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IDENTITY, FREEDOM, EMERGENCE.
A REFLECTION ON THE MEANING OF ACTION.

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In *Notebooks for an ethics*, Jean-Paul Sartre confronts an apparent *l'aporia* in human action through history [Sartre 1992, 27-28, 46-47]. If history is guided by an immanent impulse, by a pre-defined address (a binding ‘teleology’, for instance), then human action and its choices do not seem to be in a position to represent anything meaningful, since their contribution is illusory. They never change anything essential in my life and are immaterial as to the course that history is going to take. If, on the opposite, we assume that each human being is wholly free, perfectly independent from his/her past and from any meaning conveyed by history, then again human action seems to be meaningless and immaterial. It is meaningless because there is nothing that can really guide it. It is immaterial because the others’ actions that will follow ours, being wholly independent of what preceded them, will not be tied to anything that we may have done before.

Such aporetic situation depends on conditions that seem quite favourable to confer meaning to action, that is, the availability of *ontological freedom*. In fact, if we were living in a Laplacian deterministic universe, it would be a fortiori impossible to talk of the meaning of choices and actions. The picture that Sartre presents is such that the very conditions required in order for actions to be meaningful turn all actions into meaninglessness.

In the following, we will try to give an answer to this aporetic picture, by staging the general outline of how an act can be both free and meaningful in a historical dimension.

All human action is meant to produce a change. It may be a change that restores known balances, as in the circularity of the fulfilment of

bodily needs (hunger and satiation, for instance). Or we can have to do with changes that address unknown outcomes, as in the desire to overcome a condition of unease, while ignoring what exactly could satisfy such unease. The argument that we want to briefly develop sketches the profile of the *transformational logic* inherent in human action as such, that is, the way in which actions position themselves in a historical process, both by affecting it and being affected by it.

The general form of a developing action is an articulate temporal unfoldment, animated by preferences and ends: it is something that has the primal appearance of a *story*. The ‘atoms’ of our stories are ‘*action units*’, that is, diachronic units endowed with a minimal sense, like grasping an object or making a step. The meaning of such units is on display by watching at the horizon where they find their relevant completion. A step is part of doing the grocery shopping, a grasp is part of taking products from the shelves, both are part of the plan of my day and in the last instance of my life. The meaning of each action unit is made intelligible by its position in a ‘story’.

If we look at the comprehensive horizon where our actions take place, we can distinguish three horizons, three fundamental levels of telling a ‘story’. We have the story of our personal life, and specifically of our ontogenetic and individual development. Then we have the story provided by *civil and cultural history*, the Hegelian *Weltgeschichte*, in which the former level is embedded. And finally, at the most comprehensive level, we find the *natural evolutionary history*, within which the species *homo sapiens* and its political and cultural history find their room.

Those levels (personal, cultural, biological) can be conceived as convergent and cooperating in each individual action and in its transformational process. What characterizes a ‘story’, in contrast with mere mechanical courses, is the implicit reference to *preferential and selective orders*. In fact, in a mechanical course, devoid of reference to living consciousness, there is not even a clear reason for granting a substantial asymmetry between past and future, since there is properly *no present at all*. *Present* is only what is *present to* somebody, to a consciousness, a subject, a living being that exercises its preferences. There is no chance to define ‘presence’ without reference to a living consciousness.

When we tell a story, even the ‘big story’ of natural biological history, we implicitly refer to *telic* orders, that is to orders, which are ‘*oriented towards*’, without having necessarily any representational awareness of specific ends. According to this telic attitude, *something makes a difference for somebody*, for a consciousness or a plurality of conscious individuals. Here ‘action’ is tantamount to current consciousness that prefers and postpones by means of bodily motions. Now, we are going to sketch out a general framework of how meaningful action can develop, starting with the most comprehensive dimension and proceeding down to the personal sphere.

1. On natural evolutionary history

Nowadays the natural history of the living is described in evolutionary terms, according to a well-known Darwinian model, which can be essentially summarised through two passages: a) different living forms – different phenotypes – are generated from genotypes emerged from casual genetic variation; b) natural selection operating on phenotypes changes their rate of reproduction, thus affecting future genotypes.

This process is often conceptualized in a misleading way, as if it showed that natural selection *explained* phenotypic traits, that is, as if it explained the *nature* of living properties. This vision depends on an erroneous adaptationist interpretation of the evolutionary course.

