

The question of free will



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Moral responsibility

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Introduction

What can one do with the question of free will when so much has already been written about it? Why add to the endless speculations on the topic? I chose to write this paper in response to a conversation on free will which took place on Tree of Life Spiritual Wellbeing Facebook. The first thought that came to mind in response to the conversation was, "I do not think in terms of free will. I think in terms of authenticity. I wonder why that is?" This paper offers my response to that question. I chose to write because writing clarifies my own understanding. I choose to offer my response within the public arena, by way of continuing to engage in the general discussion on the topic.

Ideas do not form within a vacuum. They form within a particular context, in response to a particular question. I have outlined the question in the above paragraph. Therefore, this paper will progress in the following manner: The first section presents two definitions regarding the idea of free will. Such definitions shed light on the free will VS determinism debate, and in this way, set the boundary for the exploration. *Determinism* here refers to the belief that everything is caused. Drawing from both definitions, the phrases: "authors of their own actions," "moral responsibility," "control," and "determinism" further refine the boundary. Those four phrases weave their way through the paper, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly.

The second section outlines something of both my personal context and three significant aspects within my broader context which shape my thinking in response to the question of free will. The third contextual aspect is perhaps the most telling. It involves an emerging new cultural Story of meaning. The fundamental orientation of a new Story, along with two core tenets, unearths a source for moral responsibility beyond that of free will. Therefore, in terms of the free will VS determinism debate, the second section would seem to be weighted more towards determinism.

The third section introduces the idea of authenticity in the form of the inner freedom to make conscious choices and assume personal responsibility. The framework of authenticity as presented, which also includes the potential for self transcendence, reveals that the authoring of our own actions takes place both within and beyond the boundary of determinism. Therefore, the idea that our thoughts and actions are wholly determined by external conditions or fate does not ring true for me. As a result, the free will VS determinism debate is not even within my horizon. Authentic living is where I choose to put my focus.

The paper concludes by returning to the four phrases listed above and outlines how they may be understood within the framework of authenticity.

1. The definitions which form the boundary

The following two definitions form an overall boundary for my exploration into the question of free will.

What is free will?

"The ability to choose, think, and act voluntarily. For many philosophers, to believe in free will is to believe that human beings can be the authors of

their own actions and to reject the idea that human actions are determined by external conditions or fate." www.dictionary.com

What is the problem of free will?

"The classic problem of free will is to reconcile an element of freedom with the apparent determinism in a world of causes and effects, a world of events in a great causal chain." Also: "the problem of free will has been intimately connected with the question of moral responsibility. Most ancient thinkers on the problem were trying to show that we humans have control over our decisions, that our actions depend on us and not that they are predetermined by fate, by arbitrary gods, by logical necessity or by natural causal determinism." www.informationphilosopher.com

Note: I chose to contain my exploration of free will to the context of people who experience the normal ups and downs in life, rather than the exceptional and/or traumatic. And yet, the topic of people who are so affected by life circumstances that their reasoning is impaired and as a result crimes are committed, and a judicial system which centres on retribution based on the idea of free will, is an important one; one that as a society we are called to address. In this regard, my only comment at this point in time is that I would follow the lead of Sam Harris, American author, philosopher, and neuroscientist in *Free Will*: "And if we remain committed to seeing people as people, we must find some notion of personal responsibility that fits the facts."

2. The context which shapes my thinking

2.1 Personal context

This paper is authored by someone, namely me. Who do I currently know myself to be? First and foremost, I know myself to be a human being.



Added to that, I was born and continue to live in suburban Melbourne, Australia. Therefore, I think and write within a western cultural mindset. Also, I am a non-indigenous, middle-class, later middle aged woman. I am daughter, sister, wife, mother, and grandmother. My vocation is spiritual practice education. I was born into a western protestant Christian religious tradition, and whilst such a tradition no longer features in my meaning making, I continue to draw from its wisdom teachings.

As well as the personal context listed above, there are three significant contextual aspects which shape my exploration of the question of free will. The first is spiritual practice education. The second is a contemplative orientation. The third is an emerging new cultural Story.

2.2 Spiritual practice education

Spiritual practice education centres on the intention to, and practice of, living meaningfully at any given time and place in history. *Meaningfully* here refers to the experience of personal identity, purpose, and belonging in the world. *Experience* here is understood to be, in the words of John Shea, theologian and storyteller in *Stories of God*: "the reciprocal flow between the self and its environments." Therefore, we humans do not passively receive meaning from our environment; we construct meaning through reflecting on, and interpreting, our experience of ourselves-in-life. Although such interpretation is often regarded as fact, it is simply our

interpretation of the facts as we currently understand them, determined by our current worldview.

