



## **On Freedom and Incompleteness: Exploring a Possible Mechanistic Dualistic View of Metaphysical Freedom**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In this paper we invoke the notion of incompleteness and examine its connections with the conception of metaphysical freedom, as well as with other consequent and related notions and problems such as the idea of ethical truth. In doing so, we consequently explore a possible mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom. This paper is divided into three main sections according to the line of discussion we wish to pursue. First, we shall discuss the notion of incompleteness by invoking the idea of incomplete ranking from social choice theory as a starting point. Second, we shall connect the discussions in the first section to discussions on a possible conception of freedom as metaphysically fundamental, which is similar to or and even to some extent related to the idea of consciousness as ontologically basic. Also in this second section, we shall discuss more elaborately the conjecture of a mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom. Lastly, in the third and last section, we shall discuss some implications of the ideas developed in the first two sections to other consequent and related notions and problems such as the problem of ethical truth.

*Keywords:* metaphysical freedom, incomplete ordering, positive vs metaphysical freedom, consciousness, dualistic view, freedom and ethics

## **1 Incompleteness and Metaphysical Freedom**

We start with one specific form or aspect of freedom, which is the freedom of choice. It can be asserted that the freedom of choice is one of the most important forms or aspects of freedom in general although conceivably, there could be other forms or aspects of freedom which could also be important. Even then, it can be said that at least some other conceivable forms or aspects of freedom are also inextricably linked to freedom of choice. Both the freedom of thought and the freedom of action, for instance, can be said

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to be to a significant extent dependent on the freedom of choice with regards to how a person can freely choose what to think or do. Also, both notions of negative or positive freedom (or the conceptions of freedom from versus freedom to) directly pertain to the conditions under which the freedom of choice is carried out, whether such freedom to choose is carried out simply in considerable absence of interference or in the presence of certain empowering or enabling conditions. We do not wish to present an exhaustive discussion here but rather, we simply wish to establish that idea or problem of choice is a central problem and a constitutive conception in the discourse of freedom.

When one talks about choice or choosing, one necessarily implies the presence of alternatives among which the choice is to be made. It is also implied that ultimately, the choice that will be made somehow reflects a preference for the best choice available. It is also further implied that the preference for the best choice somehow reflects a ranking or ordering of the alternatives, and such ranking or ordering is based on certain reasons or criteria.

At this point, we now invoke some concepts from social choice theory (a field that combines welfare economics and logical and mathematical techniques, pioneered by the Marquis de Condorcet (1781) in the 1700's, but revitalized in its modern form by Kenneth Arrow (1950) in the 1950's, carried on by Amartya Sen (1970), among others) which we deem to be relevant to the present discussion. Social choice theory is of course concerned with choices at the social or collective level, but as it shall be shown later on, the line of discussion that will be pursued is likewise applicable to choices at the individual level. In a quite simplistic characterization, social choice theory is concerned with how collective choices can be generated from choices of the individuals that compose the collective concerned. The choices or preferences of the individuals usually consist of rankings or orderings of the alternatives available for a particular choice that needs to be made, and it can be supposed that these individual rankings are based on certain individual reasons, motives, intentions, and other influences (Sen, 2002; Sen, 1999). These individual rankings or orderings are then taken into account into a social decision function which stipulates the collective reasons or criteria to be applied in generating the collective choice or in determining the best choice for the collective, which can take the form of a collective ranking or ordering. A complete ranking or a complete ordering is achieved when the social decision function is successful in generating a collective choice (or a collective ranking or ordering).

