants to return to a more primal, animal state: 'No sheep, no dog, exerts itself to become a 'proper sheep, a proper dog'; no beast has its essence appear to it as a task, as a concept that it has to realize. It realizes itself in living itself out, in dissolving itself, passing away. It does not ask to be or to become anything other than it is' (Stirner 1844, 293). He does not urge us to exchange being constituted as a subject by others for doing the same himself: he wants to quit identification altogether. Frankfurt argues that a creature without second-order volitions is not a person, but a wanton, no different from an animal. Stirner regards this as an inescapable fact, persons are only beasts deceiving themselves: 'A man is 'called' to nothing, and has no 'calling', no 'destiny', as little as a plant or a beast has a 'calling'. The flower does not follow the calling to complete itself, but spends all its forces to enjoy and consume the world as well as it can .... The bird lives up to now calling, but it uses its forces as much as is

practicable; it catches beetles and sings to its heart's delight' (Stirner 1844, 288).

The alternative to falling prey to mistaken identification and the sacrifice or servitude it could entail offered by Stirner is not self-determination, it is *no determination.* The self is not the product of thinking at all, regardless of whether you do the thinking yourself or let others do it for you: 'Before my thinking, there is – I' (Stirner 1844, 310). An individualist egoist does not engage in self-reflection at all, by which we should understand that he does not form second-order volitions: 'But I, when I criticize, *do not even have myself before my eyes*, but am only doing myself a pleasure' (Stirner 1844, 311, emphasis mine).

Similarly to Foucault, Stirner also presents his readers with a genealogy of western thought. In fact, he also traces the concept of self cultivation or self care to Socrates. I believe Stirner would concur with Foucault's definition of ethics, since he describes Socrates *dismissively* as 'the founder of ethics' (Stirner 1844, 21). Socrates, who he describes elsewhere as 'a fool', urges us to 'cultivate not only your understanding, but also, and especially your heart'. Otherwise, the heart remains 'filled with the most fortuitous contents and, as an uncriticized *avidity*, altogether in the power of things, nothing but a vessel of the most various *appetites* then it was unavoidable that the free understanding must serve the 'bad heart' and was ready to justify everything that the wicked heart desired' (Stirner 1844, 190, 21).

Stirner will perform no such operation on himself, on the contrary, he wants to give these 'uncriticized avidities' free reign. Foucault argues that by reflecting on our own behaviour as a problem, we have a change to better our own behaviour. Stirner would regard this as an expression of the religious attitude: 'If religion has set up the proposition that we are sinners altogether, I set over against it the other: we are perfect altogether! For we are, every moment, all that we can be, and we never need be more' (Stirner 1844, 317).

What I called a radical break with the western tradition above is exactly the point where Stirner also parts ways with poststructuralism. Socrates famously argued that an unexamined life is not worth living, *Stirner disagrees.* He urges us to quit examining and evaluating our own desires and freely let whatever desire is strongest at present move us to act. He is willing to concede that it can be difficult for people 'when the desires run away with us, free and unbridled'. Only the egoist, however, realizes 'that the free mind, splendid intellectually, enthusiasm for intellectual interests, or however this jewel may in the most various phrase be named, brings *us* into yet more grievous straits than even the wildest impropriety' (Stirner 1844, 48). What Foucault regards as Socrates' courage, his willingness to point out the flaws of his fellow citizens with great risk to his own life, Stirner considers moral weakness. How much better was Alcibiades, never placing any consideration above his own interest:

'Poor Athenians, who are accused of hair-splitting and sophistry! Poor Alcibiades, of intrigue! Why that was just your best point, your first step in freedom. Your Aeschylus, Herodotus, etc. only wanted to have a free Greek *people*; you were the first to surmise something of *your* freedom' (Stirner 1844, 192).

Whereas poststructural freedom requires honest and thorough self-evaluation, Stirner merely urges his readers: 'recognize yourselves again, just recognize what you really are, and let go of your hypocritical endeavours, your foolish mania to be something else than you are' (Stirner 1844, 149). Notice that this recommendation could hardly be more different than that of poststructuralism. The self does not present you with a task: you do not have to do anything to find yourself, let alone develop yourself. On the contrary, all this is but 'foolish mania'!