Our reflection on, and interpretation of ourselves-in-life, takes form in a unified way through our Story. Our Story unifies the responses we discover, both individually and collectively, to the time honoured and time specific spiritual questions we pose; questions around identity, purpose and belonging. The time honoured questions are ones like: "Where did we come from?" "Why are we here?" "Where do we go when we die?" One time specific cultural question is: "what does it mean to be human in an evolving universe?" We pose our spiritual questions within the light of our current knowledge of reality, i.e., our current knowledge of how the world came to be/continues to be, and how the human mind/body works. Therefore, our Story involves the subjective and intersubjective experience of reality, as reality is currently understood.

In light of the above, a Story is meaningful when it coheres with our current knowledge and lived experience. In turn, a coherent Story is the source of our identity, purpose, and experience of connection and belonging in the world. Connection and belonging are experienced within the three realms of the intrapersonal, i.e., inner wholeness; the interpersonal, i.e., authentic communal belonging; and the transpersonal, i.e., a big picture view which responds coherently with our spiritual questions.

Our Story also determines our values system, which in turn, shapes our actions, i.e., the way we live within, and act upon, our world. Therefore, our Story is the source of our experience of who we know ourselves to be in our world, and how we will act.

In turn, spiritual practice education offers principles and practices for naming and claiming a coherent Story of meaning. Hence, the idea of Story lay at the heart of this exploration of free will. At the same time, the idea of Story as presented reveals that it is Story, not free will, which determines our actions.

spiritual practice
education ~
principles and
practices for naming
and claiming a
coherent Story
of meaning



our Story, not free will, determines our values system,
which in turn, shapes our actions

photo by Kaye Twining

2.3 A contemplative orientation

My engagement in the field of spiritual practice education involves a contemplative orientation. Therefore, a contemplative orientation is the second contextual aspect. Put simply, a contemplative orientation involves choosing to let go the desire to force and/or control the process of discovering of a coherent Story. Instead the choice is made to engage in the discovery process with a Zen Buddhist notion of a *beginner's mindset*. According to Shunryu Suzuki, Japanese Zen monk and teacher who founded San Francisco Zen Centre, in *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, a beginner's mind is: "Empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities." As such, a beginner's mindset encompasses an attitude of openness, curiosity, non-judgmental exploration, and being comfortable but not complacent, with the unknown until it is known.

A beginner's mindset may also be understood through brain research as outlined by Daniel Siegal, clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and Executive Director of the Mindsight Institute, in *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human*. Siegal maintained there are two areas of brain circuitry which receive and process information. The first involves: "the filters of prior experience" with the resultant preconceptions which shape our response to ongoing lived experience. The second involves: "a conduit of sensory experience . . . where we are seeing the unique aspects of what is in front of us." Such sensory experience involves whole body awareness in the form of noticing what is stirring within both body and mind in response to ongoing lived experience. Therefore, if we intentionally unhook from the first way of processing, we may drop into the second, where we are able to receive and process information from a beginner's mindset; where we allow whole body awareness to be the entry point for our exploration.

a contemplative
orientation
involves a
beginner's
mindset and
whole body
awareness

Note: How can we intentionally unhook? Meditation and mindfulness practices allow us to unhook from the first way of processing.

A contemplative orientation also involves patience because according to Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh: "only when conditions are sufficient" within us, will insight and understanding emerge. Therefore, we can only perceive that which we are ready to perceive. So, a contemplative orientation requires that we be intentional about engaging, without seeking control of the process, or the outcome. Also, the process cannot be rushed. We simply pose our open ended questions and as the poet Rilke declared, we live into the responses.

In light of the above, a contemplative orientation involves a reciprocal process whereby we pose our open ended questions, do the research with a beginner's mindset, and then metaphorically *wait for insights and understandings to emerge within us*, much in the manner described by Sam Harris: "if you pay attention to your inner life you will see that the emergence of choices, efforts and intentions is a fundamentally mysterious process." As such, a contemplative orientation is not experienced as being controlled by either internal or external conditions, neither is it experienced as being in control of the process. Rather, it is experienced as participating in a mysterious reciprocal process.

The above understanding of a contemplative orientation gives rise to a question for me: "Does a contemplative orientation in-and-of-itself strike at the heart of the idea of free will?" Drawing from the definition of free will presented at the commencement of this paper, it would seem that free will relies on the idea of having control over our choosing, thinking and actions. In contrast, a contemplative orientation requires that we are active participants in the mysterious process of discovery, however we do not seek to control the outcome. Therefore, if free will requires control perhaps a contemplative orientation dissolves the idea of free will.

2.4 An emerging new western cultural Story of meaning

The third contextual aspect which shapes my thinking involves an emerging new western cultural Story of meaning. Before outlining the fundamental orientation of a new Story and two foundational tenets, I will offer something of my understanding of the background to this contextual aspect.

