

Chapter 14

CONSTITUTING THE WORKPLACE

*We are fundamentally free to define the precise role of work
in our search for meaning—but we are also fully responsible
for the consequences of our definition.*

THE MAIN PURPOSE of these reflections on improving the workplace and how we think about and experience power is to illustrate how philosophical insight can shift our thinking about leadership and our relationship to work and workplaces. The principles explored here are a way to begin to reconstruct our institutions as strongholds of freedom and accountability.

THE HIGH COST OF ADVOCATING NORMALCY

Every institution operates with a set of norms and expects its members to live by them. In other words, they have a fixed notion of

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what normal behavior is and in fact value it, even treat it as a given. The philosophic insight suggests that the word “normal” has absolutely no meaning when applied to either a person’s life or his or her relationship to leadership and power. The meaninglessness of normalcy is not a *value* or *disvalue* but a philosophically disclosed, existential *fact*. Normalcy is a chosen value or the commitment to a value; it is not a fact.

The *fact* of the social institution of work opens up the *possibility* of realizing the traditional value–potential of work if total adjustment to that institution is *decided on* by our freedom for self-definition. Seen from the depth of pure consciousness, the commitment to the values made possible by the institution of work is a choice that is totally free and nonrational. Of course, should people *not* choose identification with the social structure, they also choose the *consequences* of that grave alienation.

The consequences of confusing value with fact, choice with that which is fixed, and the meaninglessness or meaningfulness of normalcy can lead to severe guilt and anxiety. The more we fit in with our institutions, the more we feel guilty and anxious. We pay a high price for ignoring the depth and enormity of our freedom regarding the choice and implementation of self-concepts and of values.

Leaders who authoritatively and dogmatically assert to employees that any or all of the specific psychological, sociological, and cultural standards of work are absolute norms are acting with philosophical irresponsibility. They are philosophically untruthful because they tell employees, falsely, that there is a Platonic model which they *must* emulate, in some mysteriously terrifying sense of “must.” Of course, the ideals exist, but there is no necessary or final connection between these ideals and human existence and nature.

Our only essential nature is the power to *freely* define ourselves within specified limits. Employees—to the extent that their essence is authentic humanness—freely choose, from an infinity of models, the ones they want to emulate.

Authoritarian dogmatism can produce guilt, anxiety, paralysis of will, and loss of self. Why? Because employees must invest all their energies either to protect themselves from the anxiety and guilt arising from their difficulties in measuring up to these standards or to transform their lives to meet them. The result of Platonism in philosophical leadership is dehumanization, or, in Sartre's language, *mauvaise foi* (self-deception).

The person who is guided and directed toward an externally anchored self-concept has relinquished and lost his freedom; in truth, he has lost himself. He has abdicated his inner humanity, integrity, ego, and his "self." He has capitulated to an external object which he must become, rather than to exercise the freedom which he is.

In sum, the *damage* done by ethical dogmatism under the guise of values ensconced in truth or science is essentially dual: (a) it produces anxiety, guilt, and paralysis and (b) it dehumanizes us since it interferes with, or even destroys, our very nature—which is to be a free, inward, world-constituting object. In actual practice, of course, not every employee wants to, or can be, human in this ultimate philosophical and authentic sense. The practical solution to a specific problem may be removal of the pain through behavioral prescriptions (which are, in effect, physical or psychological medicine). However, when we invoke philosophy, we are talking about insight for human fulfillment and not of anodynes for emergencies and pain.

Insight about philosophical freedom as applied to institutional life is not merely intellectual. It must suffuse the entire, primitive being of the employee, since freedom is the structure of consciousness *before* it has chosen between intellect and emotion, reason and feeling—even self and other—as its self-concept and style of life.