To illustrate in an example, consider a social choice  $c$  that needs to be made by a collective of 3 individuals  $n_1, n_2$ , and  $n_3$ . There are three alternatives to choose from, which are  $x, y$ , and  $z$ . The individual rankings are as follows: for  $n_1$ , it is  $x > y > z$ ; for  $n_2$ , it is  $x > z > y$ , and for  $n_3$ , it is  $y > x > z$ . The social decision function to be employed is the function of majority preference. Given the individual rankings, it can be said that the majority (3 out of 3) prefers  $x$  over  $z$ , that the majority (2 out of 3, namely  $n_1$  and  $n_3$ ) prefers  $y$  over  $z$ , and the majority (2 out of 3, namely  $n_1$  and  $n_2$ ) also prefers  $x$  over  $y$ . Thus a collective ranking based on the social decision function of majority preference can be made, which is  $x > y > z$ , and it can be said that  $x$  is the best choice for the collective. Thus, a complete ranking is achieved.

Moving on, we now invoke the notion of incomplete ranking. This happens when the social decision function employed is not able to generate a collective ranking or select a best choice from the alternatives. Consider the same example above, but with different individual rankings as follows: for  $n_1$ , it is  $x > y > z$ ; for  $n_2$ , it is  $y > z > x$ , and for  $n_3$ , it is  $z > x > y$ . The same social decision function of majority preference is employed. Given the individual rankings, it can be said that the majority (2 out of 3, namely  $n_1$  and  $n_3$ ) prefers  $x$  over  $y$ , that the majority (2 out of 3, namely  $n_1$  and  $n_2$ ) prefers  $y$  over  $z$ , and the majority (2 out of 3, namely  $n_2$  and  $n_3$ ) also prefers  $z$  over

x. In this case, there is no best option because if each of the alternatives is considered, there is at least one other alternative that is more preferable than the alternative being considered, based on majority preference i.e. *i)* consider x, but z is more preferable than x, *ii)* consider y, but x is more preferable than y, *iii)* consider z, but y is more preferable than z. Thus, there is an incomplete ranking or an incomplete ordering. This logical impossibility is called Kenneth Arrows impossibility theorem, as described in Amartya Sens *Development as Freedom* (Sen, 1999). Another impossibility theorem is Amartya Sens liberal paradox, first discussed in his breakthrough 1970 paper *The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal* (Sen, 1970). In the liberal paradox, Sen has a stronger claim that there can be no social decision function that satisfies the conditions of minimal liberalism and Pareto optimality at the same time. The type of claim is stronger because Sen not only claims that certain social decision functions do not satisfy the two conditions but rather, that no social decision function satisfies the two conditions. We will not elaborate further on this claim as well as on its logical proof, but the point we are driving at is that incomplete rankings at the fundamental level of logic are present even in the most basic problems of social choice. These problems of incomplete ranking can be readily applied to individual rankings as well by considering conflicting individual reasons, motives, or intentions (which correspond to different rankings) instead of conflicting individuals.

The idea of incomplete ranking, both at the social and the individual levels can be further illustrated in a more practical and less mathematical way. For this purpose, we will just use the same example that Amartya Sen (2009) uses in his *The Idea of Justice*. Consider the choice that needs to be made on to whom among three children, Alice, Bob, and Charlie, should a wooden flute be given. Alice argues that the flute should be given to her because she is the only one among the three who can play the flute (the other two does not deny this) and thus she can make the best use of the flute. Bob argues, on the other hand, that the flute must be given to him because he currently has no toy to play with while the other two have many other toys (the other two does not deny this), and thus he would at least have something and be less deprived if the flute is given to him. Charlie, on the other hand, argues that the flute must be given to him because he was the one who made the flute (the other two does not deny this) and thus he deserves to be given the fruit of his labor. If the decision function that is to be employed is the function to choose the choice that is most just, then it is evident that this could be a practical illustration of how an incomplete ranking can arise. The flute can only be given to one child, and each child provides a compelling reason why the flute must be given to him or her. The reasons are in a sense incompatible with each other, and they are also in a sense incommensurable (*e.g.* Bobs depravity cannot be directly measured or valued in terms of Alices potential productivity or in terms of how Charlie deserves the fruit of his labor).