2.4.1 Background

Over thirty years ago I attended a conference. The one piece of information I remembered from that conference was that every three to five hundred years, western culture undergoes a major shift in worldview. Then, some time back I came across the following quotation from Peter Drucker, Austrian-born American, management consultant, educator, and author, www.druckerinstitute.com:

"Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society - its world view, its basic values, its social and political structures, its key institutions - rearrange itself. We are currently living through such a time."

Drucker's understanding of our time and place in history concurs with that of the late Thomas Berry, American Catholic priest, cultural historian and ecotheologian, in *The Dream of the Earth* and *The Great Work: our way into the future*, where he argued that we were in between stories. In a similar manner, Joanna Macy, environmental activist, author, scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology, with Molly Brown, educator and author, in *The Work that Reconnects*, named our time and place as: "The Great Turning." Therefore, there is a growing awareness that we are entering a new cultural era, giving rise to a new cultural Story.

2.4.2 The question giving rise to a new cultural Story

According to Berry, the new Story involves reinventing [reStorying] the human: "at the species level - with critical reflection, within the community of life-systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story and shared dream." Furthermore Berry argued that such a reStorying take place within the light of current knowledge of: "how the world came to be and our place of belonging within it." Therefore, at the heart of a new western cultural Story is the question: "as a species, what now is our identity, purpose, and experience of belonging within the big picture universe Story?"

Note: According to www.universetoday.com, the universe Story is thought to be 13.8 billion years in the making.

2.4.3 The fundamental orientation of a new Story

In terms of our human place of belonging within such a big picture universe Story, we are now awakening to the insight that we humans are

not the central protagonist. Therefore, within a new Story the human species has been decentred and in turn, so has the anthropocentric view. *Anthropocentric* here means regarding humans as the universe's more important entity. In this regard, Professor Brian Cox, English physicist, with Andrew Cohen, American spiritual teacher, in *The Human Universe*, argued: "the laws of nature remind us that we are not special and our existence in the grand scheme of things is understandable." Thus, we can no longer legitimately view ourselves as the centre piece around which, and for whom, Life evolves. As a result, we now know ourselves to be one species among many. Professor Cox names this experience as: "the rise to insignificance." Such an idea is new to present western societies.

At the same time, Cox and Cohen argued: "the human race is worth saving because we are a rare and infinitely beautiful natural phenomenon." So, as a beautiful natural phenomenon, we humans do belong in the universe Story. Still, to discover and take up our place of belonging now, we westerners require a new fundamental orientation beyond anthropocentrism. In line with such understandings, the fundamental orientation of a new cultural Story is: *we each stand together as one*; one human community, within one Earth community, all living on one planet we have named Earth.

fundamental
orientation ~
we each stand
together as one

Note: One factor which has given rise to such an orientation is the photos taken by astronauts of the Earth viewed from the moon. Such views of Earth as a small ball in an expanse of darkness, with visible land and water mass which have no identifiable national or state borders, awakened a new consciousness within many people.



Earth rise – Apollo 11

2.4.4 The shift in orientation from the old to new Story

The anthropocentric view within the previous cultural Story gave rise to the idea of individualism. *Individualism* here refers to: a social theory favouring freedom of action for individuals over collective or state control (en.oxforddictionaries.com). As such, within the previous Story, the values system was geared towards individual rights and responsibilities, and the flourishing of the individual. In contrast, the new Story, orientated around oneness, gives rise to a values system geared towards *the flourishing of all life*. Such a values system, in-and-of-

itself, calls forth personal moral responsibility. As a result, there is a natural reciprocity taking place, beyond the need for free will.

a values system geared towards the flourishing of all life ~ calls forth personal moral responsibility

Natural reciprocity can be further understood within the knowledge that as a natural phenomenon of the evolutionary process, we participate in the ongoing nature of Life itself. In this regard, spiritual mentor and author, Anne Hillman in *Awakening the Energies of Love: Discovering Fire for the Second time*, argued: "We are life itself. Not separate from it." Therefore, we now know ourselves to be participants within the very nature of Life itself. Such a notion gains support by Bob Berman, American astronomer and Robert Lanza, American medical doctor and scientist in *Biocentrism: how Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe*, where it is argued that the first principle of biocentrism is: "what we perceive as reality is a process that involves our consciousness." Drawing from such an understanding, we are participants in the natural reciprocal nature of Life.

2.4.5 Is such a shift in orientation actually new?

A question could be posed regarding the term *new* with regard to the understanding that we each stand together as one and that we all participate in this venture called life; in short an orientation around oneness and participation. Similar understandings have been part of the Dreaming, the Story of meaning developed by the Australian indigenous peoples over 40,000 years ago. For example: in *Australian Dreaming: 40 000 Years of Aboriginal History*, compiled and edited by Jennifer Isaacs: "According to Aboriginal belief, all life as it is known today - human, animal, bird and fish - is part of one vast, unchanging network of relationships which can be traced back to the great Spirit Ancestors." Therefore, it would seem that the orientation of oneness and participation is at least 40,000 years old.