Freedom for Stirner means *thoughtlessness*: 'only by this thoughtlessness, this unrecognized 'freedom of thought' or *freedom from the thought*, are you your own' (Stirner 1844, 306 emphasis mine). Contra Newman, Stirner does not qualify 'thoughts' as fixed ideas or spooks, but explicitly states that it is *thoughtlessness* he is after: 'I want to have the thought, want to be full of thoughts, but at the same time I want to be thoughtless, and, instead of freedom of thought, I preserve for myself thoughtlessness' (Stirner 1844, 305). Demonstrating his thorough nominalism, Stirner argues that thoughts are 'nothing but words', in which 'there is no salvation' (Stirner 1844, 307). The individualist egoist rejects *all* second-order volitions, regardless of how they were formed. In the context of a criticism of democracy, Stirner writes:

'If one were even to conceive the case that every individual in the people had expressed the same will, and hereby a complete 'collective will' had come into being, the matter would still remain the same. Would I not be bound today and henceforth to my will of yesterday? My will would in this case be *frozen.* Wretched *stability*! My creature – namely, a particular expression of will – would have become my commander. But in my will, I the creator, should be hindered in my flow and my dissolution' (Stirner 1844, 175).

Thus, for Stirner the source of a second-order volition, whether or not it is the product of genuine self-reflection, is unimportant. Freedom for Stirner means letting your first-order desires guide you to action unchecked. The egoist does not *identify* with any of his desires. In a paper written under a pseudonym, discovered to be written by Stirner and printed in English translation for the first time in the very volume in which proponents of the poststructuralist interpretation make their case, he argues: 'I most certainly distinguish myself from my thoughts that I have thought or will think; the first are objects, the other – un-laid eggs (Stirner 1847, 97).

Of course, we should not understand *thoughtlessness* literally. Much like Frankfurt's wanton, Stirner

is not arguing that we should stop *thinking* altogether: 'Thinking will as little cease as feeling' (Stirner 1844, 308). To an individualist egoist *reason* is an instrument, a means to fulfill desires, to enjoy himself (Stirner 1844, 168).

Unlike the wanton, an egoist does not shun second-order *desires*, only volitions. Only the latter can move us to act contrary to first-order satisfaction, lead us to 'sacrifice' our own well-being. Stirner is an egoistic hedonist, who considers self-enjoyment to be the only thing of value: 'My intercourse with the world, what does it aim at? I want to have the enjoyment of it' (Stirner 1844, 281). He denounces fixed ideas not because they are illosory (though they are), but because they can lead people to sacrifice their enjoyment.

Friedrich Engels once gave a description of Stirner in a poem called 'The Triumph of Faith', he wrote:

'Look at Stirner, look at him, the peaceful enemy of all constraint. For the moment, he is still drinking beer, soon he will be drinking blood as though it were water. When others cry savagely 'down with the kings' Stirner immediately supplements 'down with the laws also'. Stirner full of dignity proclaims; you bend your will power, and you dare to call yourselves free, You become accustomed to slavery; Down with dogmatism, down with law' (Engels 1842, 336 cited by Green 2006, 6).

By mistakenly identifying Stirner as a proto-poststructuralist, proponents of this view are also driven to misunderstand his views in a manner similar to Engels. Contrary to poststructuralism, he is *not* urging us to become anarchists and break down whatever social structures give rise to fixed ideas. As with wantonness, you cannot conclude on the basis of someone's behaviour whether he is an individualist egoist. He could be a kind, loving creature. That is how an egoist will act if he is endowed with strong first-order desires to help others, whether as a consequence of his upbringing or his genes.

