9.4 | *Moral Freedom*

The image of the man deprived of freedom as one in chains or behind bars, or as one coerced or intimidated into acting contrary to his own wishes, typifies the kind of liberty that is discussed in Section 13.1 on FREEDOM IN SOCIETY, but not here. The man in prison and the slave in chains, the poor man lacking the means of satisfying his desires and the oppressed subjects of a tyrant, all these can enjoy the kind of inner or moral freedom that is discussed here. It is neither freedom of choice (which is treated in Section 5.7) nor freedom to do as one wills, but rather the freedom that consists in being able to will as one ought. It is sometimes described, negatively, as freedom from the passions, subjection to which Spinoza characterizes as "human bondage." It is also described as a liberty that derives from having the willpower to do one's duty or to act in conformity with the moral law.

As the reader will find in the quotations below, moral freedom takes many forms, varying remarkably as one passes from the discussion of it by Plato and the Roman Stoics in antiquity, to what is said on the subject by Spinoza, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, or by Freud and Dewey. However, what is common to them all is the fact that a man's possession of moral freedom does not in any way depend on the outer circumstances of his life or upon his inherited nature, but upon his acquirement of virtue, or wisdom or a certain type of moral character, or even, as in the case of Freud, a certain type of psychological adjustment. The other element that is common to moral liberty in all its forms is the moral law or the moral ideal to which a man can conform only by mastering the intransigent, recalcitrant, or antagonistic factors in his own make-up. That is why the morally free man is said to have achieved self-mastery. The reader is, therefore, referred to Section 9.3 on MORAL LAW for materials relevant to moral freedom.

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1 If a man were born so divinely gifted that he could naturally apprehend the truth, he would have no need of laws to rule over him; for there is no law or order which is above knowledge, nor can mind, without impiety, be deemed the subject or slave of any man, but rather the lord of all. I speak of mind, true and free, and in harmony with nature. But then there is no such mind anywhere, or at least not much; and therefore we must choose law and order, which are second best.

Plato, *Laws,* IX, 875B

2 The most learned men have told us that only the wise man is free. What is freedom but the ability to live as one will? The man who lives as he wills is none other than the one who strives for the right, who does his duty, who plans his life with forethought, and who obeys the laws because he knows it is good for him, and not out of fear. Everything he says, does, or thinks is spontaneous and free. His tasks and conduct begin and end in himself, because nothing has so much influence over him as his own counsel and decision. Even the supreme power of fortune is submissive to him. The wise poet has reminded us that fortune is moulded for each man by the manner of his life. Only the wise man does nothing against his will, or with regret and by compulsion. Though this truth deserves to be discussed at greater length, it is nevertheless proverbial that no one is free except the wise. Evil men are nothing but slaves.

Cicero, *Paradoxes of the Stoics,* V

3 To conclude that the condition of slavery involves a person's whole being, is an error. The better part of the man is exempt. The slave-master has at his disposition only the body of the slave; but the mind is its own master. It is free and unchained; it is not even the prisoner of the body. It can use its own powers, follow its own great aims,

and escape into infinity to keep company with the stars.

Seneca, *On Benefits,* III, 20

4 Behold the wretched and dismal slavery of him who is in thrall to pleasures and pains, those utterly capricious and tyrannical masters. We, however, must escape to freedom. But this is only possible if we are indifferent to Fortune. Then we shall attain that one overriding blessing—the serenity and exhaltation of a firmly anchored mind. For when error is banished, we shall have the great and satisfying joy that comes from the discovery of truth, plus a kind disposition and cheerfulness of mind. The source of our pleasure in these things will not derive from their being good, but that they emerge from a good that is one's own.

Seneca, *On the Happy Life,* IV

5 So far as I am concerned that body is nothing more or less than a fetter on my freedom. I place it squarely in the path of fortune, letting her expend her onslaught on it, not allowing any blow to get through it to my actual self. For that body is all that is vulnerable about me: within this dwelling so liable to injury there lives a spirit that is free. Never shall that flesh compel me to feel fear, never shall it drive me to any pretence unworthy of a good man; never shall I tell a lie out of consideration for this petty body. I shall dissolve our partnership when this seems the proper course, and even now while we are bound one to the other the partnership will not be on equal terms: the soul will assume undivided authority. Refusal to be influenced by one's body assures one's freedom.

Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius,* 65

6 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:31–32

7 We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.

Titus 3:3–5

8 No one . . . who lives in error is free. Do you wish to live in fear? Do you wish to live in sorrow? Do you wish to live in perturbation? "By no means." No one . . . who is in a state of fear or sorrow or perturbation is free; but whoever is delivered from sorrows and fears and perturbations, he is at the same time also delivered from servitude.

Epictetus, *Discourses,* II, 1

9 He is free who lives as he wishes to live; who is neither subject to compulsion nor to hindrance, nor to force; whose movements to action are not impeded, whose desires attain their purpose, and who does not fall into that which he would avoid. Who, then, chooses to live in error? No man. Who chooses to live deceived, liable to mistake, unjust, unrestrained, discontented, mean? No man. Not one then of the bad lives as he wishes; nor is he, then, free. And who chooses to live in sorrow, fear, envy, pity, desiring and failing in his desires, attempting to avoid something and falling into it? Not one. Do we then find any of the bad free from sorrow, free from fear, who does not fall into that which he would avoid, and does not obtain that which he wishes? Not one; nor then do we find any bad man free.