What can be asserted from the previous discussions is that incomplete rankings are not only possible, they are also ubiquitous. Both individuals and collectives encounter incomplete rankings in all sorts of choices that need to be made. It is of course implausible and even absurd to assert that because rankings among alternatives are often incomplete, that we should evade making choices altogether, because it is impossible to make the best choice anyway. Moment by moment, day by day, choices still need to be made, some with the additional need to be made urgently, and it can be argued that even when the logical or practically rational process of decision making is incomplete, a choice (which preferably can be said to be rational or to some extent still the best choice, but even if it is not) can still be made.

Connecting now the idea of incompleteness with the problem of metaphysical freedom, we start by claiming that there is something to be suspicious about with regards to the freedom versus determinism problem. The primary conundrum is often expressed as

such. There is substantial reason to believe that events in the world are in some sense caused and thus determined. But how can choices be free if they are determined? Thus, one solution that is often defended is the claim that there is space for indeterminism in reality (often in reference to certain ideas from quantum mechanics), and this space makes metaphysical freedom possible. However, as Aune (1985) pointed out in his *Metaphysics: The Elements*, there seems to be a sense of absurdity in supposing that metaphysical freedom is based on a metaphysical notion of indeterminism. Shifting to the first person to illustrate more effectively the reflexivity of an individual subject. If I were suddenly to act or think indeterminately and be conscious of it, it would be difficult to suppose that I would think that I am acting or thinking freely, rather I would think that I am acting uncontrollably. Aune also points out that it is reasonable to think of our free acts or thoughts as to a certain extent determined by our motives, reasons, and intentions. Thus, the notion of metaphysical freedom that Aune advances is metaphysical freedom as the freedom of spontaneity, which is the freedom to intentionally act or think with spontaneity (duly noting that even such spontaneous act or thought is to a certain extent determined by certain causes, such as your motives, reasons, and intentions, whether deliberately considered or not) without significant interference from external or internal forces that can significantly outweigh such freedom of spontaneity.

We therefore work with the premise that metaphysically free acts and thoughts can still be rightfully called as such despite being to a certain extent determined or caused by certain causes or determinants, presumably ones motives, intentions, and reasons. This is Aunes position, which is distinct from both the libertarian and conventional reconciler positions in such a way that it does not necessarily depend either on a categorical conviction on the existence and subjective possession of metaphysical freedom, nor on the stipulation that an act is metaphysically free if the subject or agent could have done otherwise or could have willed to do otherwise. Instead, this notion is initially based on an idea of spontaneity as briefly explained earlier. However, at least in our view, Aunes conception of metaphysical freedom as freedom of spontaneity is wanting of further explanations of specific ways of how thoughts and acts can both be metaphysically free and yet also determined or caused. To address this, we now proceed with some conjectural discussions that employ the notion of incompleteness towards an attempted possible elaboration of how metaphysically free acts can also be determined or caused.

We start with the claim that metaphysically free acts are to a certain extent determined or caused by certain causes or determinants, presumably the subjects or agents reasons, intentions, motives, past experiences, deliberations, predispositions, and other similar possible causes or determinants. As stated earlier, this claim can be reasonably accepted and to a certain extent even said to be evident based on a certain common understanding of everyday human experience. However, based on this same commonsensical understanding, it also seems as though all these determinants and causes are not sufficient by themselves as the complete determinants or causes of a metaphysically free choice. Shifting now to the first person to illustrate more effectively the reflexivity of and individual agent when as an agent I go through the process of making a choice, after which I have made a certain choice, I am conscious and aware that I have just made a choice and that that I have made that choice freely. I am also conscious and aware that in the process of making the choice that I made, there are certain things I considered which I could rightfully pertain to as determinants or causes or influences of my choice, whether I employed a deliberate process of rational decision-making or I simply followed my heuristic impulses. Nevertheless, I can also consciously assert that all these considerations prior to my choice were by themselves insufficient to have caused my ultimate act of free choice. Ultimately, I consciously had to choose and choose spontaneously for my free choice to finally be made.

