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Transcendence and Mediation
From Tartaglia to the Free-Will Debate

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Abstract

Taking inspiration from James Tartaglia's *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life*, I suggest a way out of the present dialectical stalemate in analytic philosophy of free will and moral responsibility. The key concept employed in my proposal is *transcendence*, i.e., our remarkable ability to self-relativize by stepping back from the social framework understanding which determines our systems of value. Analytic philosophers who favor one of the standard, determinate and mutually exclusive positions in the free-will debate have marginalized this aspect of transcendence in human life. For if one conceives human life as essentially involving the movement of transcendence, then one can discern an element of self-deception in the analytic philosophers' self-images of themselves as defenders of the one true theory, as cast within a fixed framework of language and thought. One of the central suggestions of this essay is that analytic philosophers – including myself – should abandon such a self-image, because when we philosophize, we are always already engaged in an endless effort of self-reflection, self-criticism and self-revision. I argue, in addition, that it is loyalty to the untenable self-image which forces the philosophical debate on free will and moral responsibility into a vicious deadlock. As such, my essay is an attempt to philosophically investigate the topic of free will without succumbing to the self-image of 'Seeker of The Unique and Definitive Truth'.

Preface

A lesson which we can learn from James Tartaglia's recently published book (Tartaglia 2016) is that to search for a straightforward answer to the question "What is the meaning of life?" is not among the tasks of philosophy. The reason why I stress this is because, in the present Anglophone philosophical literature, several prominent authors (*e.g.*, Wolf 2010, Metz 2014) engage themselves in answering that question by proposing a determinate view about which factor or condition makes a person's life meaningful. Tartaglia's discourse developed in that book would, I suggest, fundamentally explicate why those philosophers' approach to the issue of life's meaning is on a wrong track. The problem is not that they do not give the right answer to the question, but that they care about a wrongfully oriented question. What is important here is therefore to reconsider

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what we should ask, or more basically what we should aim at, when we philosophically talk about the meaning of life.

Why, however, is this so? *I.e.*, for what reason should we say that a direct approach to the simple question about life's meaning is not an appropriate way to consider the issue in question? It might be roughly explained as follows.

One of Tartaglia's important suggestions is, as I understand it, that philosophy is an activity practiced through, and throughout, each of our lives. Or, in other words, each of us is involved in philosophy as her or his life goes on. Therefore, "philosophy, like life, needs no end" (Tartaglia 2016: 181). What we should grasp here is that there *is* a sense of the word in which we can say one keeps engaging oneself in 'philosophy' insofar as one's life continues. We, in fact, continuously re-examine what we believe to be true and revise it, insofar as we live. If we call such an endlessly self-revising aspect of our life by the name 'philosophy', it cannot be the case that some philosophical problem or another will be solved once and for all.

Any determinate dogma such as, *e.g.*, "The meaning of a person's life consists in making the world better" thus does not belong to philosophy in this sense, because any supposed answer to what life's meaning is should be reconsidered sooner or later, insofar as we live. Any activity of philosophy (in that sense) does not contain any moments properly described as 'solutions', 'proofs', 'rejections' and so on. What philosophy really involves is rather, *e.g.*, a never-ending effort to deepen our own understanding of our world and ourselves. The attempt to find a conclusive statement that the meaning of life is such-and-such, therefore, would not be any part of philosophy in that significant sense.

Tartaglia explains such a conception of philosophy, *i.e.*, philosophy as self-renewal as it were, in terms of 'transcendence'. Human beings, he suggests, can transcend their world and themselves, and thereby continuously turn their understanding of reality into a new one. This transcending aspect of human life is a fundamental basis for one's being able to engage oneself in philosophy as self-renewal. Many contemporary philosophers of the analytic tradition, unconsciously or not, tend to disregard such *dialektische Bewegung* of transcendence in human life, because they favor a statement that could be uniquely interpreted through a determinate model. This is possibly an unfortunate effect of logico-positivist partiality in the tradition of analytic philosophy. We, however, transcend our world and ourselves. Any philosophical

inquiry, if it intends to conceive human life as a whole, should not ignore our transcending essence.

What I am going to do in this paper is to take over Tartaglia's discourse about transcendence and enlarge it in a certain direction. One of my central suggestions is that the dialectical deadlock in the on-going controversy about free will and moral responsibility in analytic philosophy is caused by the participants neglecting that remarkable feature of transcendence in human life. "Are we free or not?" is also a question for which a straightforward answer should not naïvely be sought, as I will explain. We should rather transcend such a dichotomous framework of inquiry around 'free' or 'unfree' to jump into an arena where we could cooperate with each other to deepen our understanding of freedom. My concluding remark will be that we should accept a sort of contradictory view, or, more accurately, we should take a perspective, or *Horizont*, from which we can suppose that human beings are free in a significant sense; and at the same time significantly unfree as well.

Someone might wonder why this conclusion is important. As a minimal reply to such doubt, I note here that, not only to solve a problem within a given framework, but also to deepen our understanding of the whole issue in question, can qualify as a fruit of philosophical work (I would suggest that Tartaglia's contribution to philosophy consists not in solving a certain traditional problem but in creating a novel discourse in terms of which we can say a number of new things about our nature of engaging ourselves in philosophy). What I aim at in this paper is also not the solution of a certain problem but a deepening of our understanding of human existence. The analytic philosophers of free will and moral responsibility, at least in the last decades, tend to simply ask whether or not we are free and, as a result, remain in a stalemate where the pro-freedom and anti-freedom camps have nothing to say to each other. So, I will try to develop a 'narrative' which would help us to take a detour away from, or find a way out of, that fruitless dead-end.

The argument of this paper runs as follows. To begin with, I introduce the *status quo* of the free-will debate and explain how it falls into a stalemate (Section 1). Next, I present some of Tartaglia's central suggestions in his book (Section 2), because they enable us to understand what is fundamentally responsible for the vicious stalemate in question. I will argue that it is "marginalization" of the concern about transcendence in the recent trend of analytic philosophy that makes the free-will debate unproductive (Sections 3 and

4).

1.