There are four *advantages* implicit in the insight that normalcy is meaningless:

1. Existential self-disclosure can remove unnecessary and paralyzing (that is, neurotic) anxiety and guilt.
2. Correlatively, this insight can increase the sense of freedom, induce relaxation (due to freedom), and make possible a general gracefulness and ease in living.
3. It can increase our freedom of action, just as it can enhance the experience of living our own life with ease, risk, naturalness, spontaneity, and without burdensome restrictions and oppressive regrets.
4. Furthermore, the insights associated with the first principle—the nonexistence of normalcy—help employees to utilize the strengths, potentials for growth, and health dormant in their own intrinsic psychological nature. In other words, they improve performance.

A person's invariant freedom *is* his or her strength. The *weak* ego, for example, maintains its self-definition as weak through the *strength* or power of its existentially free constitution. In other words, at the level of its philosophic depth, the weak ego is strong, but it

uses its strength to keep itself weak. A philosophically oriented leader can assist employees in making that discovery—namely that they are keeping themselves weak, and expending great energy in doing so.

THE HIGH COST OF DEFINING NEEDS

Most current applications of psychology and management theory often reduce the individual to the level of our most primitive instincts and needs. These needs are said to be physiologically determined and biologically fixed. They make up our human nature. The lifestyle of the employee may then be restructured in terms of a feeling and understanding of these needs.

The philosophical view goes far beyond that and is not for everyone. Individual needs expressed by most accepted psychology presupposes the acceptance (which is, in the last analysis, free) of a biological and instinctual model of the human being. That model—in the sense of being the absolute foundation—is rejected by a philosophy of freedom. This rejection is not a spiritual value judgment but the recognition of a fact: each of us *is* the freedom to choose our nature—no more and no less. Even our primitive need–nature is a value—not a fact—and as such it is subject to existential choice. *We do* have a nature, but it is not made up of irreducible needs. It consists of intentional consciousness, the meaning-giving power of our own acts of awareness, which is a vast and threatening region of existential freedom. That freedom, like atomic energy, is both dangerously explosive and powerfully constructive.

It is true that the choice of needs is a very deep choice indeed and one which, if not made, leads to very serious and dehumanizing consequences. Nevertheless, the fact remains that needs are free personal choices and authentically possible commitments to a specific—albeit common—definition of human existence. We can go even further to say that the free adoption of or identification with a need is tantamount to the fundamental free choice of being human. The needs we hold as true are not a fact; they are a choice, a choice in fact to be human. It is still true, however, that to choose humanness is one of our consciousness's basic possibilities and, unfortunately perhaps, not a necessary state of affairs. God has created each of us free to choose whether we are to be human or not. Once we decide that what we thought were basic needs are in fact constituted choices, everything changes.

REFRAMING OUR THEORIES

These reflections lead to the next point, which is that each of us is almost infinitely adaptable, flexible, changeable, and adjustable. Since there is no such thing as an absolute and irreducible structure called “need,” and no definitive meaning to the concept of being “normal,” the self-sacrificing and celibate priest in what was Biafra and the equally self-sacrificing and celibate nun in a Calcutta leprosarium are persons who are as normal and as need-fulfilled as any of the more traditionally oriented individuals (even as much as the notorious womanizer Signore Don Giovanni Casanova, that is, Don Juan).

There is nothing unnatural about these ascetic lives or any other lives. However, in choosing asceticism, the priest or the nun

does choose to deny the commonly held notion of the primacy of human—and thus their own—biological, psychological, and sociological nature and needs. In other words, the model presented by the behavioral sciences is freely rejected by their opting for asceticism. Each choice of a value has a price: we choose both value *and* price (or consequences, associations, implicit ramifications). The priest and the nun illustrate the possibility of different definitions of what it means to be human, all equally possible and equally normal. Even if it were true that there is less meaning and satisfaction in asceticism than in, let us say, sensualism—which is open to question—asceticism nevertheless still remains a possible choice of authentic lifestyle. “Satisfaction,” in any real sense in which this term is to be defined, need not be one of the values chosen by the humanity-defining and self-defining freedom. The words “normal” and “need” are irrelevant to this situation *as long as we recognize that our deepest personal choices are choices of the meaning of humanity itself*—and not just minor, inconsequential, and readily reversible decisions. These basic considerations are illuminated by a philosophical theory of freedom.