Epictetus, *Discourses,* IV, 1

10 The man who is not under restraint is free, to whom things are exactly in that state in which he wishes them to be; but he who can be restrained or compelled or hindered, or thrown into any circumstances against his will, is a slave. But who is free from restraint? He who desires nothing that belongs to others. And what are the things which belong to others? Those which are not in our power either to have or not to have, or to have of a certain kind or in a certain manner. Therefore the body belongs to another, the parts of the body belong to another, possession belongs to another. If, then, you are attached to any of these things as your own, you will pay the penalty which it is proper for him to pay who desires what belongs to another. This road leads to freedom, that is the only way of escaping from slavery, to be able to say at last with all your soul

Lead me, O Zeus, and thou O destiny,
The way that I am bid by you to go.

Epictetus, *Discourses,* IV, 1

11 Being naturally noble, magnanimous and free, man sees that of the things which surround him some are free from hindrance and in his power, and the other things are subject to hindrance and in the power of others; that the things which are free from hindrance are in the power of the will; and those which are subject to hindrance are the things which are not in the power of the will. And, for this reason, if he thinks that his good and his interest be in these things only which are free from hindrance and in his own power, he will be free, prosperous, happy, free from harm, magnanimous, pious, thankful to God for all things; in no matter finding fault with any of the things which have not been put in his power, nor blaming any of them. But if he thinks that his good and his interest are in externals and in things which are not in the power of his will, he must of necessity be hindered, be impeded, be a slave to those

who have the power over things which he admires and fears; and he must of necessity be impious because he thinks that he is harmed by God, and he must be unjust because he always claims more than belongs to him; and he must of necessity be abject and mean.

Epictetus, *Discourses,* IV, 7

12 Do what thou hast in hand with perfect and simple dignity, and feeling of affection, and freedom, and justice; and . . . give thyself relief from all other thoughts. And thou wilt give thyself relief, if thou doest every act of thy life as if it were the last, laying aside all carelessness and passionate aversion from the commands of reason, and all hypocrisy, and self-love, and discontent with the portion which has been given to thee. Thou seest how few the things are, the which if a man lays hold of, he is able to live a life which flows in quiet, and is like the existence of the gods; for the gods on their part will require nothing more from him who observes these things.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* II, 5

13 Let the part of thy soul which leads and governs be undisturbed by the movements in the flesh, whether of pleasure or of pain; and let it not unite with them, but let it circumscribe itself and limit those affects to their parts. But when these affects rise up to the mind by virtue of that other sympathy that naturally exists in a body which is all one, then thou must not strive to resist the sensation, for it is natural: but let not the ruling part of itself add to the sensation the opinion that it is either good or bad.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* V, 26

14 It is in thy power to live free from all compulsion in the greatest tranquillity of mind, even if all the world cry out against thee as much as they choose, and even if wild beasts tear in pieces the members of this kneaded matter which has grown around thee. For what hinders the mind in the midst of all this from maintaining itself in tranquillity and in a just judgement of all surrounding things and in a ready use of the objects which are presented to it, so that the judgement may say to the thing which falls under its observation: This thou art in substance (reality), though in men's opinion thou mayest appear to be of a different kind; and the use shall say to that which falls under the hand: Thou art the thing that I was seeking; for to me that which presents itself is always a material for virtue both rational and political, and in a word, for the exercise of art, which belongs to man or God.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* VII, 68

15 Remember that to change thy opinion and to follow him who corrects thy error is as consistent with freedom as it is to persist in thy error.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations,* VIII, 16

16 Soul becomes free when it moves, through Intellectual-Principle, towards The Good; what it does in that spirit is its free act; Intellectual-Principle is free in its own right. That principle of Good is the sole object of desire and the source of self-disposal to the rest, to soul when it fully attains, to Intellectual-Principle by connate possession.

Plotinus, *Sixth Ennead,* VIII, 7

17 The wise man is always free; he is always held in honor; he is always master of the laws. The law is not made for the just but for the unjust. The just man is a law unto himself and he does not need to summon the law from afar, for he carries it enclosed in his heart. . . .

The wise man is free, since one who does as he wishes is free. Not every wish is good, but the wise man wishes only that which is good; he hates evil for he chooses what is good. Because he chooses what is good he is master of his choice and because he chooses his work is he free. Then, because he does what he wishes the free man is wise. The wise man does well everything that he does. One who does all things well does all things rightly. But one who does all things rightly does everything without offense, without blame, without loss and disturbance within himself. And one who does nearly everything without giving offense acts blamelessly and acts without disturbance to himself, without loss. He does not act unwisely but wisely in all things. One who acts with wisdom has nothing to fear, for fear lies in sin. Where there is no fear there is liberty; where there is liberty there is the power of doing what one wishes. Therefore, only the wise man is free.

Ambrose, *Letter to Simplicianus (Benedictine 37)*

18 I was bound not with the iron of another's chains, but by my own iron will. The enemy held my will; and of it he made a chain and bound me. Because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to became habit, and habit not resisted became necessity. These were like links hanging one on another—which is why I have called it a chain— and their hard bondage held me bound hand and foot. The new will which I now began to have, by which I willed to worship You freely and to enjoy You, O God, the only certain Joy, was not yet strong enough to overcome that earlier will rooted deep through the years. My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual, were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul.