The participants in the on-going controversy about free will are roughly divided into three camps, *i.e.*, libertarians, compatibilists, and free will skeptics, as you would already know. These positions are defined in relation to the metaphysical thesis of determinism, as you again already know. If a person believes that the truth of determinism is compatible with the existence of human freedom, then she is a compatibilist, and if not, then an incompatibilist. Among the incompatibilists, there are two subgroups, *i.e.*, libertarians who deny determinism but affirm the existence of free will, and free will skeptics who accept determinism and the non-existence of freedom. The compatibilists are naturally protagonists of freedom of will, because their arguing for the compatibility of determinism and human freedom pragmatically implies their commitment to the existence of free will.

In most cases, a participant in the present free will debate would be categorized as an advocate of one of those three views: libertarianism, compatibilism, or free will skepticism. To randomly enumerate prominent figures: Robert Kane, Timothy O'Connor and Carl Ginet are libertarians; Harry Frankfurt, John Martin Fischer and Susan Wolf are compatibilists; and Galen Strawson, Derk Pereboom and Bruce Waller are free will skeptics. What each of them wishes to do in the debate is, most simply speaking, to find an argument which concludes that his or her position is right, or that a position which she or he does not accept is wrong. As the debate proceeds, more and more articulated arguments are proposed. We will learn a number of 'fine' conceptual distinctions as we follow their works.

What I am going to argue in this section is that this framework of inquiry leads the debaters, sooner or later, to a stalemate of the vicious kind. Such a phenomenon is, I suggest, symptomtic of Richard Double's experience.

> Several years ago at a meeting of the American Philosophical Association a very prominent incompatibilist commented on a paper delivered by a younger, less prominent, but very sharp compatibilist. The exchange between the two lasted the entire hour, and toward the end it became clear that neither speaker could understand at all why the other held the position

> that he did: one spoke, the other just shook his head in disbelief. (Double 1991: 5)

I think that it is not simply contingent that these two philosophers from different camps finally 'swear' at each other. Such a quarrel sometimes happens in the free will debate because of the framework of inquiry, as explained in the following.

Libertarianism, compatibilism, and free will skepticism are, in reality, defined as mutually exclusive. If, therefore, you presuppose that what philosophy of free will seeks would be an answer to the question of which of those positions is true, then your choosing of one of them inevitably entails your abandoning the other two. When, *e.g.*, a compatibilist argues, in some way, that human freedom is realizable even under the truth of determinism, any incompatibilist should suggest that there must be something wrong with the argument in question, because the core of her position implies the negation of any compatibilist reconciliation between determinism and free will.

The opposition between those camps is deeper than this, however. *E.g.*, an incompatibilist could not be persuaded to convert to compatibilism insofar as she *is* an incompatibilist. For the effort of persuasion would make sense only if two opposing sides talk to each other about an issue of which at least one side can partly make a concession to the other. If, therefore, two positions with directly conflicting core ideas compete with each other by asking which of these ideas is right, then they reach, sooner or later, a place where both sides have nothing more to say than, *e.g.*, "Our idea is intuitively correct" or "I can't understand how you could accommodate such a view." The free will debate thus very often ends in a kind of impasse where all the debaters can do is just repeat: "I cannot believe you are right." (The same thing holds in many fields of analytic philosophy, *e.g.*, the philosophy of mind debate among type-A physicalism, type-B physicalism and dualism. So, if my argument in this paper is right, it would be applicable to further areas.)

I shall introduce an example which very typically represents the lack of mutual understanding in the free will debate.

Derk Pereboom, a prominent free will skeptic as I mentioned above, suggests in his book that "if all of our behavior was 'in the cards' before we were born, […] then we cannot legitimately be blamed for our wrongdoing" (Pereboom 2001: 6). This is an expression of the core idea of incompatibilism,

and I suggest that all of us can sympathize with it to some degree. We have, in fact, many ways to construct discourses in which the idea in question would be understandable: "if our behavior was predetermined, we would contribute nothing to it," "if all of our behavior was in the cards before we were born, someone who – or something which – had dealt the cards would be the true author of our behavior," *et cetera*. John Martin Fischer, an eminent compatibilist as I mentioned above, however, opposes this idea in a very unsympathetic mood:

> Our behavior's "being in the cards" is obviously metaphor. Pereboom means by this that conditions prior to our births "inevitably result in our behavior by a deterministic causal process." If the problematic notion of inevitability simply implies the notion of entailment, then Pereboom's claim just comes down to the unargued-for assumption that causal determination in the actual sequence rules out responsibility. Again, this is dialectically unhelpful. If "inevitability" also implies some sort of actual sequence compulsion, this is question-begging within the dialectic context. Why exactly is it the case that one's behavior's being "in the cards," in the relevant sense, involves problematic compulsion and thus directly rules out moral responsibility? (Fischer 2002: 201)

We should remark that what Fischer says in this quotation is, in short, that he cannot interpret Pereboom as saying something right about the matter at hand. Fischer just shrugs his shoulders and shakes his head. Certainly, it is natural, or even obligatory, for Fischer as a compatibilist to oppose the incompatibilist idea. But, I suggest that there is something wrong with the compatibilist's directly refuting stance in considering incompatibilist ideas (the same thing can be said about any incompatibilist's simple refusal of compatibilist intuitions).

My suggestion here is not that the philosophers have to avoid any kind of conflict about their core views on a relevant issue. I rather admit that, insofar as philosophy is a serious project in our life, *i.e.*, it faces 'hard' problems about our world and ourselves which are essentially different from any matter of mere taste, it is inevitable for our philosophical views to collide against each other. I suppose, in addition, that a philosophical opposition of the 'legitimate' type, if any exist, possibly reaches the extreme where two rivals will never be reconciled with each other, even if that opposition is very fruitful in the sense

that it will produce many novel narratives in the relevant field. Thus, not every opposition ought to be prevented, but what type of opposition holds does matter, and it is the unproductive type of conflict that should be avoided, as I shall argue in this section.

What I will criticize is, in a word, a presupposition of the free will debate as a whole, consciously or unconsciously held by the participants concerning the orientation of inquiry. I would like, in other words, to criticize the debaters' understanding of what philosophy of free will aims at. Except for several remarkable non-standard authors[1], all the participants of the free will debate presuppose that a certain view on free will is 'objectively' correct and that what they ought to seek is the 'true' theory of human freedom. They suppose, in consequence, that at most one of libertarianism, compatibilism, and free will skepticism, is true – and hence two of them must be false. The assumption that there is one objectively true conception of free will thus orients the debaters toward a simple battle in which the only thing each camp should do is to defend itself and attack the others.

