# A thematic pair in Trawny's *Freedom to Fail*[1]

Peter Trawny maintains that Heidegger wrote the *Black Notebooks* from a position of "an-archic freedom": "The an-archic freedom of thinking demands, as an-archic questioning, a 'freedom for error.' To venture this freedom liberates one from science and liberates one for history."[2]

What is "an-archic freedom"?

Trawny first sketches the well-known distinction between two conceptions of freedom, positive and negative,[3] 'for' and 'from':

1) "One can assess the action of an individual according to moral criteria, consider it in normative terms as the instantiation of the moral law." In this first case Trawny writes that "we are relating to freedom as the criterion of a moral action." In the first case "we are dealing with a positive understanding of freedom, as the freedom *for* . . . (freedom for good and/or evil)."

2) "One can understand it as the depiction, as the history of a life in order to acknowledge it as exemplary or reject it as without significance." In the second case we are relating "to freedom as a play-space [*Spielraum*], an open realm, in which this or that is enacted, lived." In this second case "it is a matter of the negative concept as the freedom *from* . . . (freedom from constraints)."[4]

Trawny then distinguishes the two conceptions of freedom 'for' and 'from' as they relate to principle: "the first freedom is freedom for a principle, is *principled freedom*; the second is freedom from principle, is *an-archic freedom*."

> "Principled freedom **organizes** our economy of guilt and forgiveness with **normative** claims. What must I bear? What can I refuse to tolerate? Frequently also: When may I punish, when must I myself be punished? Such questions hinge on the law **that is known**, that is supposed to come into being before we become familiar with the rights of institutions.

[1] Peter Trawny, *Freedom to Fail: Heidegger's Anarchy* (tr. Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner 2015) [FF]; *Irrnisfuge. Heideggers An-archie* (Matthes & Seitz Berlin 2014).

[2] FF 63.

[3] The distinction is analyzed in Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958) and V. J. McGill's "Two Concepts of Freedom," 8 *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 515 (1948).

[4] FF 20-21.

"An-archic freedom is an-archy, the inception of a freedom that is nothing besides itself: an 'abyss of freedom,' a freedom of the **unanticipatable** inception. An **inception** is always an appropriative event, a **rupture**, an **upheaval**. It can open up nothing other than the open itself. In it there is no longer any principle to which 'Da-sein' or the 'subject' could still adhere. In the open there is no obligation [*Verbindlichkeit*] other than to the open itself."[5]

These two conceptions can be taken together as an instance of the thematic pair whose members are designated in recent usage by the terms 'exploitation' and 'exploration.'

Of his research into thematics Gerald Holton remarks,

"I have been impressed by how few themata there are—at least in the physical sciences. I have found about 50 singlets and doublets and occasional triplets so far, and I suspect the total will turn out to be less than 100. The appearance of a new thema is rare. . . . Related to that is the antiquity and persistence of themata, right through scientific evolution and 'revolution.'"[6]

As for the thematic pair before us, the computer scientist John Holland proposed that a kind of algorithm he called 'genetic'

"helps to solve a conundrum that has long bedeviled conventional problem-solving methods: striking a balance between exploration and exploitation. Once one finds a good strategy for playing chess, for example, it is possible to concentrate on exploiting that strategy. But this choice carries a hidden cost because exploitation makes the discovery of truly novel strategies unlikely. Improvements come from trying new, risky things. Because many of the risks fail, exploration involves a degradation of performance. Deciding to what degree the present should be mortgaged for the future is a classic problem for all systems that adapt and learn."[7]

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[5] FF 21-22. Bold emphasis mine throughout.