According to an adaptationist reading, a reference to greater adaptive power is sufficient reason to provide causal explanations of all the phenotypic traits that we meet in nature. Yet, as S. J. Gould has effectively argued [Gould & Lewontin 1979], adaptationism makes claims that are inadequately justified. Such claims are *conceptually* mistaken precisely insofar as they assume to explain the *essence* of biological properties by resorting to the adaptation mechanism and therefore to natural selection. But in fact natural selection *creates nothing*, since it operates as a kind of *veto* or *ensorship* towards the powers already predisposed by genetic variation, that is, by life in its spontaneous formation. Selection always plays with cards that are provided by the powers inherent in living matter. This is evident if we notice that natural selection always already presupposes a genotype and the relevant phenotype

on which to operate: selection works *on* life, it does not constitute life.¹

In this respect, it may be useful to think of the whole content of our biological faculties from a point of view that overturns the usual perspective. Each faculty of ours, each phenotypic trait with its capabilities, depends on a genetic configuration that was *not shaped* by natural selection: we just inherited them from our parents. But this can be said also for the biological faculties of our parents, which simply inherited them from theirs, without natural selection having anything to say. And this is true by going backwards for each generation. Every present living being – each one of us – is simply the last instantiation of a successful chain of genetic variations (and their coupling), from a hypothetical ordinary single-celled eukaryote till now. On the content of this chain natural selection had nothing to say, since its authority has been exercised just on the ones that have been taken off the board. All characters that define what we are derive without exception *directly* from spontaneous developments of life.

What evolutionary theory tells us is that selection worked by changing the *probability* that some genotypes combined, insofar as it erased a vast number of possibilities from the scene; and this defines the *adaptive* character of this or that phenotypic trait. However, what each living being can do is exclusively determined by an endogenous process of living matter (and, we could say, of *matter* as such).

From this point of view, we can see that each description of biological evolution could be properly conceived as an evolution *within matter*, whose properties gradually *emerge*. This perspective may sound eccentric or metaphysical, but in fact is just the simplest way to describe from a philosophical point of view what evolutionary biology expresses in its prevalent doctrine.

Here it is important to grasp correctly the meaning of the term “emerge”. Biological properties *emerge* neither in the sense that they

¹ In “The free floating rationales of evolution”, Daniel Dennett [2012] formulates a hypothesis concerning a possible extension of the mechanism of natural selection to the emergence of life, starting from self-replicating chemical cycles. Yet, this hypothesis can be shown to be untenable, because it is lacking in a crucial requirement of evolutionary process: there is no reason why successfully self-replicating chemical cycles should spread their traits by increasing in number [cf. Zhok 2017, 201-203].

are created *ex nihilo* nor in the sense of being independent from the qualities of the material substrate in which they inhere. Each *emergent property* represents a potentiality of acting and producing effects, and such a property primarily depends on the *configuration* of the parts of the agent (i.e., the living). Secondly, the properties *manifest* themselves at the meeting point between the configuration of the living and the beings to which it relates (the surrounding world, the *Um-welt*). A property is attributed to a being only when both a certain *configuration* of its parts and a certain *surrounding world* are given.

What defines the *emerging* character of these properties is that they manifest themselves in settled relational forms: in specific environmental relations and in specific internal relations of their parts (configuration). Properties appear therefore as *emergent* because they are not reducible to the properties displayed by simpler configurations or in different environmental relations.²

In this sense, the properties of matter are properly always ‘emergent’, insofar as *before* empirically discovering what potentialities a material configuration features in certain relations with the environment, they cannot be anticipated. They cannot be *inferred* from what has appeared in different configurations and in different relations. Therefore, we cannot *deduce* the properties of the wholes from the properties of the parts.

In this sense the properties of the living are emergent, that is new and irreducible to those of the non-living; and similarly the properties of consciousness are emergent in relation to the biological ones, without it implying anything ‘irrational’ in natural processes. To regard the simpler configurations as a normative canon for the more complex configurations is just a metaphysical prejudice, which originates in methodological instances devoid of ontological significance. Attempts of conceptual reduction of complex to simplex have been, and still are, a powerful methodological instance, effective as theoretical instrument, and therefore massively adopted by modern science. However, nothing in our experience justifies its translation into an ontological statement.