What, however, if we human beings are free in that we can 'transcend' a fixed orientation of inquiry? Or, what if we are free in that we can 'destruct' a given framework of intellectual activities and 'construct' a new way of discourse which would enable us to engage ourselves in investigation in a radically different way? And, what if our deeper freedom consists in such a transcending creation? Then, we cannot but doubt the legitimacy of the 'naïve' research project in seeking one true theory of free will. I will come back to this point later.

What I am arguing is that the 'triadic' competition of libertarianism, compatibilism, and free will skepticism ends by falling into a vicious deadlock. I present another example. In the final paragraph of his paper, focused on clarification of his conception of agent causation, Randolph Clarke tentatively identifies the reason why many of us would reject compatibilism (and non-agent-causal libertarianism) by saying that,

> we find unsatisfactory any view of free will that allows that everything

[1] Honderich 1993/2002, Double 1991, 1996, Smilansky 2000, and Sommers 2012 suppose that what philosophy of free will should aim at is not to find a straightforward answer to the question of whether or not we are free but to consider, *e.g.*, the following question about life: With what idea of freedom should we live? I would like to consider a genealogy of such non-standard thinkers elsewhere.

> that causally brings about an agent's action is itself causally brought about by something in the distant past. Certainly any freedom of will that we enjoy on such a view, if not a complete fraud, is a pale imitation of freedom that is characterized by an agent-causal account. (Clarke 1993: 298)

The compatibilists immediately contend that they, and a number of us, would not find that view unsatisfactory! I stress again that all of us could sympathize with their claim to some degree, as well as Clarke's. We have, in fact, many ways to construct discourses in which the compatibilist idea would be understandable: "some significant concept of freedom must be compatible with the truth of determinism, because, on the one hand, we cannot but distinguish 'free' persons from 'unfree' insofar as we ordinarily differentiate normal adults from children, mere animals, or adults with 'abnormal' conditions, and, on the other hand, the distinction of 'free' and 'unfree' in this sense must be realizable even in a strict causal connection of events since it is undeniable that we human beings are a part of the causally connected totality of nature, in which human behavior should be regarded as an effect of the combination of past events." But, if the debaters presuppose that at most one side among the compatibilists and Clarke have it right, then all that each side can finally do is just spit out, "I have no idea why you think so."

I repeatedly suggest that such lack of mutual understanding is problematic. I realize, however, that my suggestion would be somehow difficult to accept, or even hard to understand, for people who have an analytic interest in scrutinizing the technically detailed arguments developed in the recent literature. I should add further that the traditional 'triadic' framework of the free will debate is not completely fruitless, because it has produced many illuminating conceptual distinctions, such as the difference between the 'leeway' and 'source' types of freedom.[2] To touch upon my personal history, I learned very many things by reading texts written by prominent authors including Pereboom, Fischer and Clarke. In what sense, then, can I criticize the recent research interest of philosophy of free will?

My criticism would be, I dare to say, a kind of hope, *i.e.*, hope that

[2] The 'leeway' type of freedom is defined by so-called alternative possibilities, while the 'source' type is characterized by origination, not necessarily by alternatives. This distinction added an important twist to the recent debate.

philosophy of free will would be further developed if the traditional framework can be overcome, or *aufgehoben* in the Hegelian sense. More concretely, I expect that, if we stop asking which of libertarianism, compatibilism, and free will skepticism is objectively true, then we will thereby keep away from the recent unproductive stalemate and be in a position to better say something which enables us to understand the matter in a novel and deeper way.

While this paper might be interpreted as an anti-analytic-philosophy manifesto, I have no intention to say that the tendency to subtlety and rigidity found in the contemporary Anglophone literature is harmful. Insofar as all the philosophers are essentially critics of sloppy discourses (no philosopher as such intends to be an obscurantist!), it would be reasonable for them to pursue a 'rigid' way of argumentation. It is, however, important for us to realize that there is "something it is easy to forget when we are engaged in philosophy, especially in our cool, contemporary style," as Peter Strawson says (Strawson 1962: 77). We would, *e.g.*, easily forget the transcending nature of our thinking, if we engaged ourselves in an analytic project to construct a logically consistent discourse about a given subject matter. More concretely, *e.g.*, our familiarity with logical considerations developed throughout the history of analytic philosophy would urge us to scorn respect for the transcending movement of human thinking. There is, however, something true about a contradictory statement like "we are fundamentally free, and at the same time fundamentally unfree," and the concept of transcendence would enable us to make sense of this statement in a significant way, which will be explained in Sections 3 and 4. In the next section, I will introduce, or re-construct in my own way, what Tartaglia says about the transcendent aspect of human thinking.

2.

Tartaglia, in the book in question, engages himself in philosophy in the dimension of transcendence, as it were. He does not construct his position in a fixed framework, but continuously 'deconstructs' the frameworks in which contemporary philosophy is performed. His argumentation could therefore be classed as non-standard, or even strange, because the mainstream of contemporary philosophy in the English-speaking world, *i.e.*, analytic philosophy, tends to neglect or disrespect such a transcending movement of the human intellectual ability, as I suggested in the preface of this paper. Tartaglia

touches on the reason why analytic philosophy systematically ignores the phenomenon of transcendence, when he says

> […] concerns about transcendence and the meaning of life have been marginalized over the course of the history of philosophy, especially in twentieth-century analytic philosophy's drive to naturalism and the emulation of scientific or mathematical inquiry […]. (Tartaglia 2016: 73)

What we should note is that, according to Tartaglia, analytic philosophy's assimilation of philosophical inquiry to the scientific, brought about the twentieth-century marginalization of concerns about transcendence. We should remark, in addition, that there is suggested to be some connection between transcendence and life's meaning in the quotation. What is transcendence, then, and what relationship does it have with the meaning of life?

Tartaglia, in that book, introduces the concept of transcendence in the context of a consideration of the issue about the meaning of life, as explained in the following paragraphs.