[6] "On the Role of Themata in Scientific Thought," 188 *Science* 328, 331 (1975). The antiquity of exploration/exploitation reaches at least as far back as the verse of Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing;" and its persistence is evident in Isaiah Berlin's modern refiguring: "For there exists a great chasm between those, on one side, who relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which alone all that they understand, think and feel – a single, universal, organizing principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance – and, on the other side, those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, connected, if at all, only in some *de facto* way, for some psychological or physiological cause, related by no moral or aesthetic principle; these last lead lives, perform acts, and entertain ideas that are centrifugal rather than centripetal, their thought is scattered or diffused, moving on many levels, seizing upon the essence of a vast variety of experiences and objects for what they are in themselves, without, consciously or unconsciously, seeking to fit them into, or exclude them from, any one unchanging , all-embracing, sometimes self-contradictory and incomplete, at times fanatical, unitary inner vision." "The Hedgehog and the Fox," repr. in *Russian Thinkers* (ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly 1978) 22.

[7] John H. Holland, "Genetic Algorithms," 267 *Scientific American* No. 1; 66, 69 (1992).

Of the same thematic pair the decision theorist James March wrote:

> "A central concern of adaptive intelligence within a path-dependent, meandering history is the relation between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties. Exploration includes things captured by such terms as search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation. Exploitation includes such things as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution."[8]

Heidegger noted this thematic pair as it appears in university disciplines, especially in academic philosophy. Although he does not use in the following passage any term equivalent to 'exploitation,' he does point to a "widely observed kind of activity" with recognizably bureaucratic features of that notion:

> "The dominance of this epistemological problem [the subject-object schema] (and corresponding ones in other disciplines) is characteristic of a widely observed kind of activity through which academic disciplines, especially philosophy, gain a foothold in life and preserve themselves. 90% of the literature is preoccupied with ensuring that such wrongheaded problems not disappear and are confounded still more and in ever new ways.[9] Such literature dominates the industry—everyone sees and gauges the progress and vitality of academic disciplines with it."[10]

He alludes to 'exploration' in the following two passages:

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[8] James G. March, *A Primer on Decision Making: How Decisions Happen* (1994) 237. Domain-specific instances populate the field generated by this polarity; e.g., the distinction between *r*-selection and *K*-selection (Robert MacArthur and Edward O. Wilson, *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (1967)); between entrepreneur and manager (Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (tr. of 3rd German ed. Redvers Opie 1934)); the premium for risk versus 'safe' return (Harry M. Markowitz, *Portfolio Selection* (1959)); the ethnography of danger and purity (Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (1966)); the contrast between development and stability, *ordo inventionis et ordo doctrinae* (*Insight: A Study of Human Understanding (1957), Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 3* (ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran 1992)); the context of discovery and the context of justification (Hans Reichenbach, *Experience and Prediction* (1938)); the process of discovery and the process of justification (Richard A. Wasserstrom, *The Judicial Decision: Toward a Theory of Legal Justification* (1961)); 'intuitionism' in contrast to a fixed order of principles (John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (1971)).

[9] I.e., exploration in the service of exploitation: "Then invention is monitored by existing institutions, by universities, foundations, and governmental programs, for example, that support and authorize, that authorize by supporting, only certain lines of research, only certain works of art, only certain discourses. In this conventional invention, invention is domesticated, kept in check within an economics of the 'same,' and 'inventive' human subjects are given limited rein or latitude within a fixed horizon. The 'invention of the same' is a discovery . . . of something lying already embedded in the system. In this invention, the assemblage of existing institutions is strengthened and confirmed by reabsorbing every novelty." John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (1997) 72.

[10] Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (tr. John van Buren 1999) 63.

"it is naïve and unphilosophical for philosophy to think it has found *the* truth for all eternity instead of realizing that philosophy exists only to open up new areas of focused rather than random progress."[11]

"it is a fundamental deception to believe that the effective power behind the transformation [*Wandel*] of contemporary biology is a matter of newly discovered facts.  Fundamentally and primarily it is our approach to the question and our way of seeing that has been transformed [*gewandelt*]—and in accordance with this the facts.  The transformation of seeing and questioning is always the decisive thing in science."[12]

These three remarks taken together suggest that Heidegger anticipated Kuhn's distinction between revolutionary and normal science, itself another instance of the exploration/exploitation thematic pair.

Fundamental to *Being and Time* is the manifestation of this thematic pair in Dasein: *das Man* as the exploitative pole, the anticipatorily resolute self as the exploratory.  Which brings us back to the contrast of principled with an-archic freedom.