Furthermore, the mysticism streams within the religious traditions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity held an understanding of oneness. For example: Islam - the poet Rumi in the 13th Century, Judaism - the Kabbalah, and Christianity - Julian of Norwich, writing in the 14th Century. Also the pantheistic tradition believes that: "God is everything and everything is God (www.philosophy.talk.org). Additionally, western philosophical traditions have debated non-dualism. Also, Eastern spiritual teachings regarding non-dualism have been around from the seventh century, perhaps even much earlier. So, what could possibly be new?

Firstly, the new western cultural Story is primarily geared towards reStorying at the level of the species. Such an orientation breaks through and transcends the fundamental orientation of anthropocentrism and individualism within the previous cultural Story. Even though the new fundamental orientation involves oneness and participation at the level of species, the details of such participation/purpose at this point in time are still relatively unknown. Therefore, even though the themes of oneness and participation have endured since ancient civilizations, who we know ourselves to be and how we experience belonging as a species in response to oneness and participation, is new for us, in our time in history.

What is new ~
1. restorying at the level of species

Secondly, the context in which we westerners are reposing our spiritual questions into the themes of oneness and participation is new. For

example, Brian Swimme, professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies and Evelyn Tucker, senior lecturer and research scholar at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Yale Divinity School, in *Journey of the Universe* argued: "With our empirical observations expanded by modern science, we are now realizing that our universe is a single immense, energy event that began as a tiny speck that has unfolded over time." Therefore, we are now reposing our spiritual questions within the universe Story as it is now understood on macro level through the sciences including astronomy and cosmology and the micro level through the sciences including quantum physics, biology, and neuroscience. This is new for us.

What is new ~
 2. the context of the macro and micro levels of ongoing scientific research

In light of the above, we are seeking a response to our spiritual questions within the context of the universe Story, and seeking to reStory ourselves on the level of species. As a result, it is as if we were seeking an understanding of oneness and participation, in the words of poet T.S.Eliot, "as if for the first time." Thus, for us in our culture, in our time in history, we will discover the experience of oneness and participation as if for the first time.



we will discover the experience of oneness and participation as if for the first time

photo by Kaye Twining

2.4.6 Two tenets which form a foundation

Further to the fundamental orientation of a new Story are two core tenets: 1. the principle of both/and, and 2. an integral framework for understanding ourselves-in-the-world.

2.4.6.1 The principle of both/and

I first came across the principle of both/and through the writings of Diamuid O'Murchu, Irish social psychologist, drawing from Celtic spirituality and quantum physics, in *Quantum Theology: the Spiritual Implications of the New Physics*. The principle of both/and can be understood through the metaphor of the holon. O'Murchu argued that:

"a holon is a whole made of its own parts, yet itself is part of a larger whole. And each holon has two opposite tendencies. One tendency

is a self-assertive desire to preserve its individual autonomy. The other tendency is an integrative tendency to function as part of the larger whole."

The holon metaphor gives rise to the paradoxical notion that we are *both* unique beings seeking self realization in the terms of personal identity, purpose and belonging in the world, *and* we are intrinsically connected within, and responsible for, a much wider web of relationships. Such an understanding now becomes the foundation for moral responsibility, rather than the idea of free will.

The principle of both/and breaks through the limitations of the dualistic principle of either/or which was embedded within the previous cultural Story. When the ideas of free will and determinism sat within the principle of either/or, it gave rise to the understanding that they were dualistic opposites pitted against each other. Within such a context, the problem of free will was intimately connected with the question of individual moral responsibility.

the principle of both/and offers a different context for the exploration of moral responsibility

In contrast, the principle of both/and offers a different context from which to explore moral responsibility, beyond that of the free will VS determinism debate. The foundation for moral responsibility within the principle of both/and is the knowledge that we are *both* unique beings *and* intrinsically connected to, and responsible for, a much wider web of relationships.



we now know ourselves to be *both* unique beings
and part of a much wider web of relationships.

photo by Kaye Twining

Note: In light of such an understanding, it is important to recognize that such an idea does not equate to losing personal uniqueness. Rather, we now seek self realization within the knowledge that we are intrinsically part of a much larger whole.

2.4.6.2 An integral framework of understanding

Drawing from the principle of both/and, the second tenet within a new cultural Story is that of an integral framework for understanding ourselves-in-the-world. I first came across the idea of an integral framework through the work of Ken Wilber, American writer on transpersonal psychology.

See: Ken Wilber et al, *Integral Life Practice: a 21st-Century blueprint for Physical Health, Emotional Balance, Mental Clarity, and Spiritual Awakening*. The idea has gained momentum and now there are Integral Institutes in California and Australia.