On the other hand, he might also be endowed, genetically or by conditioning, with strong first-order desires to hurt others. Since the second-order volitions most people applaud and we try to get children to adopt are those of the form 'be a good person', 'respect others', he usually criticizes second-order volitions most people would applaud. This is why he is so often construed as an immoral degenerate. In fact, however, he is just as critical of second-order volitions that are condemned by society. Consider the following passage, in which he responds to a critic who believes he is pleading for egotism, the pursuit of self-interest understood in narrow economic terms:

'What then does *on my account* mean? There people immediately think of 'filthy lucre'. But he who

acts from love of filthy lucre does it on his own account indeed, as there is nothing anyhow one does not do for his own sake – among other things, everything that is done for God's glory; yet he, for whom he seeks the lucre, is a slave of lucre, not raised above lucre; he is one who belongs to lucre, the moneybag, not to himself; he is not his own' (Stirner 1844, 266, emphasis in original).

In Frankfurt's terminology, Stirner thinks a man whose hoarding is motivated by strong first-order desires is indeed an egoist. On the other hand, a man who hoards because he thinks this is what he *should* do is not. Again, whether he has decided to hoard because he is from a wealthy family and thinks this is how he was born or after an honest self-reflection session with Socrates as his guide is irrelevant.

Individualist egoism, in other words, is *amoral*, not *immoral*. Stirner does not present us with *any* ethics, not with an 'ethics of voluntary, wilful inservitude' either. Thus, he is not urging us to break down evil institutions, he is merely explaining why we should not let ourselves be fooled by them. For all we know, both Adolf Hitler and Mahatma Ghandi could have been individualist egoists, since egoism does not require the egoist to be honest about his philosophical beliefs. How could we possibly exclude the possibility that Hitler or Gandhi's behaviour was prompted by their first-order desires alone? Similarly to being a wanton, being an individualist egoist tells us something about the *structure* of the will, not its *content*. Perhaps Hitler and Gandhi simply *enjoyed* being a tyrant and a saintly person respectively.

§3.3. Freedom as Spontaneity in Taoism

To my knowledge, there is no western school of philosophy that defines freedom in a manner similar to individualist egoism. In order to find an alternative description of freedom as spontaneity we have to turn east, to Taoism. The spiritual ideal for Taoists, the Taoist sage, is also not unlike Frankfurt's wanton. Taoists value 'wu wei', which translates literally as 'nonaction'. One scholar describes it as 'a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly from one's *spontaneous* inclinations – without the need for extended liberation or *inner struggle* – and yet nonetheless accord perfectly with the dictates of the situation at hand, [and] display an almost supernatural efficacy' (Slingerland 2003, 7 as cited by Velleman 2008, 183, emphasis mine).

Taoism is markedly different from other spiritual doctrines in the sense that is profoundly *amoral*, another similarity between Taoism and individualist egoism. Moral categories, but for many Taoists normative categories in general, inhibit 'wu wei'. Moral and normative goals require purposive action, which bars us from letting our 'spontaneous inclinations' take their natural course. Hence, the Taoist sage does not make moral judgements, perhaps he even refrains from judging altogether. In

the *Zhuangzi*, one of Taoism's two primary holy texts, the reader is urged to *forget* 'shi' and 'fei', which we can translate by 'that's it' and 'that's not' (Velleman 2008, 184). We need to discard such notions to get in touch with our spontaneous inclinations. When we succeed in this, we follow 'the Way' (Graham 1990, 3-4). Taoists claim that in times long past, men always followed 'the Way' or practiced 'wu wei'. 'Shi' and 'fei', rules, customs and institutions, only arose when the ancients had already abandoned their natural path (Graham 1990, 4). Moreover, Taoists agree with Frankfurt that animals lacking reflective capabilities have not been thrown off course, thus they follow the Way naturally (Velleman 2008, 186). Similarly to Stirner, Taoists also bite Frankfurt's bullet. They embrace the fact that the Taoist Sage is *not a person*, not a *human being*. He might have the same appearance 'but lacks the human essence' (Slingerland 2003, 181 cited by Velleman 2008, 186).