Now "the an-archic open," says Trawny, "is above all a freedom of thinking." For Heidegger "the human being who refuses the claim of thinking likewise refuses the claim of freedom." "Whoever closes himself off from the open in this way not only cannot think . . . He follows **the models of action** of all those technical surrogates of freedom, both subtle and crude.  What is convenient in all those **patterns of modern life** is that no one has to think."[13]

In terms of the thematic pair we are considering an-archic freedom is a mode of exploration, "a freedom of thinking" – "search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation"; whereas principled freedom – following models, conforming to patterns of calculative thinking, "refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution" – is a mode of exploitation.

For Heidegger – Trawny again – "the criterion is not the **logical organization** of statements, speech acts, or arguments, but rather the truth of being the appropriative event of the **interplay** of openness and concealment. . . . The freedom of the human being consists in letting himself engage in the open and the concealment belonging to it . . . the human being is not the subject that **organizes** its truth.  Rather, he experiences the fact that truth eventuates as his

[11] Martin Heidegger, *Logic: The Question of Truth* (tr. Thomas Sheehan 2010) 232; omitting Sheehan's gloss "[toward truth]."

[12] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (tr. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker 1995) 260-261.

[13] FF 23-24.

'*exposure*.'  **Exposure** – this means **insecurity**, being at the mercy of, a dearth of protection."[14]

Exposure to tragedy, that is. From the *Black Notebooks*: "*Beyng* itself is 'tragic.'"[15] Trawny adds: "The truth of being is onto-tragic."[16] Clinging to the exploitative mode while fleeing the exploratory is the attempt to forestall the catastrophe of tragedy.  (Jocasta to Oedipus: "May you never know who you are.") "The kind of thinking that begins to follow a clear and distinct criterion of truth has robbed itself of its freedom.  It has aligned itself with the certainty of the rational.  It has committed itself to technicity, in order to make the tragedy of being impossible."[17]

> "The markedly tragic determination of the human being's essence is that he cannot hold on to the state of remaining within his own essence.  He continually deviates from himself, falls away from himself, founders.  This foundering is for Heidegger not a bad thing.  To be outside oneself, the ecstasy of the flame and the fall, belongs to freedom.  The human being falls because he aims too high – that is the tragic essence of the human being, the catastrophe."[18]

Yet if tragedy is the extreme of errancy[19] then its catastrophe brings at least the possibility of errancy-damping revelation; so Heidegger claims: "By leading them astray, errancy at the same time contributes to a possibility which humans are capable of drawing up from their ek-sistence – the possibility that, by experiencing errancy itself and by not mistaking the mystery of Da-sein, they *not* let themselves be led astray."[20]

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[14] FF 36-38.

[15] As quoted in FF 26.

[16] FF 39.

[17] FF 56.

[18] FF 58. Trawny briefly discusses *Antigone* at FF 40-41.  Principled versus an-archic freedom appears in that tragedy as the *hypsipolis/apolis* polarity – purity and danger – in the first stasimon: "Whoever respects the customs of the land and the gods' oath-grounding order is *hypsipolis*; *apolis* the one who sides with the ugly deed for the sake of boldness."  For Plato the **poet** is the dangerous *apolis.*  "Plato was surely right in seeing these as alternatives: a society protected against moral and social change [the exploitation-society of the *Republic*], and a society in which free creation and exploration through art is permitted."  Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (1972) 57.

[19] Tragedy is within errancy's range: "Error extends from the most ordinary wasting of time, making a mistake, and miscalculating, to going astray and venturing too far in one's essential attitudes and decisions." Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" in *Pathmarks* (ed. William McNeill 1998) 150.

[20] *Id.* 151.  Errancy is "a peculiar turning to and fro proper to Dasein."  Errancy is not something exogenous or incidental; rather it is constitutive of human being:  "The errancy through which human beings stray is not something that, as it were, extends alongside them like a ditch into which they occasionally stumble; rather errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the Da-sein into which historical human beings are admitted.  Errancy is the free space for that turning in which in-sistent ek-sistence adroitly forgets and mistakes itself constantly anew." *Id.* 150.