Augustine, *Confessions,* VIII, 5

19 To the just all the evils imposed on them by unjust rulers are not the punishment of crime, but the test of virtue. Therefore the good man, although he is a slave, is free; but the bad man, even if he

reigns, is a slave, and that not of one man, but, what is far more grievous, of as many masters as he has vices.

Augustine, *City of God,* IV, 3

20 The good will . . . is the work of God; for God created him with it. But the first evil will, which preceded all man's evil acts, was rather a kind of falling away from the work of God to its own works than any positive work. And therefore the acts resulting were evil, not having God, but the will itself for their end; so that the will or the man himself, so far as his will is bad, was as it were the evil tree bringing forth evil fruit. Moreover, the bad will, though it be not in harmony with, but opposed to nature, inasmuch as it is a vice or blemish, yet it is true of it as of all vice, that it cannot exist except in a nature, and only in a nature created out of nothing, and not in that which the Creator has begotten of Himself, as He begot the Word, by Whom all things were made. For though God formed man of the dust of the earth, yet the earth itself, and every earthly material, is absolutely created out of nothing; and man's soul, too, God created out of nothing, and joined to the body, when He made man. But evils are so thoroughly overcome by good that, though they are permitted to exist for the sake of demonstrating how the most righteous foresight of God can make a good use even of them, yet good can exist without evil, as in the true and supreme God Himself, and as in every invisible and visible celestial creature that exists above this murky atmosphere; but evil cannot exist without good, because the natures in which evil exists, in so far as they are natures, are good. And evil is removed, not by removing any nature, or part of a nature, which had been introduced by the evil, but by healing and correcting that which had been vitiated and depraved. The will, therefore, is then truly free, when it is not the slave of vices and sins. Such was it given us by God; and this being lost by its own fault, can only be restored by Him Who was able at first to give it. And therefore the truth says, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed"; which is equivalent to saying, "If the Son shall save you, ye shall be saved indeed." For He is our Liberator, inasmuch as He is our Saviour.

Augustine, *City of God,* XIV, 11

21 As, after the resurrection, the body, having become wholly subject to the spirit, will live in perfect peace to all eternity; even in this life we must make it an object to have the carnal habit changed for the better, so that its inordinate affections may not war against the soul. And until this shall take place, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh"; the spirit struggling, not in hatred, but for the mastery, because it desires that what it loves should be subject to the higher principle; and the flesh struggling, not in hatred, but because of the bondage of habit which it has derived from its parent stock, and which has grown in upon it by a law of nature till it has become inveterate. The spirit, then, in subduing the flesh, is working as it were to destroy the ill-founded peace of an evil habit, and to bring about the real peace which springs out of a good habit.

Augustine, *Christian Doctrine,* I, 24

22 Our sensual appetite, where the passions reside, is not entirely subject to reason; hence at times our passions forestall and hinder reason's judgment, at other times they follow after reason's judgment, accordingly as the sensual appetite obeys reason to some extent. But in the state of innocence the inferior appetite was wholly subject to reason, so that in that state the passions of the soul existed only as consequent upon the judgment of reason.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I, 95, 2

23 Perfection of moral virtue does not wholly take away the passions, but regulates them.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I, 95, 2

24 In spiritual things there is a twofold servitude and a twofold freedom: for there is the servitude of sin and the servitude of justice; and there is likewise a twofold freedom, from sin, and from justice. . . .

Now the servitude of sin or justice consists in being inclined to evil by a habit of sin, or inclined to good by a habit of justice: and in like manner freedom from sin is not to be overcome by the inclination to sin, and freedom from justice is not to be held back from evil for the love of justice. Nevertheless, since man, by his natural reason, is inclined to justice, while sin is contrary to natural reason, it follows that freedom from sin is true freedom which is united to the servitude of justice, since they both incline man to that which is becoming to him. In like manner true servitude is the servitude of sin, which is connected with freedom from justice, because man is thereby hindered from attaining that which is proper to him.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* II–II, 183, 4

25 It must be observed that so far as men are concerned, in order that any one attain to a state of freedom or servitude there is required first of all an obligation or a release. For the mere fact of serving someone does not make a man a slave, since even the free serve. . . . Nor again does the mere fact of ceasing to serve make a man free, as in the case of a runaway slave. But properly speaking a man is a slave if he be bound to serve, and a man is free if he be released from service. Secondly, it is required that the above obligation be imposed with a certain solemnity, even as a certain solemnity is observed in other matters which among men obtain a settlement in perpetu-

ity. Accordingly, properly speaking, one is said to be in the state of perfection not through having the act of perfect love, but through binding himself in perpetuity and with a certain solemnity to those things that pertain to perfection.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* II–II, 184, 4

26 One must bear in mind that the sons of God are driven not as slaves, but as free men. For, since he is free who is for his own sake, we do that freely which we do of our very selves. But this is what we do of our will, but what we do against our will we do not freely but as slaves: be the violence absolute, as when "the whole principle is extrinsic, with the sufferer contributing nothing"—for instance, a man is pushed into motion; or be the violence mixed with the voluntary—for instance, when one wishes to do or to suffer what is less contrary to his will to avoid what is more contrary to it. But the Holy Spirit so inclines us to act that He makes us act voluntarily, in that He makes us lovers of God. Therefore, the sons of God are impelled by the Holy Spirit freely out of love, not slavishly out of fear.

Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* IV, 22

27 *Marco.* From his hands who fondly loves her ere she is in being, there issues, after the fashion of a little child that sports, now weeping, now laughing,

the simple, tender soul, who knoweth naught save that, sprung from a joyous maker, willingly she turneth to that which delights her.

First she tastes the savour of a trifling good; there she is beguiled and runneth after it, if guide or curb turn not her love aside.

Wherefore 'twas needful to put law as a curb, needful to have a ruler who might discern at least the tower of the true city.

Laws there are, but who putteth his hand to them? None; because the shepherd that leads may chew the cud, but hath not the hoofs divided.

Wherefore the people, that see their guide aiming only at that good whereof he is greedy, feed on that and ask no further.

Clearly canst thou see that evil leadership is the cause which hath made the world sinful, and not nature that may be corrupted within you.

Dante, *Purgatorio,* XVI, 85

28 And he [Virgil] to me: "So far as reason sees here, I can tell thee; from beyond that point, ever await Beatrice, for 'tis a matter of faith.

Every substantial form, which is distinct from matter and is in union with it, has a specific virtue contained within itself

which is not perceived save in operation, nor is manifested except by its effects, just as life in a plant by the green leaves.

Therefore man knows not whence the understanding of the first cognitions may come, nor the inclination to the prime objects of appetite,

which are in you, even as the instinct in bees to make honey; and this prime will admits no desert of praise or of blame.

Now in order that to this will every other may be related, innate with you is the virtue which giveth counsel, and ought to guard the threshold of assent.

This is the principle whence is derived the reason of desert in you, according as it garners and winnows good and evil loves.

Those who in their reasoning went to the foundation, perceived this innate freedom, therefore they left ethics to the world.

Wherefore suppose that every love which is kindled within you arise of necessity, the power to arrest it is within you.

Dante, *Purgatorio,* XVIII, 46

29 A Christian man has no need of any work or of any law in order to be saved, since through faith he is free from every law and does all that he does out of pure liberty and freely, seeking neither benefit nor salvation, since he already abounds in all things and is saved through the grace of God because of his faith, and now seeks only to please God.

Luther, *Freedom of a Christian*

30 All their [the Thelemites] life was spent not in laws, statutes, or rules, but according to their own free will and pleasure. They rose out of their beds when they thought good: they did eat, drink, labour, sleep, when they had a mind to it, and were disposed for it. None did awake them, none did offer to constrain them to eat, drink, nor to do any other thing; for so had Gargantua established it. In all their rule, and strictest tie of their order, there was but this one clause to be observed.

DO WHAT THOU WILT.

Because men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an instinct and spur that prompteth them unto virtuous actions, and withdraws them from vice, which is called honour. Those same men, when by base subjection and constraint they are brought under and kept down, turn aside from that noble disposition, by which they formerly were inclined to virtue, to shake off and break that bond of servitude, wherein they are so tyrannously enslaved; for it is agreeable with the nature of man to long after things forbidden, and to desire what is denied us.

By this liberty they entered into a very laudable emulation, to do all of them what they saw did please one.

Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* I, 57

31 The children of God are liberated by regeneration

from the servitude of sin; not that they have already obtained the full possession of liberty, and experience no more trouble from the flesh, but there remains in them a perpetual cause of contention to exercise them; and not only to exercise them, but also to make them better acquainted with their own infirmity. And on this subject all sound writers are agreed—that there still remains in a regenerate man a fountain of evil, continually producing irregular desires, which allure and stimulate him to the commission of sin.

Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* III, 3

32 Since it has pleased God to give us some capacity for reason, so that we should not be, like the animals, slavishly subjected to the common laws, but should apply ourselves to them by judgment and voluntary liberty, we must indeed yield a little to the simple authority of Nature, but not let ourselves be carried away tyrannically by her: reason alone must guide our inclinations.

Montaigne, *Essays,* II, 8, Affection of Fathers

33 True freedom is to have power over oneself for everything.

Montaigne, *Essays,* III, 12, Of Physiognomy

34 *Hamlet.* Blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart.

Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* III, ii, 73

35 The impotence of man to govern or restrain the affects I call bondage, for a man who is under their control is not his own master, but is mastered by fortune, in whose power he is, so that he is often forced to follow the worse, although he sees the better before him.

Spinoza, *Ethics,* IV, Preface

36 It will easily be seen in what consists the difference between a man who is led by affect or opinion alone and one who is led by reason. The former, whether he wills it or not, does those things of which he is entirely ignorant, but the latter does the will of no one but himself, and does those things only which he knows are of greatest importance in life, and which he therefore desires above all things. I call the former, therefore, a slave, and the latter free.

Spinoza, *Ethics,* IV, Prop. 66, Schol.

37 We may say that we are immune from bondage in so far as we act with a distinct knowledge, but that we are the slaves of passion in so far as our perceptions are confused. In this sense we have not all the freedom of spirit that were to be desired, and we may say with St. Augustine that being subject to sin we have the freedom of a slave. Yet a slave, slave as he is, nevertheless has freedom to choose according to the state wherein he is, although more often than not he is under the stern necessity of choosing between two evils, because a superior force prevents him from attaining the goods whereto he aspires. That which in a slave is effected by bonds and constraint in us is effected by passions, whose violence is sweet, but none the less pernicious. In truth we will only that which pleases us: but unhappily what pleases us now is often a real evil, which would displease us if we had the eyes of the understanding open. Nevertheless that evil state of the slave, which is also our own, does not prevent us, any more than him, from making a free choice of that which pleases us most, in the state to which we are reduced, in proportion to our present strength and knowledge.