Referring back to the notion of incompleteness, it can be said that when an agent encounters a situation of incomplete ranking, the situation encountered can be described as a decisional deadlock, despite having considered multiple possible causes and determinants. This situation of decisional deadlock will not proceed towards the achievement of a metaphysically free choice, by relying only on the determinants or causes that are already inputs to the incomplete ranking. Thus, an additional determinant or cause is required to ultimately result to a metaphysically free choice. Our conjecture is that it is free choice or spontaneous choice itself that is the fundamental determinant or cause required to generate a metaphysically free and complete choice from an incomplete ranking or an incomplete decisional deadlock. This conjecture is based on the assertion that causality or determinism does not necessarily entail a singularly linear chain of determinants or causes but instead, there could be multiple parallel causes or determinants, which together comprise the necessary causes and determinants for a certain event to come about. We think this is an uncontroversial and even to some extent unremarkable claim which can be reasonably accepted. Given the conjecture just presented, a potentially plausible explanation on how metaphysically free acts or thoughts can also be determined or caused can be stated. Metaphysically free acts or thoughts are determined because they are caused by multiple parallel causes or determinants, among which the agents motives, intentions, and reasons are included, but most importantly, they are determined by metaphysically fundamental free choices or spontaneous choices, and this is what makes them metaphysically free.

Before proceeding further, a few clarifications need to be made. Of course, it can be called out that metaphysically free thoughts and acts are still possible even in situations wherein a complete ranking is achieved, in line with how it is conceived in social choice theory. This can be accepted as true while still being consistent with the line of discussion being pursued by pointing out that even when a complete ranking is achieved, only a socially or individually reasonable possible best decision has come about, and not yet a metaphysically free thought or act. Even with a complete ranking, the agent may or may not freely choose the best option that has come about. Thus, a broader notion of incompleteness can be invoked in such a way that a thought or act is not metaphysically free and thus in a sense incomplete unless the essential cause or determinant of free choice or spontaneous choice is present to complete the set of necessary multiple parallel (or may also be interlinked) causes or determinants. The idea of incomplete ranking from social choice theory was simply a starting point and initial device employed to make the conjecture we have now arrived at clearer and more apparent.

It can be further called out that there are many other metaphysical events which do not require free or spontaneous choice as a cause or determinant. Again, this is not inconsistent with the line of reasoning being pursued but instead, it is precisely for this reason that metaphysically free thoughts or acts are unique. It is by virtue of them requiring free or spontaneous choice as determinants or causes that metaphysically free thoughts or acts are set apart. In a related note, it can be emphasized further how decisions and choices by themselves are not necessarily metaphysically free. Computer programs and algorithms can generate decisions and choices but because free or spontaneous choice is not present as a cause or determinant, these decisions and choices are not metaphysically free.

## 2 Free Choice as Metaphysically Fundamental

It appears, at least initially, that the conjecture presented in the preceding section necessarily implies a claim that ascribes a metaphysically fundamental or ontologically basic status to free or spontaneous choice. We would claim that this is not necessarily so, but before attempting to explain why, we would first assert that the claim that free

or spontaneous choice is metaphysically fundamental is not philosophically implausible. The plausibility of this claim can be better appreciated if we start our reflection with our personal everyday experience as human subjects and agents, following David Chalmers (1996) line of discussions on consciousness in his *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. Shifting again to the first person to more effectively illustrate the reflexivity of an individual human subject and agent as a human subject, there is nothing else that I experience more directly than my own consciousness and thus based on this, as a human subject, nothing seems more real to me than my own consciousness. It also seems that even by raising philosophical or scientific questions in an attempt to understand how consciousness works, I already presuppose myself as a conscious human subject. Similarly, as a human agent who consciously makes free choices in my personal everyday experience, there is also nothing else that I experience more directly than the conscious freedom of the choices I make, and thus in a sense, I constantly and directly experience the reality of my freedom. It also seems that even by raising philosophical or scientific questions of whether I am truly free or not, I already presuppose myself as a free human subject who is freely asking and examining such questions.