Therefore, the only way in which the nature of a property can be grasped is by looking at *how its implications unfold*; the only way to un-

² For a wider account of the character of emergent properties we refer the reader to Zhok [2011].

derstand the properties of a phenotypic trait, of a genotype, of a species, is to *explore what it is currently able to do*, and not to investigate (or conjecture about) its antecedents. Knowledge of the antecedents can be useful to anticipate the essence of a configuration only if we have made previous experience of regular connections between those antecedents and some consequences. But this is necessarily *a posteriori* knowledge, which depends on the specific traits of natural configurations and their irreducible properties.

The new qualities emerge from the stage defined by old qualities in a specific sense: not in the sense that the old *causes* the new, but in the sense that the old *creates the space of possibilities* where the new can take place. This is well represented by the evolutionary dynamics of *exaptation*, as it was developed by S. J. Gould [Gould & Vrba 1982].

In each moment a phenotypic trait can have a well-defined function, or it may have none, while being ‘collateral’ to another functional trait, or it may be an originary morphological trait (part of the organism’s *Bauplan*), or, finally, it can be an atavism, that is, a residual of past functions currently devoid of any function. Whatever the reason for its current existence in an organism, be it functional or not, in any case it is its *future use* that is going to define its biological *meaning*. And such use may have nothing to do with the reasons that had possibly determined its existence in a certain present (provided that reasons there were). This argument can be applied to each moment of intermediate development in the life of a species (and, of course, also to the *first* instance of organic life as such.)

The logic that emerges from these remarks on the nature of acts that take place in a historical course (here an evolutionary one) is the following: the past, as it is expressed in each present, does not *determine* the future. It expresses itself by defining *spaces of possibility* where some options are open, other ones are closed, some are likely, other less likely. The borderline case is the one where the present shuts down all future possibilities (biologically: extinction). In all remaining cases we have a *modulation* of future possibilities, a modulation which in natural history, once we exclude divine interventions and Lamarckian mechanisms from the explanatory options, is a *causal* modulation.

This process should be understood as a course of events where each

act of the living intervenes on a flux of *possibilities* by modifying their *probability*. The essential form of the process is such that the identity of an individual and its species, in a certain moment, has only possible empirical causes to exist, but the *causes* that explain its existence are not tantamount to the *reasons* able to explain its essence. Such an essence, which amounts to the capacities, powers, faculties of the living, is not knowable on the basis of their (real or conjectural) causal history, but only by examining *what can be brought to light* by it (the unfoldment of its implications).

This conceptual framework could be defined ‘*existentialist*’, in a specific acceptance, insofar as here *existence precedes essence*, insofar as the ‘*that*’ precedes and grounds the ‘*how*’.

The interpretations of evolution in adaptationist terms conceal this fundamental character: before each phenotypic trait, before each faculty or power, they pre-set the same explanatory clause, such that each trait of the living expresses in the last instance its utility for survival. This reading produces a dramatic impoverishment of our reality, as it manifests itself. Saying in the face of our enjoyment of Mahler’s symphonies, or Horace’s *Carmina*, that the faculties, capabilities and propensities that are thereby expressed are just expressions of functions apt to enhance our survival creates a barrier to grasp any relevant meaning. Such a meaning does not manifest itself by knowing the past of those faculties but by acquaintance with the present and future play of its manifestations.

The process that links together past and future on the stage of evolutionary history is conceivable as a process of progressive *possibilizations*, which take place within previous spaces of possibility. Biologically, the crucial act, the possibilizing action par excellence, is the *mating* act, with the relevant *crossing over* and the possible spontaneous variations. It is this act that defines the *present*, around which past and future gravitate. It does so, in the wake of the inherited genotype and its potentialities, and by generating a *new horizon of possibilities* downstream.

2. *On cultural and civil history*

Let us try now to move to the stage of *human history*, which always presupposes the outcomes of natural history and is grafted into it.

The biological characteristics of human species are such that their forms of interaction with the environment and with members of its own kind are massively influenced by what is learned from one's cultural surrounding. For each specimen of *homo sapiens* the culture where one is born and grown is something given, something devoid of reasons and further justifications. In this sense, one's own cultural background manifests itself in a way that is analogous to the relation that the genotype has towards the specimen itself. Here, the horizon of what is valuable or not is *defined by what one is* and cannot find any justification outside of its species-specific determinations. For a specimen of *homo sapiens* empathy is a valuable feature, characterizing and functional, but of course it would make no sense to judge empathy as something intrinsically 'good', or 'bad', for instance in the existence of a lichen, or a scorpion.