Leibniz, *Theodicy,* 289

38 If through defects that may happen out of the ordinary course of Nature, any one comes not to such a degree of reason wherein he might be supposed capable of knowing the law, and so living within the rules of it, he is never capable of being a free man, he is never let loose to the disposure of his own will; because he knows no bounds to it, has not understanding, its proper guide, but is continued under the tuition and government of others all the time his own understanding is incapable of that charge.

Locke, *II Civil Government,* VI, 60

39 A man on the rack is not at liberty to lay by the idea of pain, and divert himself with other contemplations: and sometimes a boisterous passion hurries our thoughts, as a hurricane does our bodies, without leaving us the liberty of thinking on other things, which we would rather choose. But as soon as the mind regains the power to stop or continue, begin or forbear, any of these motions of the body without, or thoughts within, according as it thinks fit to prefer either to the other, we then consider the man as a *free agent* again.

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding,* Bk. II, XXI, 12

40 Without liberty, the understanding would be to no purpose: and without understanding, liberty (if it could be) would signify nothing. If a man sees what would do him good or harm, what would make him happy or miserable, without being able to move himself one step towards or from it, what is he the better for seeing? And he that is at liberty to ramble in perfect darkness, what is his liberty better than if he were driven up and down as a bubble by the force of the wind? The being acted by a blind impulse from without, or from within,

is little odds. The first, therefore, and great use of liberty is to hinder blind precipitancy; the principal exercise of freedom is to stand still, open the eyes, look about, and take a view of the consequence of what we are going to do, as much as the weight of the matter requires.

Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding,* Bk. II, XXI, 69

41 When a man gives himself up to the government of a ruling passion,—or, in other words, when his Hobby-Horse grows headstrong,—farewell cool reason and fair discretion!

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy,* II, 5

42 Moral liberty . . . alone makes [man] truly master of himself; for the mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty.

Rousseau, *Social Contract,* I, 8

43 In vain do we seek freedom under the power of the laws. The laws! Where is there any law? Where is there any respect for law? Under the name of law you have everywhere seen the rule of self-interest and human passion. But the eternal laws of nature and of order exist. For the wise man they take the place of positive law; they are written in the depths of his heart by conscience and reason; let him obey these laws and be free; for there is no slave but the evil-doer, for he always does evil against his will. Liberty is not to be found in any form of government, she is in the heart of the free man, he bears her with him everywhere.

Rousseau, *Emile,* V

44 It is . . . the moral law, of which we become directly conscious (as soon as we trace for ourselves maxims of the will), that *first* presents itself to us, and leads directly to the concept of freedom, inasmuch as reason presents it as a principle of determination not to be outweighed by any sensible conditions, nay, wholly independent of them.

Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* Pt. I, I, 1

45 Freedom and the consciousness of it as a faculty of following the moral law with unyielding resolution is *independence of inclinations,* at least as motives determining (though not as *affecting*) our desire, and so far as I am conscious of this freedom in following my moral maxims, it is the only source of an unaltered contentment which is necessarily connected with it and rests on no special feeling.

Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* Pt. I, II, 2

46 Virtue . . . in so far as it is based on internal freedom, contains a positive command for man, namely, that he should bring all his powers and inclinations under his rule (that of reason); and this is a positive precept of command over himself which is additional to the prohibition, namely, that he should not allow himself to be governed by his feelings and inclinations (the duty of *apathy*); since, unless reason takes the reins of government into its own hands, the feelings and inclinations play the master over the man.

Kant, *Introduction to the Metaphysical Elements of Ethics,* XVI

47 The laws of freedom, as distinguished from the laws of nature, are *moral* laws. So far as they refer only to external actions and their lawfulness, they are called *juridical*; but if they also require that, as laws, they shall themselves be the determining principles of our actions, they are *ethical.* The agreement of an action with juridical laws is its *legality;* the agreement of an action with ethical laws is its *morality.* The freedom to which the former laws refer, can only be freedom in external practice; but the freedom to which the latter laws refer is freedom in the internal as well as the external exercise of the activity of the will in so far as it is determined by laws of reason. So, in theoretical philosophy, it is said that only the objects of the external senses are in space, but all the objects both of internal and external sense are in time; because the representations of both, as being representations, so far belong all to the internal sense. In like manner, whether freedom is viewed in reference to the external or the internal action of the will, its laws, as pure practical laws of reason for the free activity of the will generally, must at the same time be inner principles for its determination, although they may not always be considered in this relation.

Kant, *General Introduction to the Metaphysic of Morals,* I

48 I am free . . . when my existence depends upon myself. This self-contained existence of spirit is none other than self-consciousness, consciousness of one's own being. Two things must be distinguished in consciousness; first, the fact *that I know;* secondly, *what I know.* In *self* consciousness these are merged in one; for spirit *knows itself.* It involves an appreciation of its own nature, as also an energy enabling it to realize itself; to make itself *actually* that which it is *potentially.*

Hegel, *Philosophy of History,* Introduction, 3

49 The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendor, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men; we no longer bow before the inevitable in Oriental subjection, but we absorb it, and make it a part of ourselves.

To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things—this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship.