We ordinarily live with confidence in the meaningfulness of our daily practice, because "the social framework we live within, which has been building up over the course of history, makes it seem that our lives have an overall point" (Tartaglia 2016: 22). In fact, our social framework brings with it many devices such as commercial advertisements, school education, books, and much else, which 'implant' and reinforce the belief in the meaning of our present activities and thereby prevent us from reconsidering whether our life has an ultimate meaning at all. We affirm, *e.g.*, the meaningfulness of study in school by saying that, if a person does not study well in school, she or he will not earn much in the future; and none of us would ever doubt the truth of this in daily life. In this sense, we are ordinarily 'immersed' in our social framework, just as much as non-human animals who are more or less inevitably immersed in their biological frameworks (Tartaglia 2016: 24).

We human beings, however, are not always immersed in the daily framework. We can "step back from our framework," objectify it, and locate it in a larger context (Tartaglia 2016: 24). We can, *e.g.*, see our everyday practice from the perspective of the physical universe and thereby find that our moral behavior, or social activity in general, is just a part of the complex totality of the 'law-abiding' movements of physical matter. This ability to step back from a

given framework Tartaglia calls ‘transcendence’, which he interestingly supposes to be “a by-product of the freedom we evolved in the transition from the structures of a biological to a more malleable social framework” (Tartaglia 2016: 24).

By exercise of this ability of transcendence, we realize that what our social framework supposes to be the absolute values in our life, *e.g.*, pleasure, wealth, commercial success, industrial development, and so on, are ‘worthless’ things in a higher or deeper context. If, *e.g.*, we ascend to the perspective of physical nature, then we find that, objectively, there is no axiological difference between socially presumed good and bad actions, because both are fundamentally just complex sums of value-free movements of micro-physical matter. Every normative feature of the world vanishes from the physical perspective. Transcendence thus brings about nihilism, *i.e.*, the view that there is no absolute value which would ascribe an overall point to our life. There is something true about nihilism, and we know it. For, if we step back from the social framework, which would ordinarily give some seemingly ultimate point to our daily activities, we realize that social matters are just a sort of illusion, and nothing matters at a deeper, more fundamental level. The physical universe, in short, is indifferent to what happens in our world. Our life in it therefore lacks an overall point.

While many philosophers wish to reject nihilism, Tartaglia rather affirms it, partly because that view, he suggests, reflects the truth of our world which our ability of transcendence unveils. He adds that, contrary to naïve expectation, realizing the truth of nihilism has no grave consequences in our practical life. He says that, as a matter of fact,

> trying to make money, change the world for the better, become famous, find love or just stay out of prison, all remain just as compelling as they ever were in light of nihilism, except to the extent that they were thought to contribute to an overall purpose to life […]. (Tartaglia 2016: 43)

Even after we find that there is no ultimate goal in our life, we cannot but live in our daily social framework. Relative goals like wealth or development, therefore, continue to be things we should pursue in our life. What changes, then, when we realize the truth of nihilism? Tartaglia says that all we should do is “re-engage with the [social] framework” (Tartaglia 2016: 43). We should, in

other words, engage ourselves in the same things as before, but now we would do so without the illusion that these social activities have an absolute value. Nihilism, in short, wakes us up, but does not necessarily imply despair or hopelessness.

Many who regard nihilism as a source of ruination, nevertheless, would seek a firm ground on which we hit the ultimate framework, and which no one could transcend. Tartaglia himself, however, transcends this common frame of thinking, which uncritically supposes that nihilism ruins us. So, his philosophy does not begin with the assumption that there may possibly be a firm ground which would give us some overall meaning, but rather with the fact that we continuously transcend, *i.e.*, objectify and relativize, our given frameworks. I will explain this point in the following. How Tartaglia's focus on transcendence determines his conception of philosophy will thereby be clarified.

The intellectual activity he calls 'philosophy' is not a purely ontological description of the world within a given framework. It could, should and even must in some cases, transcend that fixed framework to ask, "In what respect does this kind of ontological description matter?" Even in the midst of an exciting inquiry, indeed, we can always, and should sometimes, step back from an 'absorbed' perspective and ask about the meaning of the inquiry to which we are presently devoted. If philosophy is an attempt to understand our world and ourselves *as a whole*, then it should not overlook this transcending feature of our movement of thought. In this sense, it is reasonable for Tartaglia to qualify 'philosophy' as involving reflective consideration on the meaning of the issues it engages itself with (Tartaglia 2016: 69-70).

To organize these points, I introduce Tartaglia's term of 'enframement'. He says that, generally,

> if we want to understand the meaning of a particular practice, we do so by framing it within the wider context of social life […]. (Tartaglia 2016: 70)

Suppose that, *e.g.*, a student asks, "Why should I study at all?" In order to answer, we have to find a comparatively broad framework which locates, within it, the practice of study as a means to another end. *E.g.*, when we reply, "If you don't study well, you won't earn much in the future," we thereby appeal to the framework which determines money as an absolute value, the meaningfulness of which is stipulated to be undoubted under the context in question. Needless to

say, we can also transcend the latter framework and ask "Why is money relevant?" To answer this, we need a broader framework still.

To understand the meaning of a practice is, therefore, to realize a framework in which the practice in question is determined as meaningful. Tartaglia thus calls a question of this type, *i.e.*, a question about the meaning of a practice and its background framework, "a question of enframement" (Tartaglia 2016: 70). Another type of philosophical question, *i.e.*, an 'objective' inquiry into the fundamental elements of the world, is traditionally called 'ontology.' The terminology of 'enframement' and 'ontology' enable us to catch the point of Tartaglia's conception of philosophy. What he suggests is, in short, that our philosophical investigation should not only consist of ontology but also enframement, even though the interest of the latter kind is marginalized in the trend of analytic philosophy, as I already mentioned.