Let us call the cultural chunks that rule over social action – like customs, institutions, collective habits – '*éthos units*'.³ When *éthos units* emerge, they have potentialities that are not knowable a priori. Specialized scholars (anthropologists, sociologists, etc.) may sometimes take advantage of settled experiences in order to foresee how a social group can change by adopting a specific *éthos unit*. This knowledge, however, is not already available when these units come first to light: their potentiality must be explored through historical praxis.

Here cultural evolution shows interesting analogies with biological evolution. In historical course, each novel *éthos unit* is the analogon of a new genetic configuration. As genetic configurations, also rules and collective behaviours are born for reasons that are mostly unknown and not further justifiable. The *éthos units* are put to the test historically, and they spread if they allow the relevant groups to work and thrive. This is

³ The Greek term *éthos* (ἦθος), which originally meant a place where to live, over time has taken the meaning of shared 'disposition', 'character', 'temperament', and in the last instance 'code of collective behaviour'. It is in this last acceptance, which has been absorbed by Hegel's 'objective spirit', that we are going to use here the term.

a model of social ordering that is suggested by Friedrich von Hayek in the first part of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* [Hayek 1998, 35-55].

The *éthos units* that turn out to be functional, and that allow the social reproduction of the group, define an ‘*ethical*’ *standard*, that is, a configuration of legitimate customary behaviours, which are *prima facie* proposed as models to be followed. The ordering promoted by the *éthos units* can freely change and diversify, with the only mandatory limit that it must not conflict with ‘species-specific virtues’, that is, with essential biological traits. There is no absolute standard of goodness or badness for a custom, insofar as it does not clash against the instances promoted by the evolutionary history of the species that adopts the custom (i.e., the human species).

Here there are two main differences between the genetic and the cultural configuration: the first one concerns their *temporal extension*, the second one concerns what we call *possibilization*, or *possibilizing action*.

As to the first point, social rules, customs and cultural trends unfold over shorter times than phenotypic traits. Thus, communitarian orderings combining education and coercion in sight of intersubjective coordination are as old as the first human communities. Laws able to keep together social groups that do not directly know each other have developed roughly five thousand years ago. Modes of production relying on monetary coordination of individual initiatives are social orderings that have been tested just for the last couple of centuries. The more an *éthos unit* has taken roots over time, the stronger its justification in continuing to exist the way it does.

The potentialities of any social ordering manifest themselves in its concrete unfoldment, without being analysable ‘in vitro’. Each cultural and social ordering that exists and works for many generations has some good reasons to exist as it does. Effective demands of change are not just fantasized alternatives but attempts to overcome dysfunctions immanent in the current historical development. Such development is always hinging on a surrounding world, grafted into a territorial and anthropological site, and the demands for change cannot be sensibly judged without an acquaintance with that context. From this point of view, changes are justified when they try to overcome dysfunctions inherent in the existing collective *éthos*.

On the contrary, believing to be able to export forms of life, social rules, institutional orderings from one context to another, while overlooking the historical path and the territorial context of a culture, represents always a form of violence (sometimes mere inappropriateness, sometimes dramatic abuse).

At this level, a '*possibilizing action*' can be grasped at best in acts like the *definition of legislative and institutional orders*, which explicitly create the framework for a re-orientation of future practices. However, there exists also a cultural micro-creativity which is capillary, diffuse and continuous and which immanently introduces – and modifies – collective habits, social practices, tacit norms. Whatever the dimension of the possibilizing action that we want to represent, the essential point is that also here we find the same elementary logic. Current acts are not *caused* but are *made possible* by previous cultural (and biological) orders. In their turn, current acts can modify the cultural orders and, if they do it, they do it by opening new possibilities and blocking alternative options.

Mostly such possibilizing acts are not in the condition to foresee precisely what possibilities are going to be opened downstream. This is certainly true for all individual micro-contributions immanent in the history of a community, as well as for artistic and literary contributions. Acts that imply macroscopic normative changes (for instance, big institutional changes) seem to represent an exception, since they are precisely produced in order to inform future behaviours. But, even here, the reliability with which an anticipation is possible depends exclusively on previous experience in similar circumstances.