Russell, *A Free Man's Worship*

50 Anyone who has successfully undergone the training of learning and recognizing the truth about himself is henceforth strengthened against the dangers of immorality, even if his standard of morality should in some respect deviate from the common one.

Freud, *General Introduction to Psycho-Analysis,* XXVII

51 One might compare the relation of the ego to the id with that between a rider and his horse. The horse provides the locomotive energy, and the rider has the prerogative of determining the goal and of guiding the movements of his powerful mount towards it. But all too often in the relations between the ego and the id we find a picture of the less ideal situation in which the rider is obliged to guide his horse in the direction in which it itself wants to go.

Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis,* XXXI

52 If we state the moral law . . . as the injunction to each self on every occasion to identify the self with a new growth that is possible, then obedience to law is one with moral freedom.

Dewey, *Ethics,* Pt. II, XV, 5

53 The office of the moral law is that of a pedagogue, to protect and educate us in the use of freedom. At the end of this period of instruction, we are enfranchised from every servitude, even from the servitude of law, since Love made us one in spirit with the wisdom that is the source of Law.

Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*

9.5 | *Conscience*

According to its etymology, the word "conscience," deriving as it does from *conscire,* should have almost the same meaning as "conscious," indicating awareness or knowledge. But that is not the meaning of the word as it has come to be used in discourse about moral problems. In that context, it is used either to signify a sense of right and wrong, whether innate or acquired; or to signify the inner voice that determines the judgment an individual makes concerning what he should or should not do, or approve of, in a particular case.

Conscience does not displace but rather applies the principles or rules of the moral law, which is discussed in Section 9.3. Such principles or rules are universal or general formulations applicable to a wide variety of individual cases, some of which clearly fall under the rule and some of which involve aspects that might make them exceptions to the rule. Conscience is needed to make the judgment that considers the principle or rule in relation to this or that particular case, deciding either that the case calls for conformity to the rule or that the case justifies dispensation from it.

One quotation that the reader might expect to find here—Hamlet's statement that "conscience doth make cowards of us all"—has been placed elsewhere because, when it is read in the context of the whole "To be or not to be" speech, the meaning is clearly that it is a certain kind of knowledge, not the moral conscience, that causes us to become overtimid or overcautious when contemplating suicide.

Among the quotations assembled below, the reader will find some that discuss freedom of conscience and the right of private

judgment in moral matters. These should be read in connection with related passages that have been placed in Section 13.2 on FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION: CENSORSHIP. The reader will also find, in quotations taken from Freud, the discussion of psychological phenomena that are related to conscience—remorse and a sense of guilt. Other passages from Freud on the sense of guilt with be found in Section 12.4 on CRIME AND PUNISHMENT. In Freud's theory of the matter, the reader will learn, the repressive strictures of the superego represent the voice of conscience.

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1 The best audience for the practice of virtue is the approval of one's own conscience.

Cicero, *Disputations,* II, 26

2 Where there is a bad conscience, some circumstance or other may provide one with impunity, but never with freedom from anxiety.

Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius,* 105

3 There is nothing so preoccupied, so distracted, so rent and torn by so many and such varied passions as an evil mind. For when it cherishes some dark design, it is tormented with hope, care and anguish of spirit, and even when it has accomplished its criminal purpose, it is racked by anxiety, remorse and the fear of all manner of punishments.

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria,* XII, 1

4 Conscience is said to witness, to bind, or stir up, and also to accuse, torment, or rebuke. And all these follow the application of knowledge or science to what we do, which application is made in three ways. One way in so far as we recognize that we have done or not done something: *Thy conscience knoweth that thou hast often spoken evil of others,* and according to this, conscience is said to witness. In another way, so far as through the conscience we judge that something should be done or not done, and in this sense, conscience is said to stir up or to bind. In the third way, so far as by conscience we judge that something done is well done or ill done, and in this sense conscience is said to excuse, accuse, or torment. Now, it is clear that all these things follow the actual application of knowledge to what we do.

Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I, 79, 13

5 The laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom. Each man, holding in inward veneration the opinions and the behavior approved and accepted around him, cannot break loose from them without remorse, or apply himself to them without self-satisfaction.

Montaigne, *Essays,* I, 23, Of Custom

6 *King Richard.* Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
Devised at first to keep the strong in awe:
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.

Shakespeare, *Richard III,* V, iii, 309

7 *Macbeth.* Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.

Shakespeare, *Macbeth,* III, ii, 19

8 Another doctrine repugnant to civil society is that whatsoever a man does against his conscience is sin; and it dependeth on the presumption of making himself judge of good and evil. For a man's conscience and his judgement is the same thing; and as the judgement, so also the conscience may be erroneous. Therefore, though he that is subject to no civil law sinneth in all he does against his conscience, because he has no other rule to follow but his own reason, yet it is not so with him that lives in a Commonwealth, because the law is the public conscience by which he hath already undertaken to be guided.

Hobbes, *Leviathan,* II, 29

9 *God.* And I will place within them as a guide
My Umpire *Conscience,* whom if they will hear,
Light after light well us'd they shall attain,
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.

Milton, *Paradise Lost,* III, 194

10 *Adam.* O Conscience, into what Abyss of fears
And horrors hast thou driv'n me; out of which
I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd!

Milton, *Paradise Lost,* X, 842

11 A good conscience is never lawless in the worst regulated state, and will provide those laws for itself, which the neglect of legislators hath forgotten to supply.