Most Taoists, however, radically depart with individualist egoism in two crucial aspects. According to almost every Taoist text, achieving 'wu wei', getting in touch with our natural inclinations, requires years of hard work. The aspiring Taoist sage must meditate and fast extensively in order to clear his mind of 'shi' and 'fei' (Velleman 2008, 187). This feature of Taoism is not only unappealing, it is also inherently paradoxical. After all, following the Way requires us to leave all purposes and goals, all second-order desires and volitions, behind. Elevating the Way to an ideal, a divine purpose to be consciously strived for seems absurd. It is engaging in exactly what we should abandon if we wish to follow 'the Way'. Why would anyone think that the best procedure to abandon all second-order desires and volitions is to form a second-order volition not to do so? Moreover, the Way thus understood is a fixed idea, in Stirner's terminology.

The second point on which Taoism differs from individualist egoism is the idea that 'wu wei' requires us to abandon not only second-order desires and volitions, but normative judgement in general. Such a claim is susceptible to counter-arguments similar to those employed against the radical sceptic. By analogy, consider the following argument against radical scepticism. In a famous passage in David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, one of the spokespersons tells his conversational partner, a radical sceptic: 'We shall then see, whether you go out at the door or the window; and whether you really doubt if your body has gravity, or can be injured by its fall; according to popular opinion, derived from our fallacious senses, and more fallacious experience' (Hume 1779, 5) A similar argument can be employed against a Taoist sage who claims to have abandoned all normative judgements. How does he survive everyday life without (at least implicitly) making normative judgements? Does he not choose to cover himself up when it is freezing outside? Does he not think it good to eat when starving, to drink when dying of thirst? Differently put: even spontaneous action is not devoid of normativity.

One Taoist philosopher departs with the tradition in this respect, he does not think that 'wu wei' requires great effort to achieve. Furthermore, this philosopher, the author of a chapter in the *Lieh-*

Tzu called *The Garden of Pleasure*, also does not feel that we need to throw out the baby with the bathwater. We do not need to abandon judgement in general, similarly to Stirner, he feels that refraining from reflective self-evaluation is sufficient. To be fair, Angus Graham, the translator and editor of the *Lieh-Tzu*, urges that this chapter 'is so unlike the rest of the *Lieh-Tzu* that it must be the work of another hand' (Graham 1990, 135). This unknown author put his own ideas in the mouth of a certain Yang Chu, a Taoist sage who voices less unconventional ideas from a Taoist perspective in other works. Considering the topic of this essay, it is worthy of note that Graham remarks in the introduction to this chapter: 'Any Taoist would understand part of what we mean by Liberty, but the author of this chapter is perhaps the only early Chinese thinker who would have appreciated the passion which this word excited in the West' (Graham 1990, 137).

In any case, *this* Yang Chu cautions us not to engage in second-order volitions for hedonistic reasons: because they bar us from acting to further our own happiness. Yang Chu is especially opposed to 'honour', by which I think we can fairly understand a second-order volition 'to be an honourable person': 'Busily we compete for an hour's empty praise, and scheme for glory which will outlast our deaths; even in our solitude we comply with what we see others do, hear others say, *and repent of what our own thoughts approve and reject*' (Graham 1990, 139-140, emphasis mine)

The desire to be an honourable man, in other words, is bound to put us *in opposition to ourselves.*

Combining a Taoist appreciation for spontaneity with hedonism, Yang Chu anticipates Stirner and urges us to let ourselves be guided by our first-order desires and enjoy ourselves. The ancients, who have an almost mythical status for Yang Chu as they do for Taoists in general, were still in touch with their inclinations. They did not distance themselves from them by forming second-order volitions. Contrary to other Taoists, Yang Chu envisions them as being joyful hedonists:

'The men of the distant past knew that in life we are here for a moment and in death we are gone for a moment. Therefore they acted as their hearts prompted, and did not rebel against their spontaneous desires; while life lasted they did not refuse its pleasures, and so they were not seduced by the hope of reputation. They roamed as their nature prompted, and did not rebel against the desires common to all things; they did not prefer a reputation after death, and so punishment did not affect them' (Graham 1990, 140).