3. *On personal history*

If we come to the third level of analysis, the one of ordinary individual action, to begin with, we find ourselves entrusted to settled biological and cultural layers, which prepare the space of possibility within which our individual action takes place. With regard to these spaces of possibility every act of ours operates in its turn as a *possibilization*: it is conditioned by the previous spaces of possibility and it generates new ones.

In the first context (1), individual action turned from possible to real

in the dimension of the *species*. In the second context (2) it did so on the stage of a *social group* tied together by a line of cultural development. Here, in the third case, we have to do with individual agents where a pre-set sphere of possibilizations turns into reality primarily for the agent itself, which preserves its identity over time. Individual agents decide within a framework of intelligible consensus, which is defined by the community they belong to, which is commonality of biological species and cultural tradition.

Everything that counts as a *reason* for acting has always a *super-individual status*, since a reason is ideally intelligible for an indefinite plurality of (alter) egos. Actions that *do not* appeal to superindividual reasons are idiosyncratic events, like an action prompted by a momentary and extemporaneous impulse. They are events that could be unintelligible even for the agent itself in the future. Therefore, they are also impervious to *being followed*. Biological and cultural presuppositions are not efficient causes: they are *platforms of possibilities* from which a new possibilization emerges with any new action. Every single action has therefore a possibilizing character, creative of new possibilities, primarily for the course of life of the agent itself. Over the course of our life each action of ours takes charge of the possibilities that biology, culture and one's own previous choices have predisposed, and on this basis it generates new spaces of possibility. This clearly happens during the ontogenetic development, where each achievement represents the premise for further achievements. The infant's motility introduces her to the first forms of locomotion, and then of ambulation, and further of running, jumping, etc. Early intersubjective interaction prepares language learning, on which reading and writing will grow, and from then on, the subject will be able to access the whole of written culture. And the same motion will unfold for the adult person as well: each act will take on previously predisposed possibilities and in their wake new ones are going to be produced. No action *determines* the future; what an action can do is to re-orient the space of possibilities where events and future choices (one's own and the other's one) will be able to position themselves.

Each act creates new conditions where some options diminish in probability, and possibly disappear, while other ones increase in prob-

ability. A self-conscious agent expresses itself as a possibilizing event. It differs from possibilizing events of higher level, like the evolution of the species, insofar as the self-conscious agent can *anticipate* – to some extent – how the available space of possibilities will look like after performing the current action. This rational anticipation can prompt it to orient its own action otherwise and represents the primary feature of what we call *rational guidance of the action*.

Now we can try to draw some basic conclusions concerning the ‘logic of action’ and its ways of transforming reality. Let us follow the temporal tripartition of past, present and future, which correspond here respectively to historical *inheritance* in a broad sense, to the *present identity* of the agent and to its future-oriented *freedom*.

Every action produces change in the status quo. With regard to the inherited space of our possibilities, our position as agents comes always fatally late. It is an *ontological* lateness, in the sense that the present position of the agent is in principle unable to revoke the conditions that posit it as agent. This means that the biological and cultural configuration, which we here and now are (our *identity*), cannot be reviewed and grasped, as it were, by rewinding the tape of our past history. In a course of events where novelty emerges in forms irreducible to what precedes it, the essence of what we are is *posited* by the past, but it is properly *understandable* only through the future, in what we are able to bring to light. The causal chain of past events that posit us does not reveal anything about our essence.

This perspective allows us to answer to the aporia mentioned at the beginning, such that our present action would be *meaningless* both if we are determined by our past and if we are absolutely free with regard to the very same past.

The first horn of the dilemma entailed the idea that the past, by deciding what we are, takes away from us the possibility to bestow meaning on our actions, since all meaning would be already included in the process that preceded and determined us. A model of this kind can be the one proposed by evolutionary adaptationism in natural history. This

perspective is saying to us that any quality, virtue or human potentiality is *nothing but* an accidental embodiment of the same and only substance: the principle of the survival of the fittest. Such a move empties qualities or virtues of their content and value. They are no longer judged for what they do and display, but in the light of their conjectural reduction to a causal history that – allegedly – produced them. However, as we have seen, the content of our dispositions, the essence of what we are and can, is *not* defined by natural selection. Therefore, the essence of what we are cannot be discovered by looking at our past causal history but by exploring the potentialities that we exhibit while acting. From this point of view it is precisely the present action, and the chain of future actions, that reveal the meaning of the agent (individual, society, species) to itself.