According to Ken Wilber et al, an integral framework is one that both "transcends and includes" all human knowledge and belief systems, from ancient times until the present. As such, an integral framework takes into account both the cumulative and emergent nature of knowledge and beliefs. An integral framework offers a new lens for viewing ourselves-in-life which takes into account human history as a whole, within the awareness that history is forever and continually in the making. As a result, within an integral framework a coherent Story is sought within the context of the wider human tradition. Consequently, an integral framework supports the reStorying of the human at the level of species.

a lens which takes
into account human
history as a whole

Whilst an integral framework does not relate directly to the topic of free will, it is a foundational tenet of a new Story. Also, an integral framework as presented, grounds the understanding that many ideas have emerged and dissolved over the span of human history. Is free will is one such idea?

Note: an integral framework offers a new way of integrating the wisdom of bygone eras beyond either wholly accepting, or wholly rejecting the belief systems which arose around the wisdom teaching. In this regard, Raimon Panikkar, Spanish Roman Catholic priest, scholar of comparative religion, and a proponent of inter-religious dialogue, as quoted in *The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living*, argued: "our task and responsibility are to assimilate the wisdom of bygone traditions and having made it our own, to allow it to grow. Life is neither repetition nor continuation. It is growth, which implies at once a continuance and rupture. Life is creation." In line with Panikkar's teaching, in each new era of human history, we are required to repose our spiritual questions within the light of human knowledge and beliefs, past and present.

Summary ~ 2. The context which shapes my thinking

Firstly, I chose to explore the question of free will in response to the question: "why do I not think in terms of free will?" Secondly, I write from and into a western cultural worldview; a culture which seeks truth about reality predominantly through ongoing scientific research; a culture which, according to a number of authors, is in between Stories of meaning due to such ongoing scientific research.

Three significant contextual aspects shape my thinking: spiritual practice education which centres on meaning; a contemplative orientation which centres on a beginner's mindset, and an emerging new cultural Story. The fundamental orientation within a new cultural Story is that of oneness and participation; an orientation experienced as participating in the reciprocal nature of Life itself. Such an orientation calls forth moral responsibility. Whilst the orientation of oneness and participation within a new Story is not new, our current engagement with such an orientation is; we are exploring oneness and participation as if for the first time.

Of the two core tenets within a new Story, the principle of both/and offers a different context for the exploration of moral responsibility; one beyond the free will VS determinism debate. The second tenet, an

integral framework, allows us to integrate the wisdom of the ages whilst also transcending particular belief systems which are no longer coherent with current knowledge and lived experience. An integral framework also reveals that many ideas have emerged and dissolved over time.

Within the boundary of the two definitions of free will presented at the commencement of this paper, it would seem that we cannot be, and/or be held morally responsible, if we do not have free will. It is as if moral responsibility and free will are two sides of the one coin. And yet, within the context that shapes my thinking, the idea of free will, and in turn the problem of free will, simply dissolves. Therefore, the question of free will is not within my horizon.



photo by Kaye Twining

3. If not free will, then what?

Even though the question of free will is not within my horizon, the question of authentic living within a new Story is. My exploration into that question to date has given rise to the following understanding: *Authentic living refers to the ability to make conscious choices regarding the way we will live, in light of a values system which seeks the flourishing of all.*

Therefore, authentic living within a new Story involves the ability to author our own actions and be morally responsible, even within the knowledge that many influences, both internal and external, also shape our actions.

In this regard, Harris maintained: "we are steering our lives whilst knowing that we are ultimately being steered." In this way, the idea of authentic living draws from the principle of both/and, involving a reciprocal process.

the principle of
both/and, involving
a reciprocal process

The following offers a further foundation for the idea of authenticity and something of how authenticity may be experienced in daily life.

Note: Whilst the previous section seemed to be weighted towards determinism, this section on authenticity demonstrates that it is possible to make conscious choices for which we take personal responsibility, both within and beyond the classification of determinism.

3.1 A foundation for the idea of authenticity

As mentioned previously, when the conversation on free will commenced on Facebook, the term *authenticity* came to my mind. Why, probably because I had recently written a paper on the topic of authentic Self. Furthermore, it seemed to me that authenticity could offer a different framework for understanding personal responsibility within the knowledge that many forces influence our thinking and actions. Then, as part of my research into my question of why a belief in free will did not engage me, I turned once again to the work of the late Bernard Lonergan, Canadian, Jesuit priest, philosopher, and theologian in *Method in Theology*. I had studied *Method in Theology* in its entirety as one of the subjects for my Master of Arts Degree in the field of spirituality.

It had been quite a number of years since I had studied Lonergan's book and I could not remember his position on free will. So I went to the index and looked for the term. I was surprised that the term was virtually non-existent. Rather, the term that his work centred on was authenticity. To quote Lonergan: "it is the highly complex business of authenticity and unauthenticity that has to replace the overly simple notion of will as arbitrary power." Surprise, surprise, he agrees with me! Or, could it be that his work had more impact on me at the time than I was consciously aware?