Later in the chapter a 'chief minister' is brought to the stage. This ruler is so just and capable that, after less than three years of being in power, 'the good had submitted to his reforms and the wicked dreaded his prohibitions' (Graham 1990, 143). His two brothers, however, have completely different personalities. They never worked a day in their lives but spend their time in leisure, enjoying women and wine (Graham 1990, 144). One of the brothers could get so lost in drunken enjoyment

that 'he *forgot* the possessions in his own house, the degrees of affinity of his kinsmen, and that it is better to live than to die' (Graham 1990, 144, emphasis mine).

The minister decides to teach his brothers some manners. He urges them to 'live properly and dutifully' and warns them that 'if you act on the promptings of your passions, and excite yourselves with pleasures and lust, you will endanger health and life' (Graham 1990, 145). To his great surprise, his brothers answer that they have been waiting for an opportunity to point out *his* follies, instead of vice versa. They tell him that 'to wish to impress others with your respect for propriety and duty, distorting your natural passions to call up a good name, in our judgement is worse than death' (Graham 1990, 145).

Not impressed by how their brother runs his estate, they argue that his method of ruling 'may be realised temporarily in a single state, but it is out of accord with men's hearts. Their method of 'ruling themselves' on the contrary, 'may be extended to the whole world, until the Way of ruler and subject is brought to an end' (Graham 1990, 146-147).

Moreover, according to Yang Chu, a man in touch with his first-order desires is *free* in a sense those who worry about 'propriety and duty' are not. He writes of a certain 'king Chieh' who carried himself in the same manner as the two younger brothers: 'He was the most *carefree*, the *least constrained* man under the sky' (Graham 1990, 151, emphasis mine).

Although, Stirner and Yang Chu have the same kind of freedom in mind, I believe that the nature of Yang Chu's exposition is more prone to being misunderstood than that of Stirner. Yang Chu solely depicts the men following their spontaneous inclinations as partying hedonists. Because of this, his treatise risks being misunderstood as a plea for a certain kind of behaviour: drinking, dancing and having sex. Perhaps Yang Chu himself believed that this is the behaviour *anyone* would engage in, were he to act on first-order desires alone. Still, does not imply that being free in the spontaneity sense refers to engaging in a specific type of behaviour.

Chapter 4: Freedom as Spontaneity & Political Theory

§4.1. Poststructural Freedom or Democratization of Constraint?

In this concluding chapter, I will discuss two ways in which freedom as spontaneity might be relevant for contemporary political theory. The topic of this section is the way in which it can cast a critical light on poststructuralism.

Legal equality and democratic representation do not guarantee poststructural freedom. In order to be free, an individual must also resist pressure to conform and challenge established behavioural norms. Hence, one could question poststructuralism from a conservative angle, say by pointing to the value of tradition, or by arguing that gender-roles do in some way reflect very real biological differences between men and women.

Freedom as spontaneity offers an alternative line of criticism. The poststructuralist has not gone too far: he has not gone far enough. Identity *in general* may constrain the individual. Hence, the idea that procuring as much freedom of identity as possible is suspect for an egoist. This is not a recipe to rid us of constraint, it is what I would call a plea for *democratization of constraint*. This freedom merely allows us to choose our own master, our own identity, and exchange it for another when we no longer feel his rule is just. Even the poststructuralist is still seeking for freedom *in* thought, hence he will only arrive at a freedom *of* thought, as Stirner put it: 'even the most inexorable criticism, which undermines all current principles, still does finally believe in the principle' (Stirner 1844, 309).

At least one poststructuralist agrees with this statement, but argues that the freedom proposed by Stirner is an impossibility. Foucault asserted that 'the expression of not being governed at all, I believe it is the philosophical and theoretical paroxysm of something that would be this will not to be relatively governed'. Foucault does not believe that 'a fundamental anarchism', 'an originary freedom, absolutely and wholeheartedly resistant to any governmentalization' is even possibility (Foucault 1997, 75). Freedom as spontaneity, being free from principles altogether refers exactly to such an 'originary freedom', an egoist does believe that this is possible.