It is arguable, in fact, that philosophy is originally a sort of two-wheeled vehicle for conceiving our existence. *E.g.*, for Plato, a philosopher's ontological knowledge of the transcendent world, or especially the knowledge of the Idea of Goodness, would guide our life by telling us what our practice fundamentally aims at, as Tartaglia illustrates (Tartaglia 2016: 72). I would like to add Spinoza's *Ethics* as another example, where the fundamental meaning of our intellectual activity is found to be an exercise of our human rational essence as determined by God's eternal nature. Ontology and enframement are thus "tightly interwoven" (Tartaglia 2016: 72). Answering the question of the enframement of an ontological inquiry would justify the whole philosophical project at a deeper level. In this sense, in virtue of the two-wheeled-ness of its concern, philosophy would proceed on the right track. If a philosopher, conversely, lost her interest in 'transcendent' explanation and justification of the meaning of her first-order ontological research, then her investigation would fail to do all that it could do. This would be a significant fault, Tartaglia supposes. I will argue that his judgment is relevantly right, through consideration of the free will debate.

Several chapters, *i.e.*, chapter 4-7, of Tartaglia's book consider the problems of consciousness, time and universals in the light of his 'two-wheeled' philosophy, although I would like to omit the details. He explicates, throughout those chapters, that "experience does not belong to the objective world" (Tartaglia 2016: 176). This means that any objective description of reality could not exhaust everything there is. Something would always remain, which transcends our objectification. Tartaglia calls this supposition the "transcendent

hypothesis", which I take to be another expression of the fact that we continuously transcend our given frameworks.

This 'hypothesis' explains why, *e.g.*, the materialist reduction of consciousness in philosophy of mind would be unsatisfactory, because such an attempt would only succeed in making a clear analysis of the conscious phenomenon in the physicalist framework at the price of overlooking, or even denying, the dimension of human experiential transcendence. On reflection, however, we cannot but realize that we could transcend such a 'material' framework to conceive an 'idealistic' aspect of the phenomenon in question, as Kant did. The materialists' success, in short, carries with it a significant cost. A dualist conception of consciousness, on the other hand, would absurdly try to objectify the transcendent dimension, without adequate understanding of the hypothesis in question. The most important point here is to realize that there is a genuinely transcendent feature of human thought and experience. We should, therefore, abandon the ambition to describe everything in front of our objective eyes. Both the materialists and dualists are caught by 'a philosophically bad obsession', insofar as they aim to objectify all the essential aspects of the conscious phenomenon.

Repeatedly, the materialists deny transcendence, while the dualists objectify it. Generally speaking, it is the dialectic of these two approaches, *i.e.*, negation of transcendence and objectification of it, that makes progress in philosophy (although, in most cases, the debaters do not explicitly realize that we human beings are an essentially transcending existence). This is one of the central suggestions developed in the final chapter of Tartaglia's book. He says that,

> [p]hilosophy proceeds as a perennial debate between these two factions, with one side reminding us of the fact of transcendence only to take it in the wrong direction, and the other side trying to deny it. Thus the first provide alternative articulations of transcendent being to that provided by objective thought – typically achieved by treating our shadow concepts of experience as accurate representation – with this then producing a clash with commitments which the other side consider obligatory, such as physicalism, positivism or common sense. (Tartaglia 2016: 180)

In addition,

> the debate goes on and shows no sign of abating, as various approaches to affirming or denying transcendence are developed from generation to generation; taking in new discoveries and reflecting new interests. This constitutes progress in philosophy; a progress which reflects life in that it has no prospect of completion. (Tartaglia 2016: 181)

We now reach the point where we can make sense of what I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. I said that philosophy is an activity practiced through, and throughout, each of our lives. This is because, as Tartaglia suggests, philosophical progress consists in deepening our understanding of the world and ourselves through continuous exercise of the human 'privilege', *i.e.*, our transcending nature. When we engage ourselves in a 'first-order' philosophical inquiry, there are always open possibilities in which we might transcend its framework. True, we would plausibly have some 'natural' limitation on the range of humanly possible transcendence. But, we do not know where the boundary is. For us, therefore, philosophical progress has no end.

To sum up, our transcending nature, which even philosophers sometimes ignore or disrespect, makes our practice of philosophy never-ending. Finding a definitive answer to a question would, therefore, not be any genuine part of our philosophical journey. This point applies also to philosophy of free will. A straightforward answer to the naïve question "Are we free or not?" is not a thing that philosophers of free will ought to pursue. What should we aim at, then, in philosophy of free will? I would like to answer this in the remaining sections.

3.

The compatibilists typically suggest that human freedom is conceivable in the framework of physicalism or naturalism. For them, our freedom of will would be an immanent phenomenon within the system of mechanistic nature, as it were. Some libertarians oppose them by suggesting that proper free will must be 'thicker' than it. They therefore assume that there are transcending dynamics, or "agent causation", in the objective reality. Another type of libertarian, by contrast, equates human freedom just with a kind of indeterministic event and suggests that some type of naturalism, insofar as it accommodates indeterminism, would be compatible with the existence of freedom of the libertarian sort. Most free will skeptics suppose that our genuine freedom is of

the ‘thick’ type, and argue that free will in this sense is not realizable in the objective world.

This status quo of the free will debate can be analyzed from a different perspective in terms of the terms ‘transcendence’, ‘objectification’ and ‘negation’. If the fundamental kind of human freedom consists in the movement of transcendence of our thinking and experience (as I believe), then, *e.g.*, the ‘agent-causal’ libertarians are guilty of objectifying such transcendent dynamism within their this-worldly causal connections. For dynamics of transcendence would essentially evade the net of our objectification, or *Vor-sich-stellen*. On the other hand, the typical compatibilists and naturalistic libertarians attempt to conceive human freedom in the framework of physical events and thereby overlook, or in some cases negate, the phenomenon of transcendence. The free will skeptics should be blamed for the same reason, because they would in most cases be devoted just to exposing the non-existence of free will in the objective world, and therefore have no respect for the ‘transcendent’ existence of our freedom.

We should remark that almost all the participants in the contemporary free-will debate ignore, or fail to rightly conceive, or even consciously deny, the possibility of human transcendence. They begin their consideration with the supposition that there is a fixed objective reality, and never consider whether or not we could step back from that given framework and relativize it, as explained in the following manner.