Heidegger urges this same point years later when he claims that technology's danger, *die Gefahr*, harbors a saving power, *das Rettende*:

> "Where the danger is as danger, that which saves is already there. The latter does not insert itself alongside the former. What saves does not stand next to the danger. When it is as the danger, the danger itself is what saves. The danger is what saves insofar as, from out of its essence, it brings what saves. What does 'to save' mean? It says: to let loose [*lösen*], to disengage [*freimachen*], to free [*freyen*], to spare [*schonen*], to shelter [*bergen*], to take under protection [*in die Hut nehmen*], to guard [*wahren*]. Lessing still uses the word 'salvation' [*Rettung*] in an emphatic manner with the sense of justification: to restore something to its right, the essential, and to guard it therein [*in das Rechte, Wesenhafte zurückstellen und darin wahren*]. What genuinely saves is what guards [*das Wahrende*], guardianship [*die Wahrnis*]."[21]

If this be tragedy its *Stimmung* is Aeschylean, for Aeschylus turns us toward a recognition of good news, "the grace of god." In the tragedies of Aeschylus, writes Bernard Knox,

> "the onward flow of time, *oupirreon chronos*, reveals not only the chain of causation of human action, presented through the persons of successive generations, but also the intimate and in the end clearly defined connection of all these events with the will and action of the gods. The action of the characters is an organic part of the larger design; it has its being in a hugely imagined world where the sweep of history affords us a perspective for the suffering we see on stage, and offers us consolation by giving it meaning; where also the human beings, involved in an action too great for them to understand, are warned or encouraged, judged or defended, by gods, from afar and eventually in person. Human suffering, in this all-embracing vision, has a meaning, even a beneficent purpose; it is the price paid for human progress. The violence, Aeschylus has his chorus sing, is in some way the grace of god."[22]

Although Aeschylean tragedy portrays the inveterate flounder-foundering of human action there emerges nevertheless a higher sense to this errancy. Aeschylean errancy "liberates one for history" in Trawny's phrase. Freedom 'for' is principled freedom; and history is 'principled' in Aeschylus; its *archē* is the divine, which – so his art leads us to feel – has regard for human being.

For Heidegger errancy, the danger, "the self-refusal of the truth of being," "harbors a still-unwanted grace [*Gunst*] . . . In the essence of danger there essences and dwells [*west und*

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[21] "The Turn" in Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures:* Insight into That Which Is *and* Basic Principles of Thinking (tr. Andrew J. Mitchell 2012) 68.

[22] Bernard M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (1964) 4.

*wohnt*] a grace, namely the grace of the turn [*die Gunst der Kehre*] of the forgetting of beyng into the truth of beyng.  In the essence of danger, where it is as the danger, there is the turn to guardianship [*die Kehre zur Wahrnis*], there is this guardianship itself, there is that which saves of being [*das Rettende des Seyns*]."[23]  Errancy, the truth of beyng "pursuing itself with forgetfulness," is reoriented by grace, "that through such a turn forgetfulness turn itself about and become guardianship of the essence of beyng."[24]

For Sophocles, not so much.  For Sophocles the sweep of history, "the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery"[25] bodes no larger design and no consolation; no pattern that makes sense of human life and aspirations; nothing to be discovered that makes ultimate sense of our concerns.[26]    The violence – human suffering and human infliction of suffering – is no sign of grace and no bearer of meaning; the violence and suffering, like the blooming of the rose, is 'without why,' an-archic, a hot mess from start to finish. [27]  "Best not to be born," Sophocles has his chorus sing.[28]

The texts "On the Essence of Truth" and "Insight into That Which Is" depict errancy and the saving power as, respectively, the thema 'exploration' – "free space . . . constantly anew" – and its anti-thema 'exploitation' – securing, protecting, and conserving as in the prudential offices of trusteeship and wardship.