What has been said thus far does not necessarily entail that either consciousness or free choice is metaphysically fundamental. They merely imply that there is a strong case for claiming that both consciousness and freedom are metaphysically real, and that it seems as though consciousness and freedom are already presupposed in any attempt to inquire into their nature and mechanisms and they themselves also make such inquiries possible. However, if we are able to come up with a robust and satisfactory account of the nature and mechanisms of either consciousness or free choice, and if such account would entail that either consciousness or freedom is not metaphysically fundamental, then this is to be accepted. However, as Chalmers (1996) asserts, there currently is no robust and satisfactory science of consciousness, particularly one which robustly or satisfactorily explains subjective consciousness in terms of objective physical systems. Thus, there is an explanatory gap between the human subjective or phenomenal experience of consciousness and with the objective scientific models of how the brain or the mind works.

Recent developments in neuroscience are evidently important in helping human beings understand the anatomy of the brain, the mechanisms of brain processes, and their correlative relationships with human behaviors, capacities, and actions. Apart from neuroscience, we have also gained important insights towards a better understanding of how the human mind or brain works from evolutionary biology, psychology, behavioral economics and other behavioral sciences. These different objective sciences of the brain and of the mind have helped human beings come up with strategic interventions both to individuals and societies, towards making human lives better. However, it is a different claim altogether to assert that these objective sciences of the brain and of the mind have provided us with robust and satisfactory accounts of consciousness and free choice as we directly experience them as human subjects and agents. Recent developments in neuroscience have generated comprehensive maps linking and correlating anatomical locations and brain processes with specific functions of the human mind, including decision making and the different states of consciousness (*e.g.* when asleep, when awake, when dreaming, etc.). However, the empirical and mechanistic models of neuroscience does not account for our subjective experiences of consciousness and freedom. It is plausible to imagine brains to continue to be structured and to function as they do, and for human beings to mechanistically act in line with these brain structure and processes, without any human subjective experience of consciousness or free choice. This is what Chalmers (1996) pertains to as the logical possibility of philosophical zombies physical entities which are exact objective duplicates of human beings but without the

subjective experience of consciousness. Given this logical possibility of philosophical zombies, it is also plausible to imagine biological evolution proceeding in line with natural selection, up to a point where human beings (or human-like philosophical zombies) arise, with equal chances of survival within the mechanisms of natural selection, without any need for any subjective experience of consciousness or free choice. Scientific models on the brain and the mind, which are based on externally manifested data on human behaviors, actions, and anatomy, only necessitate that human beings externally appear as if they are conscious and free, but why are they actually conscious and free in their internal subjective experiences? As Chalmers (1996) again points out, this is the hard question about consciousness (as opposed to the easy physical, mechanistic, and empirical questions that the objective neurosciences deal with, with hard and easy being used as a philosophical distinction without the intent to undermine the complexity and rigor involved in the disciplines of the objective neurosciences), and there is currently no robust and satisfactory response to this question, and thus until we come up with a robust and satisfactory science of consciousness, it seems as though the premise that both consciousness and free choice are metaphysically fundamental will remain to be plausible. Chalmers (1996) takes a naturalistic dualistic position on the fundamental nature of consciousness – naturalistic in the sense that he accepts that consciousness is somehow caused by or linked to physical systems such as brains but dualistic in the sense that he maintains that the subjective or phenomenal aspect of consciousness cannot be completely explained in terms of, or completely reducible to, physical systems. Conceivably, a similar naturalistic dualistic position on conscious free or spontaneous choice can be taken, which would be consistent with the line of discussion being pursued thus far.