Poststructuralists still believe in ethics, as Foucault and Stirner would understand the term. They still feel that we have a task to fulfil in life, an identity to develop. Since Stirner holds that *any* principle, ideal or second-order volition can renders us unfree, his criticism of the 'free-thinkers' in his own time also applies to poststructuralism:

'...the Caucasian [the liberal or the critic] [has] shown himself spontaneous only *in spite* of his Mongolian morality. The Mongolian heaven, or morals, remained the strong castle, and only by

storming incessantly at this castle did the Caucasian show himself moral; if he had not do with morals at all any longer, if he had not had therein his indomitable, continual enemy, the relation to morals would cease, and consequently morality would cease. That his spontaneity is still a moral spontaneity, therefore, is just the Mongoloidity [religious element] of it, it is a sign that in it he has not arrived at himself. 'Moral spontaneity' corresponds entirely with 'religious and orthodox philosophy', 'constitutional monarchy', 'the Christian State', 'freedom within certain limits', 'the limited freedom of the press', or, in a figure, to the hero fettered to a sick-bed (Stirner 1844, 66).

Consider the transvestite in the example I offered above. Why can he only be free if he adopts a novel modality of gender? From an egoist perspective, this is merely releasing him from an ideal society imposed on him by one of his own choosing. The poststructuralist would of course object that he reserves the freedom to change his mind about his gender identity. If that is so, why then should he identify with anything at all? Can he not simply wear a dress when he feels like it and exchange it for pants the moment he feels uncomfortable in it? Why is it necessary for him to engage in self-reflection in between?
Moreover, why would we even want to be free in a poststructural sense? For Stirner and Yang Chu, freedom is only a goal derivatively, insofar as it contributes to our well-being, our enjoyment. This might have paradoxical implications for some individuals. That is, if someone is happier under the illusion that he has an identity than he is when rid of it, he should not want to be free. What can the poststructuralist offer as a reason to pursue freedom? Is 'inventing yourself' somehow intrinsically valuable? Foucault's example of Socrates who paid for honest self-reflection with his life can hardly be called encouraging.

§4.2. Freedom as Spontaneity & Contemporary Society

Similarly to the way in which freedom as spontaneity may be used to question poststructuralism, it can also be employed to question the view that a liberal society truly furthers individual liberty. The free-born man does not reject a specific kind of religious belief or political view: he rejects religious and ideological beliefs in general.
For the egoist, both freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are oxymora. After all, both religious and moral views render us unfree! They introduce second-order volitions that could, and probably will, cause believers to act in a way that runs counter to their interests. Hence, freedom as spontaneity may be used to criticize *every* ideological or religious view. Notice that this is not to say that an egoist cannot take part in an ideological or religious movement. In fact, he will if it suits him. Newman is right when he argues individualist egoism prompts 'alternative forms of political action'

(Newman 2011, 10). That is, an individualist egoist could take part in *any* form of political action. Since he is what one might call *unprincipled on principle*, hypocrisy is not *necessarily* a problem for him. A particular egoist might *like* patriarchy or *enjoy* tyranny. Maybe his position in life depends on the existence of these institutions or perhaps he simply has a sadistic personality. Of course, it is, conversely, also false to argue that he *must* be indifferent to being dishonest and lying to others: perhaps he dreads the guilt he will feel, or simply likes being honest to people.

Although, historically, Stirner's thought has influenced anarchism, a person who holds that state authority is illegitimate or unjust is not an egoist. The latter rejects the moral imperatives that political philosophers feel these institutions place on us, but refuses to replace them by a moral imperative to deconstruct them. Since deceiving others might be something he enjoys doing, his philosophical views could very well prompt him to take the reverse course of action.