Lonergan raised the idea of authenticity within the context of both freedom and responsibility. Furthermore, freedom and responsibility were viewed within the context of: 1. horizons of meaning and 2. the intrinsic pattern within human consciousness.

3.1.1 Horizons of meaning

Lonergan argued that we each view ourselves-in-life through a particular horizon. He maintained that: "a horizon is our field of vision and our field of knowledge," and as such it both forms and limits the way we "receive and interpret knowledge about our world." Our personal horizons do not arise within a vacuum. They are conditioned by the norms and beliefs of our families, cultures, religious/spiritual traditions, and ongoing lived experience. Therefore, we do not view reality as it is, rather our view is always mediated by meaning. Hence Lonergan's use of the phrase, *horizon of meaning*. As a result, our horizon of meaning, not free will, shapes the way we author our actions and our understanding of moral responsibility.

our horizon of meaning
shapes the way we
author our actions and
our understanding of
moral responsibility

At the same time, whilst at first glance the idea of horizons of meaning seems to fit neatly within determinism, this is not so. Although we always perceive ourselves-in-our-world through an horizon of meaning, we are not locked into a particular one. Rather, we each have the ability to break through and transcend the limitations of our current horizon. In this regard Lonergan argued that self transcendence takes place on the levels of the moral, the intellectual, and the religious. In terms of the moral, self transcendence: "changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values." In terms of the intellectual, self transcendence involves: "a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity and human

we are able to break
through and transcend
the limitations of a
current horizon

knowledge." In terms of the religious, self transcendence involves: "being grasped by ultimate concern . . . It is total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations. But it is such a surrender, not as an act, but as a dynamic state that is prior to and principle of subsequent acts. It is revealed in retrospect as an under-tow of existential consciousness." Therefore, based on such an understanding of self transcendence, Lonergan argued that humanity: "achieves authenticity through self transcendence." Such an understanding of self transcendence dissolves the idea of determinism as the sole cause for our actions, in that we are more than cause and effect.

Note: Within the context of this paper, the term *self-surrender* does not involve the act of erasing our sense of Selfhood. Rather, *self-surrender* involves a dynamic state from which we relinquish our attachment to, and protection of, a wholly separate, solid, non-changing, fixed identity. In turn, we experience the inner freedom to engage in the practice of self transcendence.



artwork by grandson, Ethan

3.1.2 The intrinsic pattern within human consciousness

If not free will or determinism, what is the source of the potential for self transcendence? Lonergan argued that the source is an intrinsic pattern within human consciousness which allows each of us to break through and transcend the limitations of our current horizon of meaning. Such a pattern involves the four transcendental precepts of: 1. being attentive to lived experience; 2. being intelligent in understanding; 3. being reasonable in coming to decisions; 4. being responsible in carrying out such decisions. Lonergan maintained:

the source of self transcendence is the intrinsic pattern within human consciousness

"Being attentive includes attention to human affairs, [including the joys, sorrows, fears, and disappointments experienced]. Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities. Being reasonable includes the rejection of what probably would not work but also the acknowledgement of what probably would. Being responsible includes basing one's decisions and choices on an unbiased evaluation of short-term and long-term costs and benefits to oneself, to one's group, to other groups."

Even though the above pattern is intrinsic within human consciousness, we are required to intentionally *tune into* it, if we want to participate in the

ongoing experience of self transcendence. Lonergan named such a *tuning in* as the transcendental method of conscious intentionality.

Added to the four precepts, is the human ability and drive to wonder and to pose questions. In this regard Lonergan maintained: "while human beings as a species are no different from the higher animals in terms of substance, the one striking difference is the human capacity to wonder, to question, and to discover responses." Such an ability and desire to question lay at the heart of the practice of self transcendence.

The pattern of human consciousness as presented by Lonergan lay at the heart of a contemplative orientation. Also, that pattern is the source of the potential for self transcendence. Furthermore, the intrinsic pattern within human consciousness is the source of being able to author our own actions and the basis of moral responsibility, by way of making conscious choices in accord with our values system. Therefore, we are able to make conscious choices that are both within and beyond the domain of determinism.

making conscious
choices in accord
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system ~ both
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the domain of
determinism.

Summary ~ 3.1 A foundation for the idea of authenticity

The idea of authenticity offers a different framework for understanding personal responsibility within the knowledge that many forces influence our thinking and actions. Drawing from the research of Lonergan, authenticity is raised within the context of both inner freedom and communal responsibility. Inner freedom and communal responsibility are contextualized by the understanding that to be human is to view ourselves through a particular horizon of meaning. Such an horizon of meaning shapes our Story, which in turn shapes our values system, and subsequent actions. Therefore, our horizon of meaning shapes the authoring of our actions and our moral responsibility.