The pro-freedom debaters would, in fact, just seek what they define as human freedom in their particular, ‘prejudiced’ conception of the world. Robert Kane, an eminent libertarian, *e.g.*, starts his investigation by accepting a naturalistic worldview and analyzes our free choices in terms of indeterministic informational-processing of “the two crossing neural networks” in our brain, *i.e.*, so-called “parallel processing” (Kane 1999: 312), without critically reflecting whether his conception of the world could be transcended or not. What is problematic about his stance is, I would suggest, that his concern is exclusively focused on locating or constructing something he would call “freedom” within his presupposed framework. So, we would find in the process of his thinking, no moment of fundamental reflection on the necessity of his particular orientation, *i.e.*, of pursuing freedom in the event-causal world. In brief, Kane is, in other words, immersed in his presupposed framework and never re-examines it. He, as a result of this, fails to turn his eyes on the genuine dimension of human

freedom, *i.e.*, 'transcendent' liberation from the given framework of thinking and living (similar things happen in the work of, *e.g.*, Chisholm and Pereboom, to whom I refer in the following).

As another illustration, Roderick Chisholm, an equally eminent but non-naturalistic libertarian, suggests that "the motion of the hand was caused by the motion of certain muscles," and "the motion of the muscles was caused by certain events that took place within the brain," but "some event, and presumably one of those that took place within the brain, was caused by the agent and not by any other event" (Chisholm 1964: 31). He here objectifies human freedom of a 'transcendent' kind, *i.e.*, agent causation, within the sublunary causal connection, without asking at all whether our genuine freedom is transcendent over, or immanent in, the objective reality. If there is something absurd about his move, it is explained by Thomas Nagel's comment that Chisholm would "try to force autonomy into the objective causal order" (Nagel 1986: 115). *I.e.*, if our genuine autonomy belongs not to the objective, or objectified, order, but rather to our transcendent objectification of the order in question, then any attempt at forcing autonomy into something objectified should be judged 'absurd'; because it is meant to objectify something unobjectifiable.

The anti-freedom debaters could also, in most cases, be blamed for failing to rightly capture the genuine dimension of human freedom, for they just aim at showing the non-existence of freedom of will within the physical world. They would not consider the freedom in our transcending dynamism, *i.e.*, transcendental liberation as it were, which would enable us to step back from a given framework. Pereboom, *e.g.*, argues that, given our knowledge of natural science, agent-causal libertarianism is implausible. He says,

> it may turn out that some human neural structures differ significantly from anything else in nature we understand, and that they serve to ground agent causation. This approach may be the best one for libertarians to pursue. But at this point we have no evidence that it will turn out to be correct. (Pereboom 2007: 114)

True, we can agree that we have no evidence for the prospect that physics, physiology, or neuroscience will discover the existence of agent causation, even in the remote future. But, we should remark at the same time, that Pereboom

would uncritically accept that human freedom should be found, if possible, somewhere in the objective worldview described by natural science. What is problematic here is, briefly, that the dimension of human transcendence remains completely out of his sight.

Kane, Chisholm, Pereboom, and most of the other debaters, suppose that there *exists* an objective reality, but never take into consideration our transcendence of objectification. It is, however, this 'naïve' realism, *i.e.*, the supposition that there is one fixed reality, that I would suggest is the root, or at least one of the essential roots, of the dialectic deadlock in the recent debate as introduced in Section 1. For, if there were one fixed reality, independent of our objectification and conceptualization, then there would have to be one true answer to the question "Are we free or not?" Adequate observation of this reality would tell us the Truth of human freedom. Realism uncritically presupposed in the free-will debate thus entails the 'harmful' supposition that the free-will question has one determinate answer.[3]

Why is this harmful, however? It is because, if it is assumed that there is this one Reality, then the difference between the core suggestions of libertarianism, compatibilism and free will skepticism would turn into an opposition or conflict concerning who knows the Truth. What each participant in the debate aims at would be, in consequence, to show that only her or his view is true. She or he would therefore try to find faults in the other camp's position, but not to understand the good aspects of it. Thus, one speaks and the others just shake their heads in disbelief, as Double said. As a result of this, we have dialectical deadlock. How can we transcend this 'suffocating' situation?

My answer to this question is that we should keep in mind, and continuously reflect on, our transcending nature. Realizing the dimension of human transcendence, indeed, enables us to truly say that philosophical progress consists in deepening our understanding of the world and ourselves through the continuous exercise of transcendence, as I developed in Section 2 by following Tartaglia. Our philosophical dialogue, thus, essentially has no end and therefore never falls into a deadlock.

Transcendence would, generally speaking, enable us to keep away from a fixed framework of thinking and thereby make sense of a certain 'inconsistent' view in a 'rational' way. It would, *e.g.*, tell us that there is something true, and

[3] Only a few exceptional philosophers, some of whom are referred to in footnote 1 of this paper, avoid the naïve realism of the contemporary free-will debate.

something false, on both sides of the pro-freedom and anti-freedom camps. We would therefore have no need to answer which of libertarianism, compatibilism and free will skepticism is True. We should rather, *e.g.*, consider in what sense each of those views are true and false. I will explain these points in the next, final section. The discourse developed in the following is intended as an exercise in transcending the dead ends of the debate. Though possibly presumptuous, this entails positing a novel dimension for talking about human freedom. I begin my argument by objectifying the framework of the debate in a somewhat novel way.

4.

The problem of free will, as transcendent reflection reveals it, can be formulated as a conflict between two types of perspective, which would make us see the world and ourselves in completely different ways. From one perspective, *i.e.*, the 'daily' perspective as it were, we see human behavior as action and say that, *e.g.*, Mr. A was driven by jealousy and shot Mr. B. Note that, from this perspective, we conceive Mr. A's behavior of shooting as his action. And, insofar as we do so, we regard it as a freely chosen and responsible act.

