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## The Terrible Gift Of Freedom

WITHIN the sphere of his inner activity, man may reach his fulfillment or he may not, precisely because of the terrible gift of freedom.

One of the greatest desires of the adolescent is to attain freedom. But, when can we affirm — categorically — that a man is really free?

Let us begin by stating what freedom means. Would it be freedom if one were doing just what one pleases to do? It does occur quite often that we are doing what we please to do, and then — after having done it — we come to realize that what we really wanted was an entirely different thing. A child doesn't study because he doesn't want to. Afterwards, at the time of the examinations, he understands — too late, though — that had he studied he would then be much "freer" and more satisfied with himself.

There was an element of freedom because he did exactly what he wanted to do, but he ended up by enslaving himself! He lost an academic year and thus he didn't achieve his so much-desired fulfillment.

Which are the constituents of true freedom?

1. An intrinsic element within ourselves: that no one obliges us to do it.

2. Two intrinsic elements within ourselves:

- that upon doing one thing, I have the possibility of doing another thing;
- that the act "sets me free!"

An act is free when it liberates me, and is really not free when it enslaves me.

This is the active and true meaning of freedom.

Freedom has, therefore, a body and a soul:

— the body of the free act is that no one, besides myself, can liberate me;

— the soul of the free act is that, upon doing the act freely, I set myself free.

What does it mean to set oneself free?

We free ourselves when we express ourselves "authentically" on how we would want to appear before the world and before God. When a free act is guided by this essential commitment of personal realization, then it is a true act of freedom. It is a movement or orientation which we freely impose upon our being in the course of our existence. An orientation is free when it accommodates itself and coincides, ever more perfectly, with what we really are with regard to what we authentically desire to be.

A drunkard, when he drinks, does so freely, but by so doing, he destroys his morals, his family, and his very professional future. He doesn't liberate himself! There is something in him which impedes him from performing an authentically free action. It might have been a bad habit, despair, or a weakness . . . No being would want to destroy itself. If in fact it does, it is because it is tied down by insurmountable forces.

How is one to explain this apparent contradiction in the exercise of freedom in human beings? We have to take into account the fact that our being is divided into two parts:

- a "superficial ego" which craves for the material, the external, the transitory, and
- a "profound ego" which seeks a lasting happiness, truth, an unending love, the Absolute — GOD!

The "profound ego" is the foundation of all desires of true happiness, of the quest of the infinite and eternal. But these manifest themselves through a "superficial ego" which perhaps, may not offer them the adequate object. There would be true freedom if the free act were a conjunction of the innermost wishes of our "profound ego," which those of the "superficial ego," in contact with the transitory and the material, etc. The great forces which do impeded the free integration are:

UNTRUTHFULNESS — Not to know the truth of things!

WEAKNESS OF WILL — One who knows what one has got to do, but for which one lacks the moral strength!

UNSTABLE INNER EQUILIBRIUM — To be subject to strong emotive pressures which impede the act to be done freely, such as anguish, pessimism, unbridled sensuality, rebellion against authority.