Earlier in this section, it was recognized that the conjecture on free choice being a separate parallel cause or determinant of metaphysically free thought or action does not necessarily imply that free choice is metaphysically fundamental. This is because even causes and determinants can have antecedent causes and determinants (i.e. caused or determined by something else) and are thus not necessarily fundamental. This realization does not immediately undermine the conjecture on free choice being a separate parallel cause or determinant of metaphysically free thought or action, but it can potentially undermine the metaphysical status of free choice if free choice is metaphysically reduced into more metaphysically real entities, determinants, or causes, particularly when it is metaphysically reduced to the mechanisms of physical systems. However, when a naturalistic dualistic position of conscious free or spontaneous choice is taken, as characterized in the preceding discussions, it can be accepted that conscious free or spontaneous choice is caused by or linked to more metaphysically fundamental physical entities or events, while maintaining that these physical entities and events by themselves are insufficient causes or explanations of conscious free or spontaneous choice. Thus, the concept of incompleteness can again be invoked here and it can be conjectured that there is another metaphysically fundamental cause or explanation for conscious free or spontaneous choice apart from physical systems, and thus the philosophical position on the plausibility of the metaphysically fundamental status of conscious free choice can be maintained.

We think it is also important to mention that not only is there an explanatory gap between the objective science of physical systems and the subjective or phenomenal human experiences, but there are also explanatory gaps among the objective (physical or social) sciences themselves. Within physics, there is an explanatory gap between quantum mechanics which excellently accounts for physical phenomena at the quantum level (at physical magnitudes at the scale of Planck's constant or  $10^{-23}$ ) and classical Newtonian mechanics which is still the most robust model of mechanical systems at the macro level. Then there is an explanatory gap on how to account for biological



phenomena (*e.g.* evolution, ecology, genetic propagation) solely in terms of physical and chemical mechanisms. Then there is the explanatory gap on how to account for objective social and behavioral phenomena solely in terms of biological mechanisms. Materialists would maintain that these explanatory gaps are purely epistemic in nature and it is only a matter of time before these gaps are closed, but the fact remains that the explanatory gaps exist now, and the onus is on the materialist to confirm the claim that these gaps can be bridged. Thus, we echo Aunes call out on the apparent implausibility of identifying the probabilistic or indeterministic character of quantum mechanics as the potential locus of the possibility of metaphysical freedom. In attempting to do so, you not only need to bridge the explanatory gap from the subjective and phenomenal to the objective, but you also need to bridge multiple explanatory gaps among different magisteria of objective scientific fields.

So far, what can be called a mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom has been argued for, with the aid of the underlying concept of incompleteness. In this view, it is accepted that metaphysically free acts or thoughts are caused or determined by, or more conservatively, linked to mechanistic systems. At the level of the thought or act of making choices, these mechanistic systems include the processes of deliberate decision making or the process of coming up with heuristic impulses, which are linked to reasons, motives, intentions, and influences. However, it has been conjectured that this picture of metaphysically free acts or thoughts is incomplete and that there is another metaphysically fundamental and ontologically distinct cause or determinant, which is free or spontaneous choice itself, which makes metaphysically free thoughts or acts possible. It is also recognized that even free or spontaneous choice could be linked to more fundamental mechanistic systems, particularly physical systems such as brain anatomies and processes, but ultimately this account is also incomplete because there is another metaphysically fundamental and ontologically distinct entity which makes the subjective or phenomenal experience of conscious free or spontaneous choice possible. This was developed while duly noting the explanatory gaps between the subjective and the objective, as well as the explanatory gaps among magisteria of objective sciences themselves. This mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom provides a somewhat richer explanation of how metaphysically free acts and thoughts are truly free and yet determined or caused by various determinants and causes.