In the latter text Heidegger envisions history as the intermittent flow of dispensations of being, or 'beyng' rather.  "If positionality [*das Ge-Stell*] is an essential destiny of beyng itself, then we may suppose that, as one essential way of beyng among others [*als eine Wesensweise des Seyns unter anderen*], positionality changes [*wandelt*]."[29]    I.e., gives way to another dispensation.  "Destiny [*Geschick*] . . . is essentially the dispensation of being [*wesenhaft*

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[23] "The Turn" 69.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach."

[26] Versus philosophy which is, as Aeschylus was, "still deeply attached to giving good news." Bernard Williams, "*The Women of Trachis*: Fictions, Pessimism, Ethics" in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (2006) 49. *Per* Williams philosophy proffers the sanguine message that "the universe or history or the structure of human reason can, when properly understood, yield a pattern that makes sense of human life and aspirations. . . . that somehow or other, in this life or the next, morally if not materially, as individuals or as an historical collective, we shall be safe; or, if not safe, at least reassured that at some level of the world's constitution there is something to be discovered that makes ultimate sense of our concerns."  *Shame and Necessity* (1993) 163-164.  From this majority opinion Williams dissented.

[27] "Personally of course I regret everything.  Not a word, not a deed, not a thought, not a need, not a grief, not a joy, not a girl, not a boy, not a doubt, not a trust, not a scorn, not a lust, not a hope, not a fear, not a smile, not a tear, not a name, not a face, no time, no place . . . that I do not regret, exceedingly.  An ordure, from beginning to end."  Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (1953).

[28] *Oedipus at Colonus* 1225.  Freud: "Unfortunately this happens fewer than once in ten thousand cases."

[29] "Positionality" in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* 64.

*Geschick des Seins*], so much so that being itself sends itself [*selber sich schickt*] and each time essences as a dispensation [*als ein Geschick west*] and destinally transforms itself in accordance with this [*demgemäß sich geschicklich wandelt*]."[30]

These shifts are discontinuous, sudden, and uncaused. "Abruptly [*Steil*] from out of its own essence of concealment, beyng takes place [*ereignet*] in its epoch. Thus we must take note: The turn of the danger takes place suddenly [*jäh*]."[31] "As beyng, the way that beyng sends itself neither precedes anything effected, nor follows upon anything causative."[32] In Trawny's terms, the way that beyng sends itself is "always an appropriative event, a rupture, an upheaval." Beyng's history is driven by a dynamics whose centrifugal component ("deviates from himself, falls away from himself, founders") is the exploratory, dissipative mode of errancy, and whose centripetal component ("hold on to the state of remaining within his own essence") is the exploitative, conservative mode of the saving power.

Yet there is no primacy of mode and "Beyond the dynamics of this competition itself there is no one in charge."[33] The dynamics traces a dithering plot through a dimension unique to human existence. Heidegger's key notion is that the dynamics generates the dimension concomitantly as the dimension – the open, *das Offene*; the clearing, *die Lichtung*; etc. – supports the dynamics; the dynamics and its dimension are coeval, conjugate, and coterminous; each depends on the other; they 'irrupt' together. There is no higher dimension of meaning, of ultimate sense or purpose, in which the open is embedded. Beyng's kinesis is oriented neither by origin or goal; it is an-archic, "a freedom that is nothing besides itself: an 'abyss of freedom'." Its model, as intimated by Nietzsche's madman, is Brownian motion:

> "Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing [*Irren wir nicht wie durch ein unendliches Nichts*]?"[34]

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[30] *Id.* 65.

[31] *Id.* 69.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Richard J. Herrnstein and Dražen Prelec, "Melioration: A Theory of Distributed Choice," in Richard J. Herrnstein, *The Matching Law: Papers in Psychology and Economics* (ed. Howard Rachlin and David I. Laibson 1997) 292. Melioration is the competition between two components: "behavior which is directly reward-seeking [i.e., exploitative], and exploratory behavior which is designed to elicit information which will enable the decision maker to make inferences about reward contingencies." *The Matching Law* 192.

[34] *The Gay Science* (tr. Walter Kaufmann 1974) Book III, §125.