Fielding, *Tom Jones,* XVII, 3

12 Surely if there is any thing in this life which a man may depend upon, and to the knowledge of which he is capable of arriving upon the most in-

disputable evidence, it must be this very thing,—whether he has a good conscience or no.

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy,* II, 17

13 Whenever a man talks loudly against religion, always suspect that it is not his reason, but his passions, which have got the better of his creed. A bad life and a good belief are disagreeable and troublesome neighbours, and where they separate, depend upon it, 'tis for no other cause but quietness' sake.

Sterne, *Tristram Shandy,* II, 17

14 I need only consult myself with regard to what I wish to do; what I feel to be right is right, what I feel to be wrong is wrong; conscience is the best casuist; and it is only when we haggle with conscience that we have recourse to the subtleties of argument.

Rousseau, *Emile,* IV

15 There is . . . at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue, by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil; and it is this principle that I call conscience.

Rousseau, *Emile,* IV

16 *Johnson.* Conscience is nothing more than a conviction felt by ourselves of something to be done, or something to be avoided; and in questions of simple unperplexed morality, conscience is very often a guide that may be trusted. But before conscience can determine, the state of the question is supposed to be completely known. In questions of law, or of fact, conscience is very often confounded with opinion. No man's conscience can tell him the right of another man; they must be known by rational investigation or historical enquiry. Opinion, which he that holds it may call his conscience, may teach some men that religion would be promoted, and quiet preserved, by granting to the people universally the choice of their ministers. But it is a conscience very ill informed that violates the rights of one man, for the convenience of another.

Boswell, *Life of Johnson (May 1, 1773)*

17 Conscience is not a thing to be acquired, and it is not a duty to acquire it; but every man, as a moral being, has it originally within him. To be bound to have a conscience would be as much as to say to be under a duty to recognize duties. For conscience is practical reason which, in every case of law, holds before a man his duty for acquittal or condemnation; consequently it does not refer to an object, but only to the subject (affecting the moral feeling by its own act); so that it is an inevitable fact, not an obligation and duty. When, therefore, it is said, "This man *has* no conscience," what is meant is that he pays no heed to its dictates. For if he really had none, he would not take credit to himself for anything done according to duty, nor reproach himself with violation of duty, and therefore he would be unable even to conceive the duty of having a conscience.

I pass by the manifold subdivisions of conscience, and only observe what follows from what has just been said, namely, that there is no such thing as an *erring* conscience. No doubt it is possible sometimes to err in the objective judgement whether something is a duty or not; but I cannot err in the subjective whether I have compared it with my practical (here judicially acting) reason for the purpose of that judgement: for if I erred I would not have exercised practical judgement at all, and in that case there is neither truth nor error. *Unconscientiousness* is not want of conscience, but the propensity not to heed its judgement. But when a man is conscious of having acted according to his conscience, then, as far as regards guilt or innocence, nothing more can be required of him, only he is bound to enlighten his *understanding* as to what is duty or not; but when it comes or has come to action, then conscience speaks involuntarily and inevitably. To act conscientiously can, therefore, not be a duty, since otherwise it would be necessary to have a second conscience, in order to be conscious of the act of the first.

The duty here is only to cultivate our conscience, to quicken our attention to the voice of the internal judge, and to use all means to secure obedience to it, and is thus our indirect duty.

Kant, *Introduction to the Metaphysical Elements of Ethics,* XII

18 Conscience is an instinct to pass judgment upon ourselves in accordance with moral laws. It is not a mere faculty, but an instinct; and its judgment is not logical, but judicial. We have the faculty to judge ourselves logically in terms of laws of morality; we can make such use as we please of this faculty. But conscience has the power to summon us against our will before the judgment-seat to be judged on account of the righteousness or unrighteousness of our actions. It is thus an instinct and not merely a faculty of judgment, and it is an instinct to judge, not in the logical, but in the judicial sense.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics,* Conscience

19 He who has no immediate loathing for what is morally wicked, and finds no pleasure in what is morally good, has no moral feeling, and such a man has no conscience. He who goes in fear of being prosecuted for a wicked deed, does not reproach himself on the score of the wickedness of his misdemeanour, but on the score of the painful consequences which await him; such a one has no conscience, but only a semblance of it. But he who has a sense of the wickedness of the deed itself, be

the consequences what they may, has a conscience.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics,* Conscience

20 Conscience is the representative within us of the divine judgment-seat: it weighs our dispositions and actions in the scales of a law which is holy and pure; we cannot deceive it, and, lastly, we cannot escape it because, like the divine omnipresence, it is always with us.

Kant, *Lectures on Ethics,* Conscience

21 We may speak in a very lofty strain about duty, and talk of the kind is uplifting and broadens human sympathies, but if it never comes to anything specific it ends in being wearisome. Mind demands particularity and is entitled to it. But conscience is this deepest inward solitude with oneself where everything external and every restriction has disappeared—this complete withdrawal into oneself. As conscience, man is no longer shackled by the aims of particularity, and consequently in attaining that position he has risen to higher ground, the ground of the modern world, which for the first time has reached this consciousness, reached this sinking into oneself. The more sensuous consciousness of earlier epochs had something external and given confronting it, either religion or law. But conscience knows itself as thinking and knows that what alone has obligatory force for me is this that I think.

When we speak of conscience, it may easily be thought that, in virtue of its form, which is abstract inwardness, conscience is at this point without more ado true conscience. But true conscience determines itself to will what is absolutely good and obligatory and is this self-determination.