Before this section is closed, we think it is important to assert that the mechanistic dualistic view on metaphysical freedom is not a practical shortcut (*i.e.* while the explanatory gaps are not yet bridged, we might as well just temporarily adapt a mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom), but is a plausible philosophical response to the challenge of coming up with a robust and satisfactory theory of metaphysical freedom. There are certain starting points where theorists can reasonably agree, particularly the fact that subjective or phenomenal experiences of conscious free choices exist and the fact that currently, there are explanatory gaps between the subjective and objective, as well as among different objective sciences. Thus, there is a challenge to theorize about metaphysical freedom given these starting points. The materialist response and the mechanistic dualistic view, among other possible views, are philosophically distinct responses to this challenge which have equal initial merits in attempting to develop a satisfactory and robust account of metaphysical freedom. The mechanistic dualistic view is not a second rate option that is to be resorted to while the materialist view is working out its defense. Instead, it is a direct response to the question of what a theory of metaphysical freedom demands. This clarification is made in analogous reference to a similar clarification that Sen (2011) makes about the comparative approach (an alternative to the dominant transcendental social contract approach) to a theory of justice which he defends in his *The Idea of Justice*. Sen asserts that the comparative



approach is a direct response to the question of what a theory of justice demands and not a practical shortcut that can be adapted in the meantime while various transcendental or social contract theorists have not agreed on what perfectly just social institutions are like.

### 3 Some Implications of a Mechanistic Dualistic View of Metaphysical Freedom

In this final section, we shall discuss some of the implications of the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom, as conjectured and developed thus far, to some important associated notions. In particular, we shall discuss and connect this view of metaphysical freedom to the ideas of ethical responsibility, justice, and human nature.

The connection between freedom and ethical responsibility is of course readily evident. Since a human being is supposed to be an agent who is capable of thinking and acting freely, then the individual human agent is taken responsible or accountable for his or her free thoughts or actions. If metaphysical freedom is not possible because of the essentially deterministic nature of reality, as it is argued in some philosophical positions, then ethical responsibility is also not possible. However, in the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom, metaphysically free thoughts and actions are possible and thus, human agents can be taken accountable for their metaphysically free thoughts and acts (Aune, 1986). A human agent is responsible or accountable for his or her thought or act if the choice to think or act as such was chosen freely, that is if the metaphysically fundamental cause or determinant of free or spontaneous choice is present and serves as one of the causes or determinants when the choice is made. On the other hand, if there is an internal or external force which prevents or significantly handicaps free or spontaneous choice from being one of the key causes or determinants of a thought or act, then it can be considered that the human agent is not ethically responsible or accountable for the thought or act. An example of such an internal force would be a mental or psychological illness which severely alters the human agents subjective experience such that his or her ability to employ free or spontaneous choosing in his or her thoughts or actions is significantly handicapped. On the other hand, an example of an external force that could handicap the ability for free and spontaneous choice is extreme coercion. In the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom, whether or not a persons thought or act is metaphysically free, and consequently whether or not a person is ethically responsible, is ultimately diagnosed only in the human agents subjective experience. Nonetheless, in objective attempts to determine ethical responsibility, usually at the social level, society can rely on external manifestations of metaphysically unfree thoughts or actions (such as external manifestations of mental illness or coercion that results in handicapped free or spontaneous choice).

In the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom, a thought or an act is metaphysically free, and thus the agent is ethically responsible, as long as free or spontaneous choice is one of the causes or determinants of the thought or act. This is an expansive conception, in the sense that there is a minimal (in fact, only one) necessary and sufficient condition for a thought or act to be considered metaphysically free. Such a conception is also focused on the intrinsic capability of the human agent to choose freely rather than on external systemic factors that may significantly influence choice. In other words, regardless of what systemic external factors could have heavily influence the choice that was made, or of how easy or difficult the choice was, or of whether or not the agent could have done otherwise, as long as the choice was made with conscious free or spontaneous choice as one of the causes or determinants, then the thought or action is still metaphysically free and the agent is still ethically responsible. It is important to note