From the other perspective, *i.e.*, the scientific perspective, however, we see human behavior as an event or mere happening and say, *e.g.*, that Mr. A's brain state was such-and-such, the neural firing of such-and-such pattern occurred, and then the muscle contraction of such-and-such pattern occurred, with the result that the position of the trigger changed, and so forth. We now conceive Mr. A's behavior not as his action (since, from the latter perspective, Mr. A is not an agent at all but just a complex sum of physical matter, and therefore Mr. A's behavior is just a combination of physical movements). We rather see it as purely 'impersonal' event and, insofar as we do so, we regard it as non-free and non-responsible.[4]

The existence of two types of perspective, and therefore two ways to describe the world, leads to the following questions. From which of those perspectives should we see human behavior? In which way should we describe it? Suppose that a person, say Ms. C, chooses to take the scientific perspective and says that Mr. A's behavior is just an event and so he is not responsible for Mr. B's death. She must be right in some sense, because there is, in fact, a

[4] I would define "free will" here by a volitional factor in virtue of which a human being is qualified as an agent. Freedom in this sense would have no essential relationship with alternative possibilities.

perspective from which to see the world in that way. True, there is another perspective, *i.e.*, the daily perspective, to see the world as involving agency. But, it can be supposed that Ms. C knows it and yet chooses the 'impersonal' one. Given this supposition, telling Ms. C that there is another viewpoint would not change her idea. Her view that Mr. A's behavior, or more generally, human behavior in general, is not free would thus carry with it some legitimacy.

Is it the case, however, that each of two ways to describe the world is true in its own terms? Should we admit here a kind of relativism which suggests that it would be a waste of time to pursue some fruitful dialogue between these two ways of discourse? Can we, in the present context, do something more than telling Ms. C that there is another viewpoint, in order to argue for our agency and freedom?

My answer, which I am going to explain, is that we can. Certainly, this would not imply the ability to convert Ms. C to the pro-freedom school. But, it would add a dialectical depth to the present situation, as it were.

Let me rephrase our question, to begin with. The existence of two ways to describe the world brings about the question "Which should we choose?" as explained above. Which, then, should we choose between an action narrative and an event narrative, as it were? Should we see the world as the space of happening and say that our behavior is not free? Or, should we see the world as involving agency and ascribe freedom and responsibility to some of our behavior?

I argue that choosing one way to see the world and to describe it, in response to this question, is also an action. Selection is an action. It is, in other words, not just anything happening in the space of events but rather something an agent does. When trying to choose an answer to the question of "Which should we choose?" therefore, we are already inside the space of action. We then pragmatically presuppose that we are agents and can choose our own lives.

Even if a person takes the scientific perspective and describes human behavior as an event or happening, as Ms. C did about Mr. A's behavior, that person's act of describing nevertheless figures among human actions. More fundamentally, insofar as we are "*homines narrantes*," *i.e.*, story-telling human beings, we always live within the space of actions. As a result of this, to say "Everything is mere event, so there is no action at all" would be inevitably absurd in an important sense, for a person's saying so implies putting out of view the fact that she or he *says* so (this is an action!).

The same thing applies to freedom. Should we describe human behavior as freely chosen? Or, should we view it as a matter of happening? Choosing one among these ways of discourse cannot but be an exercise of freedom. Generally speaking, when we choose something, we are already inside the space of freedom, as it were, for otherwise we would not be genuine subjects of the choice. As a result of this, to say "we are just composites of micro-physical movements, so there are no free agents who are truly subjects of behavior" would again be absurd. A person's saying that, in fact, implies the so-called 'self-destructive' negation of his or her own freely choosing to say so.[5]

It turns out therefore that we can save the space of actions and freedom at the ultimate level. In fact, at the very time when we ask "Are we free agents or mere composites of events?" we find ourselves in the space of freedom. Our asking something is also among human actions. Our question "Are we free?" should, therefore, be affirmatively answered at the very time of its being questioned. The existence of human freedom is thus saved at the fundamental level.

This is what I would like to say when I reply to a person like Ms. C, who says, "Our behavior is never free." What I intend by saying so, however, is not that Mr. A's behavior of shooting must be a free action. Rather, I intend to remark that, independently of what Ms. C says about the behavior in question, we anyway cannot say, *e.g.*, "There is no free action at all," unless we would fall into absurdity. I would suggest further that, if someone asserts that everything just happens in accordance with the laws of nature, then her or his statement would be self-destructive in an important sense. If, in fact, such a statement were true, then her or his assertion would be a mere happening, and therefore it would not be any action which could sensibly be ascribed accountability. Likewise, her or his saying so would be the same sort of noise. I would thus suggest that the 'assertion' in question has an absurd implication like "Treat this claim just as a natural phenomenon, like noise!"

Certainly, in response to these suggestions, someone might continue to say, *e.g.*, "It is exactly the case: I admit that what my assertion implies, and everything, including this claim, is just a happening." I should say here that I have nothing to say in reply to him or her. What I have said in the last paragraph, however, would justify this resignation. We would have no duty to reply to his

[5] This is so, at least insofar as 'freedom' here is understood as a factor in virtue of which a human being is qualified as an agent, as remarked in the last note.

or her voice if it was just a mere noise as he or she 'suggests'.

To sum up, we cannot live outside the space of actions and freedom, insofar as we are *homines narrantes* or *res cogitantes* (since thinking is also an action in a broad sense). In this sense, nobody can consistently suggest that there is no free action. So, there must be something true about the pro-freedom camp in the free-will debate. The point can be explained or enlarged in terms of the concept of transcendence. Even if we try to talk about everything as mere happening, there remains some residue which keeps its bearing over our event narrative. *I.e.*, our fundamental freedom, as exercised in our talking, will not be captured as something unfree, as objectified in the event narrative. In this sense, our freedom of the 'deepest' kind is transcendent and therefore it does not belong to the objective causal order; and this is what Tartaglia's transcendent hypothesis says about conscious experience.

We have thus *dis-covered* that the space of free actions is never closed so long as we live. We should remark, however, that a truth sometimes covers up another truth. The truth found in the last paragraphs, *i.e.*, the truth that we cannot view everything as mere happening, would, in fact, conceal the antipodal truth that human behavior must be just an event. This truth, I will argue, we cannot express in a straightforward way. In fact, as I already explained, if we say that all of our behavior is mere happening, then we immediately fall into absurdity. This is one of the main reasons why free will skepticism, which suggests that we have no freedom of will, sounds inconsistent. There is, however, something true about the radical denial of human freedom, as I will explain in the following.

Why should we believe that human beings are unfree? It is because we are not, *e.g.*, infinite gods, *i.e.*, exercisers of absolute freedom, but rather just finite individuals that belong to the natural world. True, there is a good sense in which it can be said that human beings participate of 'divine' ability. *E.g.*, understanding the meaning of something is a sort of 'divine' art, insofar as mere animals could not do it. Transcendence, in short, makes us divine to some degree. Nonetheless, we are also just parts of the system of nature. Our behavior should therefore be one of the events in the global system of causal connection.