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right,* Additions, Pars. 136–137

22 A man could not have anything upon his conscience if God did not exist, for the relationship between the individual and God, the God-relationship, is the conscience, and that is why it is so terrible to have even the least thing upon one's conscience, because one is immediately conscious of the infinite weight of God.

Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* I, 3B

23 The conscience really does not, and ought not to monopolize the whole of our lives, any more than the heart or the head. It is as liable to disease as any other part. I have seen some whose consciences, owing undoubtedly to former indulgence, had grown to be as irritable as spoilt children, and at length gave them no peace.

Thoreau, *The Christian Fable*

24 I fully subscribe to the judgment of those writers who maintain that of all the differences between man and the lower animals, the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important. . . . It is summed up in that short but imperious word *ought,* so full of high significance. It is the most noble of all the attributes of man, leading him without a moment's hesitation to risk his life for that of a fellow-creature; or after due deliberation, impelled simply by the deep feeling of right or duty, to sacrifice it in some great cause.

Darwin, *Descent of Man,* I, 4

25 The moral sense follows, firstly, from the enduring and ever-present nature of the social instincts; secondly, from man's appreciation of the approbation and disapprobation of his fellows; and thirdly, from the high activity of his mental faculties, with past impressions extremely vivid; and in these latter respects he differs from the lower animals. Owing to this condition of mind, man cannot avoid looking both backwards and forwards, and comparing past impressions. Hence after some temporary desire or passion has mastered his social instincts, he reflects and compares the now weakened impression of such past impulses with the ever-present social instincts; and he then feels that sense of dissatisfaction which all unsatisfied instincts leave behind them, he therefore resolves to act differently for the future,—and this is conscience.

Darwin, *Descent of Man,* III, 21

26 It is not because men's desires are strong that they act ill; it is because their consciences are weak. There is no natural connection between strong impulses and a weak conscience. The natural connection is the other way. To say that one person's desires and feelings are stronger and more various than those of another, is merely to say that he has more of the raw material of human nature, and is therefore capable, perhaps of more evil, but certainly of more good. Strong impulses are but another name for energy. Energy may be turned to bad uses; but more good may always be made of an energetic nature, than of an indolent and impassive one. Those who have most natural feeling are always those whose cultivated feelings may be made the strongest. The same strong susceptibilities which make the personal impulses vivid and powerful, are also the source from whence are generated the most passionate love of virtue, and the sternest self-control. It is through the cultivation of these that society both does its duty and protects its interests: not by rejecting the stuff of which heroes are made, because it knows not how to make them.

Mill, *On Liberty,* III

27 The internal sanction of duty, whatever our standard of duty may be, is one and the same—a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty, which in properly cultivated moral natures rises, in the more serious cases, into shrinking from it as an impossibility.

This feeling, when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances, is the essence of Conscience.

Mill, *Utilitarianism,* III

28 I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness which man was bound to contract under the stress of the most radical change which he has ever experienced—that change, when he found himself finally imprisoned within the pale of society and of peace.

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals,* II, 16

29 What means does civilization make use of to hold in check the aggressiveness that opposes it, to make it harmless, perhaps to get rid of it? Some of these measures we have already come to know, though not yet the one that is apparently the most important. We can study it in the evolution of the individual. What happens in him to render his craving for aggression innocuous? Something very curious, that we should never have guessed and that yet seems simple enough. The aggressiveness is introjected, *internalized;* in fact, it is sent back where it came from, ie., directed against the ego. It is there taken over by a part of the ego that distinguishes itself from the rest as a super-ego, and now, in the form of *conscience,* exercises the same propensity to harsh aggressiveness against the ego that the ego would have liked to enjoy against others. The tension between the strict super-ego and the subordinate ego we call the *sense of guilt;* it manifests itself as the need for punishment. Civilization, therefore, obtains the mastery over the dangerous love of aggression in individuals by enfeebling and disarming it and setting up an institution within their minds to keep watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* VII

30 This increased sensitivity of morals in consequence of ill-luck has been illustrated by Mark Twain in a delicious little story: *The First Melon I ever Stole.* This melon, as it happened, was unripe. I heard Mark Twain tell the story himself in one of his lectures. After he had given out the title, he stopped and asked himself in a doubtful way: "Was it the first?" This was the whole story.

Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents,* VII

9.6 | *Good and Evil*

The terms good and evil are used in other contexts than those of ethical or moral discourse. According to *Genesis,* God surveying his creation judged it to be good, very good. Similar judgments are made by human artists, expressing their estimation of the excellence or perfection of the work produced. In this meaning of the word, beauty, excellence, or perfection represents a goodness inherent in the very being of the thing judged good, without regard to its bearing on human conduct or its value for human life. Such goodness is sometimes called "ontological," in contradistinction to the moral goodness of the things that are good for man or good in his behavior. It is in this ontological sense that a mouse is said to be more good than a pearl, though a pearl is more valuable to man.

As the reader will find in the quotations below, the human good or the good for man is sometimes discussed in the singular and sometimes spoken of as a class of goods. The reader will find passages that consider "the Good," or that assert that the only morally good thing in the whole world is a good will. On the other hand, the reader will find enumerations of the variety of goods, discussions of the order of goods and of the relation of one good to another, and different classifications of goods, such as the threefold division of them into external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul.

One distinction that is made by the an-