Now, if we take on the second horn, it seemed that the agent's freedom would destroy the very identity of the agent and its relation to the past. If I am wholly free, I can recreate myself at pleasure, I am not bound to anything, I have no essence to which I can refer, and therefore I have no reason to prefer something to its opposite. This is a perspective to which Sartre seems to incline,⁴ a perspective where the absoluteness of freedom threatens the very possibility of grasping the meaning of one's own acts, whose gratuity adumbrates their groundlessness.

In front of the absoluteness of freedom, taking care of any inheritance of the past might seem to be senseless prejudice. Yet, this stance is untenable. The *inheritance* that defines us for what we are has an intrinsic justification, which does not require any further argument to support its *validity*. The biological and cultural configurations that we inhabit have overcome obstacles and hurdles and have thus demonstrated to be able to preserve their functionality across generations. This is, at first sight, the highest possible authoritativeness that we can tap into, and it cannot be rejected in the wake of extemporaneous conjectures or ideal imaginations. In the face of customs, settled uses, collective hab-

⁴ «[...] my freedom is the unique foundation of values and [...] nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation» [Sartre 1956, 38].

its, tacit social norms, communitarian forms, educational practices, etc. we can usually say to ignore why they have been adopted, or why they are so and not otherwise. But this lack of theoretical reasons is no lack of justification: every cultural and institutional order that have come to us has always already at least something that speaks in its favour. If it came down to us (precisely like a phenotypic trait) we can say that it was enhancing, or at least allowing, social reproduction. This does not shield it from changes but circumscribes the sources legitimated to justify a change. From this point of view the agent is free, but it is also endowed with a ‘historical essence’, which defines it precisely as that kind of agent, and which depends on the previous possibilizing orders (biological, sociocultural, personal). Every agent is free, because its act is *not* univocally determined by the past, but it is also endowed with an essence, which is not justified by theoretical reasons but by its own existence as inheritor of its history. There exists, thus, an ultimate normative source provided by the biological, cultural and personal identity that each of us always already is. What such ‘essence’ is can be displayed by future actions, but *that* it exists, as inheritor of its past, is what gives a normative and foundational ground to our decisions.

Thus, the Sartrean aporia from which we started is about to disappear. On the one hand, our action is always *free* in a radical way: it does not just realise previous possibilities, but it also *originates* further possibilities downstream. Action is free insofar as it is never conceivable as mere outcome of a chain of efficient causes. On the other hand, it is free but not *arbitrary*, since it inherits the possibilizing events that in the past opened up the possibilities that we presently inhabit. Our freedom is not mere *libertas indifferentiae*, no mere availability of indifferent options, and cannot be understood, not even in principle, as gratuitous sovereign *autopoiesis*. The form of action and its transformational potential depend primarily on the acknowledgment of one’s own *identity*, which has normative value and cannot be bypassed – as if our identity were a burden to the aspirations nourished by our imagination. In universal history, as in the individual’s one, we find both the *discontinuity* of emergence, and the *continuity* of preceding possibilizations.

What we are (for ourselves) is not just a ‘fact’ but has *normative* character, that is, it defines the horizon of what we are able to desire

and how we can do it. Such normativity is never coercion, both because it provides options and addresses, no compulsions, and because we can always deny every inclination, renounce every desire, overcome every ambition. However, every choice that tries to be aware of itself must take in the normativity implicit in its actual identity and try to transform it along given lines. Even the *reasons* for trying a radical self-transformation must root in what the agent has access to, here and now, as collateral of its own identity. Every free and rational choice must therefore assume the identity, which we are bearers of and which we have never been in a position to choose, and only then we can possibly proceed to change it as variation of its spaces of possibility downstream. The identity of the existent is an unjustifiable and indubitable foundation, but its nature is not that of obligation but that of reasons for possibilizing actions.

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Abstract

Freedom and the meaningfulness of action are not just natural allies, as one might expect. They can be also incompatible instances, since radical absolute freedom threatens any action with emptiness and groundlessness. In the present pages we try to tackle this ‘paradox of freedom’, where actions deprived of all freedom, and actions radically free, appear both to be threatened by meaninglessness. We do so by outlining a comprehensive conception of agents’ freedom as possibilization, which reveals itself in the forms of biological, cultural and personal history, and which is capable of neutralizing the aporetic character of the ‘paradox of freedom’.

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