Does not such an understanding sit wholly within the idea of determinism? No, within such a context, the idea of authenticity is founded upon the human potential for ongoing self transcendence on the levels of the moral, the intellectual, and the religious. That we are able to break through and transcend the limitations of a present horizon dissolves the idea that determinism is the sole cause of our actions. Thus, the idea of authenticity means that we can make conscious choices both within and beyond the domain of determinism.

The source of self transcendence is the intrinsic pattern within human consciousness. Within that pattern we intentionally pose our open ended questions and seek responses which hold true within our current lived experience. Even though the source is intrinsic to human consciousness, if we choose to be intentional about the practice of self transcendence, we are required to *tune into* the way the pattern of human consciousness is operating within us.

3.2 The experience of authenticity in daily life

Lonergan argued that the experience of authenticity is one of both inner freedom and communal responsibility. Communal responsibility, within the context of this paper, is experienced as a conscious choice to live from and into a values system which seeks the flourishing of all; to take personal responsibility for the way we live within, and act upon, our world.

Authentic communal responsibility emerges from the experience of

inner freedom. *Freedom* here does not relate to the *will*. Rather, inner freedom refers to the experience of self awareness giving rise to personal authority and integrity. As a result, choices and actions are less likely to be driven by habitual thought/feeling/acting patterns.

Within the light of personal authority and integrity, choices and actions are consciously discerned in response to current lived experience. Therefore, it is an orientation of personal inner freedom, rather than free will, which governs authentic communal responsibility.

inner freedom ~
personal authority and
integrity to discern
choices, in the light of
current lived experience

Harris concurs somewhat with Lonergan regarding the experience of inner freedom. Harris declared: "becoming sensitive to the background causes of one's thoughts and feelings, can paradoxically allow for greater creative control over one's life." In line with Harris' declaration, I have found that my engagement with Lonergan's method of conscious intentionality has allowed me to become sensitive to many of the background causes of my thoughts and feelings; thoughts and feelings which have included the whole range of affective experience, i.e., joys, delights, pleasures, sorrows, disappointments, distresses, angers, fears and frustrations. In turn, I am also able to experience creative control in the form of a sense of awe and wonder, adventure, and joyful humility of making conscious choices within the context of participating in the dynamic, reciprocal flow between inner freedom and communal responsibility.



an orientation of personal inner freedom, rather than free will,
governs authentic communal responsibility

photo by Kaye Twining

Note: One practice for engaging in the ongoing process of experiencing authenticity is compassionate Self enquiry, as posted on the Tree of Life Spiritual Wellbeing website. This practice draws from Lonergan's method of conscious intentionality.

3.2.1 One experience of authentic living

One experience of participating in the dynamic, reciprocal flow of

authentic living is as follows: Did I choose to write this paper? Yes, I did. Still, the choice to write was in response to an invitation, out of the blue, from a Tree of Life Spiritual Wellbeing Facebook participant to write on the topic of free will. My initial response was that the topic of free will was not my question, therefore I would not write about it. Rather, I would give a little thought to why it was not my question, given the implications for moral responsibility that the idea of free will seemed connected to.

As I allowed my question to wander around in my conscious awareness, I noticed a felt sense of restlessness within my body and mind. I also noticed a felt sense of annoyance relating to: "Free will is not my question. Why won't this let go of me?" In response, I tried to write a short reply; I was looking for a quick fix. I sat down at the computer a number of times and commenced writing, but my thoughts went in circles, like a dog chasing its tale. I had ideas, so many ideas, but not well formed enough at that stage. So I chose to leave behind the idea of a quick fix and settle into the contemplative stance and see where that *took* me.

Then the Facebook participant offered the resource of Sam Harris' *Free Will*. I had not heard of Harris before this. I chose to read it. I found Harris' booklet intriguing, especially that of his experience of a loss in the belief in free will. He declared: "I think losing the sense of free will has only improved my ethics - by increasing my feelings of compassion and forgiveness and diminishing my sense of entitlement to the fruits of my own good luck." Also I was interested in his thoughts around the idea that the judicial system required an idea of free will because of the notion of retribution. Harris' booklet gave me much to think about. Also, I found a number of Harris' ideas dovetailed with those of Lonergan, even though Harris' horizon was more in line with determinism and Lonergan's horizon was framed by a religious tradition.

Regarding, Lonergan, I had been exposed to the four transcendental precepts during my Graduate Diploma training as a spiritual director in 2003. Then a number of years later, when undertaking my Masters Degree, I had to pick two units of study as well as write a thesis. As I looked at the subjects on offer, none really seemed that appealing, so I chose one about the human good, not realizing that the unit involved an in-depth study of Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. When it came to writing an essay on a range of topics *chosen* by the lecturer, my heart sank. None of the topics resonated. So I chose to be pragmatic and simply choose one of the topics and hope that I could write an essay that at least gained a *pass* grading. I was not looking forward to such a prospect in terms of the writing and the grading.