A human being is a part of nature. It cannot be, therefore, a subject of independent autonomy. If the word 'substance' is a word applied only to something independently autonomous, there is no human substance in the world. Human beings, metaphorically speaking, are parts of the flow of a big river. Our behavior must be mere happening at least in this fundamental sense.

Nonetheless, as stressed earlier, the fundamental eventhood of human behavior is hard to talk about. This is so, even if it is obvious that our behavior cannot but be an event as a part of the order of nature, because, to repeat the reason, *saying* that there is no action would imply absurdity. Our question is thus the following: How can we consistently talk about the fundamental eventhood of our behavior? Or, in other words, what should we say in order to understand why we, who already found that human behavior is necessarily free at the ultimate level, can admit that our behavior is fundamentally unfree? How can we understand this contradiction?

My central suggestion is that the fundamental eventhood of our behavior cannot be endorsed by us in any direct, or straightforward, way. Its endorsement rather requires some medium. If you reflect on the history of thought, you would realize that many profound thinkers reached endorsement of the fundamental eventhood of our behavior through various paths of mediation (in a more or less Hegelian sense). Medieval philosophers or theologians, *e.g.*, contemplated God and found His freedom in divine decision to be of the ideal kind. For them, only God is truly qualified as free. Human decisions, on the contrary, are just free in a very limited, 'incomplete' way. Our freedom to make them is a mere shadow of the Idea of Divine Freedom, so to speak. Human beings are not masters of their own action, but their behavior is a result of God's choice. In this sense, our behavior is not what we do, but something properly called "happening" as a remote effect of *causa prima*.

Contemplation of the divine perfection, nonetheless, is not demanded as a necessary condition for recognizing the eventhood of our behavior. What is required would rather be realization of our own finite nature. And, in order to be aware of our finitude, it would be necessary to transcend our own sphere and relativize it through mediation with something beyond us. Here is the reason why the eventhood in question cannot be conceived in a 'direct' way. Endorsement of it would require self-transcendence, and relativization through mediation with something beyond us would open a perspective on which we could conceive ourselves as unfree.

I suggest that scientific reflection on the world also would tell us of the limitation of our mastery, as theological contemplation informs us of our imperfection of agency. If we view ourselves, *e.g.*, from a physical point of view, we conceive human behavior, not as a process of self-determination and self-control, but rather as a consequence of some universal laws. From such a

scientific perspective, human beings could not renew the world by their action, but rather they would just be subjected to the universal laws which govern the world. More precisely, the scientific point of view would pull human beings back into the dimension in which the distinctions of master/slave, free/constraint, and so on, would no longer make sense, because there is no room for action within the space of events opened by the 'cool' perspective in question.

Let me summarize. When we talk about something, we live within the space of action, as I stressed above (since to talk is an action). The space of actions is, therefore, the ultimate field of human life in which we continuously find ourselves. We human beings, however, are not necessarily immersed in this space. We can transcend it, while we are still always within it. We can, in fact, step back from our own absolute perspective and relativize it through mediation with something beyond us (*e.g.*, God and natural law). We would, in this way, find that our behavior is just mere happening of which we have no ultimate control. There must be therefore something true about the anti-freedom camps in the free-will debate.

We should remark that, insofar as the pro-freedom and anti-freedom camps both suggest something true, the philosophers of free will ought not to seek a straightforward answer to the question of "Are we free or not?" The right track would be, I suggest, to keep away from this naïve question.

Someone might be afraid, however, that there would remain nothing for us to do in philosophy of free will if we stopped asking whether or not we are free. I would suggest that there remain many things. We can, *e.g.*, try to make explicit under what framework of thought we engage ourselves in in our first-order practice of philosophy, as Tartaglia did in his book and I did in this paper. Our transcending nature would leave us many things to do in order to deepen our understanding of the world and ourselves. In this sense, I said above that philosophy is an activity practiced through, and throughout, each of our lives. Concretely speaking, each of the three main camps in the free-will debate, libertarianism, compatibilism, and free will skepticism, must have its unconsidered framework of investigation. To explicate what it is might be, I suggest, one of the things we should be attempting to do. This attempt might, as I hope it will, break the dialectical dead end we now face in philosophy of free will.

I will finish my paper with a brief critical comment on one of Tartaglia's

suggestions in his book. I completely sympathize with his conception of philosophy as an activity practiced through, and throughout, each of our lives, if I correctly understand him. I would therefore argue that Tartaglia could affirm life's meaning in a deepened sense as it were, because he should find some 'meaning' in our engagement in such perennial philosophical conversation. True, he is right in suggesting that any social meaning could be transcended and therefore it should not be a final aim which would give our life an overall point. I remark that his suggestion of this point is very significant because it would make us realize the transcendent dimension of our thinking about meaning. However, I would note that Tartaglia unnecessarily emphasizes the meaninglessness of our life to an excessive degree, because his discourse seems at least to me to imply that there is a deeper dimension of meaning of life than the ordinary, social one. Tartaglia says, e.g.,

> [t]here would still be plenty of philosophy to do, of course, because there are many routes to transcendence to explore; some of which have doubtless yet to be discovered. And there is endless potential for investigating the nature and scope of our misrepresentation of transcendent being […]. The task could not end, because every new generation needs to make philosophical ideas their own. (Tartaglia 2016: 181)

I would argue that, if such a philosophical journey is worth making, then a life including it would be meaningful *in some sense*. I can agree with Tartaglia that, insofar as any social meaning could be relativized, our life could not be 'meaningful' in the sense that some social framework would supply it with an overall purpose. I should admit that our life cannot but be like a drifting ship with no destination. I would nevertheless argue that, insofar as, *e.g.*, "every new generation *needs* to make philosophical ideas their own," such activities should have some meaning in another sense, though what this sense would be, I suggest, is among the hard questions appearing in our perennial philosophical journey. Deepening our understanding of life's meaning that we cannot but admit at some level would belong to the intellectual activity authentically called the 'philosophy of meaning of life'.

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