however that an agents thoughts or actions are not solely caused or determined by free or spontaneous choice but also by multiple other causes and determinants, which include motives, intentions, and reasons, which are also further defined and determined by causes or determinants of other kinds. This realization has potentially important implications on an ethical view on just punishment, both in the retributive or corrective sense. On one hand, retributive punishment can be justifiable because human agents can be held ethically responsible for their metaphysically free thoughts and actions, but on the other hand, if an ethical system also aims to focus on the corrective aspect of punitive justice, it is also important to not only punish the offender to discourage or correct his or her propensity to make the same choice in the future (since presumably the undesirability of the punishment done to him or her as well as the undesirability of potentially getting punished again in the future would then be one of the input considerations and thus one of the dominant causes or determinants of future action), but also to address the multiple other causes or determinants of the unethical action. This would be a more comprehensive or complete approach to ethical punishment and justice (Rawls, 2009; Sen 2011).

Elaborating further on some other important implications of the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom on the idea of justice, we now proceed to discuss some consequent claims that can be made on what a just society looks like if this view of metaphysical freedom is taken. Because freedom is in a sense considered metaphysically fundamental and constitutive of human subjective consciousness and experience, then the status of individual human freedom could be elevated among other important considerations of justice such as individual and aggregative utility, social ideals and norms, and social contracts and institutions. Freedom can be asserted to be valuable in itself as it is a key cause or determinant of human thoughts and actions and is thus central to human experience in general, but it is also present in conjunction with other determinants and causes and is also dependent on the alternatives that are available in every choice that is made. Thus, it can be said albeit rather impressionistically, that the idea of a just society consistent with the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom would be that of a society which promotes rational awareness or consciousness on the expansiveness of the possibility of free or spontaneous choice (i.e. a society that does not deny the existence of choice where it exists, and makes individual members aware and conscious of the presence of such choices). Such a society would also take its individual members ethically responsible and accountable for their free choices, but would also address other causes and determinants which could heavily increase the likelihood of unethical thoughts and actions (such as systemic poverty, deprivation, ignorance, and violence)(Robeyns, 2005; Alkire, 2005). Thus, such a just society would also be committed to the expansion of the available alternatives for individual members to freely and spontaneously choose the lives they value and have reasons to value, and also committed to the removal of barriers against free choice and the expansion of alternatives for free choice. This conception of what a just society would look like is consistent with the capabilities approach of Sen and Nussbaum (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993), and well as with Sens comparative approach to the idea of justice (Sen, 2011).

Lastly, the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom also has some important implications on the idea of human nature. Upon some conceptual extension, this view of metaphysical freedom can be consistent with both a purely materialistic conception of human nature as well as with an idea of human nature which involves a non-physical soul or spirit. Both sides would agree with the claim that human consciousness and free choice are to a certain extent linked to (or originate from, or caused by) physical systems, particularly brain anatomies and brain process. Both sides would also be able to recognize the explanatory gap between the subjective or phenomenal human experience

of consciousness and free choice on one hand, and the objective mechanistic models of the physical systems they are linked to on the other hand. However, the strong materialist would argue that the dualism is only an apparent dualism and not a real dualism and it is only a matter of time before scientists discover a material model that would completely account for reality, even for subjective human experience. On the other hand, the strong dualist would maintain that the dualism is real and what accounts for human consciousness and freedom can only be found in the supernatural or non-material realm inaccessible to the strict methodologies of materialist scientific investigations. Some moderate positions, from both materialists and dualists, can claim that the gap between objective models of the world on one hand, and individual human subjective experiences on the other hand, is a fundamental metaphysical or epistemological gap and thus can never be bridged. Despite all of these conceptual extensions, if the mechanistic dualistic view of metaphysical freedom is nonetheless taken, there could be a reasonable agreement that metaphysical freedom is not only possible, but is an essential constitutive element of human nature, and thus must be valued and protected, both in terms of expanding peoples capabilities for free choice as well as in terms of taking them responsible and accountable for their free thoughts and actions.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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