

The Freedom of Radical Obedience



Matt has studied music and theology and is the Administrator of SCM UK and ERC Treasurer.

Matt GARDNER

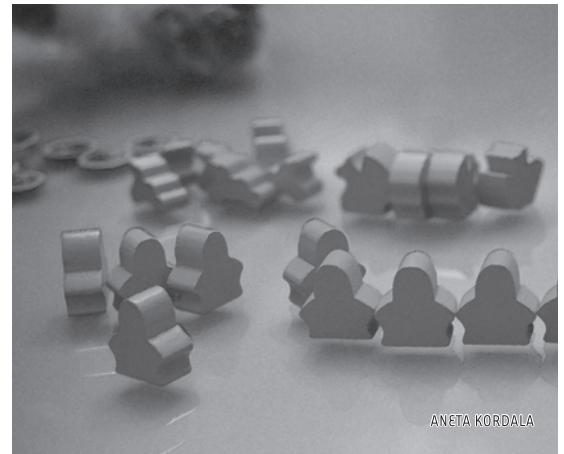
Probably one of the most damning indictments of our modern culture's obsession with freedom is that it's a name we even give to our wars. Like other concepts which become removed from their context and valued in an absolute manner, freedom can become a very dangerous tool – being free from all forms of control and domination (and increasingly, free from 'offence') soon means being free to control, dominate or offend others. Absolute freedom has no end beyond itself, but as John MILTON recognised in the 17th century (just as the great era of privatisation and individualism was dawning), freedom that is not directed towards virtue is not freedom but merely licence, 'which never hath more scope or more indulgence than under tyrants'.

This utilitarian definition of freedom, where everybody is free to do whatever they like 'so long as it doesn't interfere with anyone else', poses huge problems for all modern human politics. But perhaps the place in which it comes unstuck most spectacularly is the way we treat our natural resources and damage our environment. For if there is one thing the increasing environmental awareness of the last 20-30 years has shown us, it is that we are incapable of 'not interfering' with our environment, and if there is one thing that the processes of globalisation over the same period have shown us, it is that 'our environment' includes the whole planet. All animal and plant life, the atmosphere, soil, sea, rocks and desert – all are created as one interconnected community.

In this context then, our neat Enlightenment concept of freedom as essentially amoral, individual and privatised breaks down. Other

people do not merely exist as restrictions to my freedom, and neither does the rest of the natural world. We need to learn that true freedom comes not from asserting ourselves over each other and over nature, occasionally banding together to lobby on shared agendas, but from learning to co-operate and co-exist in community. This means discourse based on 'needs' rather than 'rights' and the acknowledgement that human will is not the most powerful force in the universe.

Operation Enduring Freedom, the name given by the US military to their response to the 11/09/01 attacks, was originally called Operation Infinite Justice. The name was changed to avoid offence to Muslims (for whom only God, the Al-'Adl, is Utterly Just) but the blasphemy and presumption remains. For, paradoxically, true freedom is not to be found in the separation of violence and individualism, but in community, islam (submission) and radical obedience to laws not of our own making.



ANETA KORDALA