Then, as I was talking with my husband about my dilemma, an idea came to mind; a topic that I would be interested in writing about in relation to Lonergan's method. I chose to contact the lecturer and ask if that would be appropriate. The lecturer agreed, so I commenced writing and I produced an essay which gained a *high distinction* grade. As it turned out, that unit of study and the essay I wrote, laid a solid foundation for both my work in the field of spiritual practice education and for my personal engagement with life, i.e., my experience of authentic living.

As I reflect on the reciprocal flow of the above experience, I recognize something of the mysterious dynamic of both steering and being steered, in that, within both a contemplative orientation and Lonergan's method of intentional consciousness, I made conscious choices

making conscious choices
within the boundary of
current lived experience

within the boundary of my current lived experience. Such is the nature of authentic living.

Summary ~ 3.2 the experience of authenticity

We are neither passive receivers of authenticity, nor are we in control of the experience of authenticity. Rather, we participate in a reciprocal process of consciously discerning choices in line with our values, within the limits of our current horizon of meaning. Authenticity takes into account the principle of both/and and as such, authenticity contains the idea that whilst our actions are shaped by internal and external causes, we are not solely defined by determinism. Rather, as we *tune into* the intrinsic pattern within human consciousness we are able to make conscious choices both within and beyond determinism; we are able to make conscious choices from the place of inner freedom. As we make such conscious choices, we take personal responsibility for our actions and in so doing, we experience communal responsibility.

Through the ongoing practice of conscious intentionality, we can experience authenticity in the present moment, whilst knowing that our living is also always in the making. Therefore, that which we experience as authentic now, may not be so in the future. Also, the end point of such a process will differ for each person, for we are each engaging in the process of discovery through our own horizon of meaning.

4. Concluding remarks

Within the context of an emerging new cultural Story, the freewill VS determinism debate is not in my horizon. The question for me is around the idea of authenticity. Within the framework of authenticity, how may the phrases which refined the boundary of this exploration take form?

Moral responsibility

The basis for moral responsibility is: the knowledge that as well as being unique human beings seeking self realization in the form of personal identity, purpose, and belonging in the world, we are also intrinsically connected within, and responsible for, a much wider web of relationships. Such an understanding naturally calls forth moral responsibility.

Control

We do not control our thinking, emotions, or resultant actions. Neither do we need to be controlled by them. As we engage in Lonergan's method of conscious intentionality, we continue to grow in awareness of our inner and outer motivations. In so doing, we are less likely to be driven and/or controlled by such habitual unconscious patterns of motivation.

Therefore, we can consciously choose to act in accord with our values system.

Determinism

To be human is to view ourselves-in-life through a particular horizon of meaning. Such an idea is not a negative one, it is simply what it means to be human. Our current horizon of meaning shapes the responses we discover to our spiritual questions, which in turn shapes our Story, which in turn determines our values system, which in turn shapes the way we live within, and act upon, our world. Therefore, we do not view reality directly; our view is always mediated by meaning. As a result determinism plays a role in shaping our thoughts and actions.

At the same time, we are not locked into a particular horizon of meaning. We have the potential to break through and transcend the limitations of a particular horizon of meaning; we are able to participate in the act of self transcendence. The source of self transcendence is the intrinsic pattern within human consciousness. As we *tune into* the pattern operating within our consciousness, we are able to make conscious choices that are both within and beyond the domain of determinism.

Authoring our own actions

Rather than authoring our own actions based on either free will or determinism, we can engage in the practice of conscious intentionality and in so doing, discern and carry out, choices in accord with a values system that seeks the flourishing of all. As a result, we are in effect, authoring our own actions from the orientation of inner freedom.

Within the knowledge that we are making choices both within and beyond determinism, we experience ourselves as authoring our actions from the orientation of inner freedom.



photo by Andrew Twining

Resources

John Shea, *Stories of God*
Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*
Daniel Siegel, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of being Human*
Sam Harris, *Free Will*
Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*
The Great Work: our way into the future

Joanna Macy & Molly Brown, *The Work that Reconnects*
Prof. Brian Cox & Andrew Cohen, *The Human Universe*
Anne Hillman, *Awakening the energies of Love: Discovering Fire for the Second Time*
Bob Berman & Robert Lanza, *Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe*
Jennifer Isaacs, *Australian Dreaming: 40 000 years of Aboriginal History*
Brian Swimme & Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe*
T S Eliot, Little Gidding V: With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling, we shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time
Diamuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: the Spiritual Implications of the New Physics*
Ken Wilber et al, *Integral Life Practice: a 21st Century Blueprint for Physical Health, Emotional Balance, Mental Clarity, and Spiritual Awakening*
Raimon Panikkar, as quoted in *The New Monasticism: an Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living*
Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*