The arguments above would presumably be unacceptable for the vast majority of political philosophers. A more agreeable consequence that recognizing freedom as spontaneity as a valid understanding of the term might have, is that prompts us to reconsider what it means to act self-interestedly. Poststructuralists argue that the 'narrow marketized conception' of freedom 'dished up to us by liberalism' falls short because it ignores the way in which we are anything but free in matters of identity. (Newman 2011, 8). Freedom as spontaneity suggests the complete opposite of poststructuralism's critique of liberalism. On the spontaneity conception, this narrow understanding of self-interest fails on its own terms. Stirner argues that it is absurdly limited to believe that acting in your self-interest *must* mean pursuing material wealth and sex. Do people need two houses and four different cars to *enjoy* themselves? Although we can never be sure if a greedy materialistic person is an egoist or not, it seems likely that excessive greed usually reflects *unfreedom.* Differently put, it is a concern with *identity,* not with one's own interest, that usually lies motivates excessive self-enrichment and consumerism. In the modern world, we are constantly reminded of the need to *become* successful in life. An egoist could appeal to the self-interest of decadent people. Why are you working yourself to death to conform to an ideal? Such an appeal to self-interest probably has a better chance of succeeding than simply casting moral blame. I also feel it would be more successful than the poststructuralist recommendation to engage in a genuine practice of identity formation. Whereas few people have the capacity to reflect in a manner similar to Socrates, almost everyone wants to be happy.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have formulated a conception of freedom that is hardly if ever discussed by western philosophers: freedom as spontaneity. This understanding of freedom has been defended by Max Stirner and, implicitly, by Taoists. Especially in the ancient text 'The Garden of Pleasure', a fusion of hedonism and Taoism, one can discern a notion of freedom very similar to Stirner's.

Stirner has quite recently been interpreted as a precursor to poststructuralism. Although this view is mistaken, confusing poststructuralism and individualist egoism is understandable. Both schools of thought concern themselves with the phenomenon of 'voluntary servitude'. Moreover, their understanding of how this phenomenon operates, via identification, is also remarkably similar.

After giving an account of poststructural freedom, drawing both on Butler's thoughts on gender-identity and Foucault's thoughts on Enlightenment, I have argued that freedom as spontaneity must be distinguished from poststructural freedom. Frankfurt's terminology allowed me to highlight the difference between the two views. Whereas the poststructuralists argue that a *specific kind* of second-order volition can render us unfree, freedom as spontaneity requires one to forego forming second-order volitions in general.

Notwithstanding the lack of philosophical literature on this conception of freedom, I believe we have this understanding of the word in mind when we enviously look upon birds or dream about moving to a far-away place to live in seclusion. The bird has no task to perform, he need not *become* anything. His lack of capacity for self-reflection prohibits him from worrying about wasting his potential, he does not consider whether he might not be living up to expectations, including his own. A hermit also seems to be in a better position to follow his spontaneous inclinations. Living in seclusion, he is not troubled by other people telling him what to do. Neither are there any Socrates-like figures around that urge him to engage in thorough self-reflection.

Foucault was right when he asserted that the converse of freedom as spontaneity, a concern with who we are, pervades the western philosophical tradition. Thus, it is unsurprising that we have to turn to Max Stirner for an alternative; a thinker on the fringe of western thought, considered a madman by most. Foucault's characterization of western thought is also reinforced by the fact that freedom as spontaneity is not foreign to Chinese thought at all. On the contrary, it is exemplified by the Taoist sage, the spiritual ideal of one of the world's major religions with a rich philosophical tradition.

In the final chapter, I have hinted at ways in which freedom as spontaneity might be interesting for contemporary philosophers and social critics. Since Stirner and Yang Chu both offer an alternative response to voluntary servitude, freedom as spontaneity can be employed to question poststructuralism. Stirner would argue that poststructuralism does not go far enough. The

poststructuralist might be freed of fixed ideas, his freely chosen identity might be no less oppressive. In my opinion, the biggest promise freedom as spontaneity holds for political theory is its capacity to critically assess the presuppositions surrounding the modern condition. Consumerism and greed could be understood as *identity* driven, instead of self-interested behaviour.

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