

## What is Freedom Anyway? Ralbag and R. Hasdai Crescas on Freewill

### 1. R. Hasdai Crescas, *Or Hashem*, II: 5, Intro

לפי שכבר קדם לנו שמיסודות הדת הוא הבחירה ושתהיה רשות כל אדם נתונה לו למה שלא תפול שם המצוה למוכרח ואנוס לפעול דבר מוגבל. אבל צריך שיהיה מונח לרצונו הפשוט לכל אחד מהצדיק ואז תהיה הצוואה לו ראוייה ומתיחסת

### 2. R. Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag), *Milhamot Hashem* III.4

ונאמר שכבר התבאר במה שקדם שאלו הענינים האפשריים הם מוגבלים ומסודרים מצד ואפשריים מצד אחר. ובהיות הענין כן, הוא מבואר כי הצד אשר ידעם בו הוא הצד אשר הם מסודרים ומוגבלים, ... כי מזה הצד אפשר שתפול בהם ידיעה. והצד אשר לא ידעם הוא הצד הם בו בלתי מסודרים, והוא הצד אשר הם בו אפשריים, כי מזה הצד אי אפשר שתפול ידיעה בהם. ואולם ידע מזה הענין שהם אפשריים שלא יגיעו מצד הבחירה אשר שם אותם באדם השם יתברך להשלים מה שחסר מן השמירה מפאת הגרמים השמימיים, כמו שהתבאר במאמר הקודם, ולא ידע איזה משני חלקי האפשר הוא יגיע, בצד שהם אפשריים, שאם היה הענין כן, לא היה בכאן אפשרי כלל. ואין העדר ידיעתו יתברך איזה משני חלקי האפשר יגיע במה שהוא אפשר חסרון לחקו, כי הידיעה השלמה בדבר היא כשיודע הדבר לפי מה שהוא עליו, וכאשר הושג על זולת מה שהוא עליו, הנה זה טעות לא ידיעה. ובהיות הענין כן, הנה הוא יודע באופן היותר שלם שאפשר אלו הדברים כלם, וזה כי הוא ידעם מצד שהם מסודרים בדרך ברור והגבלה, וידע עם זה מה שהם בו מן האפשרות מצד הבחירה לפי מה שהם עליו מהאפשרות,

### 3. A.J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity"

[http://www.informationphilosopher.com/solutions/philosophers/ayer/freedom\\_and\\_necessity.html](http://www.informationphilosopher.com/solutions/philosophers/ayer/freedom_and_necessity.html)

[W]hen [the moralist] makes it a condition of my being morally responsible that I should act freely, he does not wish to imply that it is purely a matter of chance that I act as I do. What he wishes to imply is that my actions are the result of my own free choice: and it is because they are the result of my own free choice that I am held to be morally responsible for them.

But now we must ask how it is that I come to make my choice. Either it is an accident that I choose to act as I do or it is not. If it is an accident, then it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise; and if it is merely a matter of chance that I did not choose otherwise, it is surely irrational to hold me morally responsible for choosing as I did. But if it is not an accident that I choose to do one thing rather than another, then presumably there is some causal explanation of my choice: and in that case we are led back to determinism....

Furthermore, to say that my actions proceed from my character or, more colloquially, that I act in character, is to say that my behaviour is consistent and to that extent predictable: and since it is, above all, for the actions that I perform in character that I am held to be morally responsible, it looks as if the admission of moral responsibility, so far from being incompatible with determinism, tends rather to presuppose it... It seems that if we are to retain this idea of moral responsibility, we must either show that men can be held responsible for actions which they do not do freely, or else find some way of reconciling determinism with the freedom of the will.

#### **4. Crescas, *Or Hashem*, II: 5.iii**

ולזה הוא מבואר שאין בכל הטענות ההם מצד העיון ומצד התורה מה שיחייב חיוב הדברים בבחינת עצמם ולזה היה האמת הגמור כפי מה שתחייבהו התורה והעיון שטבע האפשרי נמצא בדברים בבחינת עצמם לא בבחינת סבותם אלא שהפרסום הזה מזיק להמון למה שיחייבהו התנצלות לעושי הרעה ולא ירגשו שהעונש נמשך מהעברות כהמשך המסובב מן הסבה. ולזה היה מהחכמה האל יתברך לשומם - רוצה לומר למצות ולאזהרות - אמצעיים מניעים וסבות חזקות להישירי האדם אל ההצלחה האנושית. וזה אמנם לחסדו ולטובו הפשוט

## An Addendum

For me, a possible solution to the freewill v determinism issue, I find that the following texts contain ideas that might yield an interesting and potentially convincing approach...

### 5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007), 466 (B564)

The difficulty which then meets us, in dealing with the question regarding nature and freedom, is whether freedom is possible at all, and if it be possible, whether it can exist along with the universality of the natural law of causality. Is it a truly disjunctive proposition to say that every effect in the world must arise *either* from nature *or* from freedom; or must we not rather say that in one and the same event, in different relations, both can be found? That all events in the sensible world stand in thoroughgoing connection in accordance with unchangeable laws of nature is an established principle of the Transcendental Analytic, and allows of no exception. The question, therefore, can only be whether freedom is completely excluded by this inviolable rule, or whether an effect, notwithstanding its being thus determined in accordance with nature, may not at the same time be grounded in freedom.

### 6.R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kol Dodi Dofek* tr. David Z. Gordon (Jersey City NY: Ktav, 2006)

Judaism has always distinguished between an “Existence of Fate” and an “Existence of Destiny,” between the “I” which is the progeny of fate and the “I” which is the child of destiny. In this distinction lies hidden the Jewish doctrine of suffering.

What is an Existence of Fate? It is an existence of duress, in the nature of “against your will do you live” (M. Avot 4:22). It is a factual existence, simply one line in a [long] chain of mechanical causality, devoid of significance, direction, and purpose, and subordinate to the forces of the environment into whose midst the individual is pushed, unconsulted by Providence. The “I” of fate emerges as an object. As an object, man appears as acted upon and not as actor. He is acted upon through his passive collision with the objective outside, as one object confronting another. The “I” of fate is hurled into a sealed dynamic that is always turned outward. Man’s existence is hollow, lacking inner content, substance, and independence. The “I” of fate denies itself completely, because the sense of selfhood and objectification cannot dwell in tandem.

...

What is an Existence of Destiny? It is an active existence, when man confronts the environment into which he has been cast with an understanding of his uniqueness and value, freedom and capacity; without compromising his integrity and independence in his struggle with the outside world. The slogan of the “I” of destiny is: “Against your will you are born, and against your will you die” (M. Avot 4:22), but by your free will do you live. Man is born as an object, dies as an object, but it is within his capability to live as a “subject” — as a creator and innovator who impresses his individual imprimatur on his life and breaks out of a life of instinctive, automatic behavior into one of creative activity. According to Judaism, man’s mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny — an existence that is passive and influenced into an existence that

is active and influential; an existence of compulsion, perplexity, and speechlessness into an existence full of will, vision, and initiative. The blessing of the Holy One to his creation fully defines man's role: "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). Conquer the environment and subjugate it. If you do not rule over it, it will enslave you. Destiny bestows on man a new status in God's world. It bestows upon man a royal crown, and thus he becomes God's partner in the work of creation.