If we accept this line of thinking, and step back for a minute, we begin to question much of the theory that underlies our strategies of motivation, building cooperation, training and development, and even how we organize work.

The Defining Ego

This perspective means that *I*—the ultimate individual or the philosophically disclosed ego of every human being—*define the meaning, nature, and importance* of work with full freedom, but *also*, and this fact must never be overlooked, with full responsibility for its

consequences. Freedom means recognition of both a zone of unhindered activity *as well as* a zone of absolute limitations. We must not overlook the inseparable duality of freedom and responsibility. The world is *fixed* in its ambiguity, and thus the ego is *fixed* in its freedom.

Size and Importance

Specifically, the perceived size and importance of work in relation to our total life-world is not an absolute but is a matter of definition and choice. A specific size is *given* as a *value*. It is also *given* as a *fact*, that is, as both a *social* (that is, medical, religious, psychological, etc.) fact and as an *individual* (situational) fact. With respect to the *value*, the ego has *constitutive* (that is, weak) freedom; but in regard to the *facts*, the ego has only *attitudinal* freedom (that is, for withdrawal or commitment).

In other words, work can be chosen to encompass everything in life or be but a minor incident. Each of us must ask ourselves how important—that is, how large—the perceived work-world is to us. We must recognize that the size of the work is part of the definition of work regarding which we are both free and responsible—and accountable—for the consequences are now part of the real world.

Meaning

Furthermore, human beings, in their philosophical essence, are totally free and fully responsible for the role performed by the cultural *institution* of work as well as by any actual *existing* workplace in their own, individual *search for meaning* in life. We may choose to search for meaning in life *through* work, *with* work, or *in spite*

of work. Of course, two of these are extreme possibilities, but each is a freely and responsibly constituted definition of work and of self. We are fundamentally free to define the precise role of work in our search for meaning—but we are also fully responsible for the consequences of our definition.

Subjectivity

The subjective perspective is the only actual, accurate, and true perspective. This position is not taken because philosophy is committed to subjectivism. On the contrary, everything (that is, every object) is what it is because it is an object *to a subject*. An object, such as the experience “work-in-general” or “my-work,” is not accurately described for what it in truth is, if we describe only or exclusively the object aspect of the total experience. We must also recognize that the object, “work” in this case, is, in its essence, not only the isolated abstract object but also an intention—a chosen definition, an assigned meaning—being perceived by a particular and real individual. And the difference is enormous. The unique subjective element, perspective, or dimension in the total perception is as much an aspect of the reality called work as is any purely “objective” consideration. Work, or a workplace, is the subject–object interaction in perception. *Any* object is seen from the point of view of a subject. Work is the interrelatedness of the ego and its world.

Once we recognize this fundamental insight, it becomes clear that the so-called “objective” analysis of the thing, event, or object called “work” is a meaningless undertaking. We can discuss meaning and work only from the perspective of *each* subjective percipient. Leadership and coaching, which have to do with *objective*

answers, are—in any lasting sense—irrelevant. However, communication between the participants in the workplace *is*, of course, relevant, since what occurs in verbalization is that two people are comparing *two* objects that they had confused as one. The two objects are their two separate perspectives of the work situation.

A so-called “objective” analysis of a workplace is really the attempt to “peel off” the abstract or pure object from the total and concrete intentional or meaning-giving conscious stream. There can be no objective assessment of a workplace. The sole objective truth is the inescapable subjective (that is, intentional) version. The tendency toward treating what is subjective as if it were objective, and the subsequent alienation, is a fundamental flaw in our materialistic age: we err by seeing human or people-related events as pure objects, that is, as two-dimensional “things” divested of a third, subjective dimension that is nevertheless every bit as rich and *real* as the abstracted objective aspect. This alienation is the ominous danger in today’s culture of making humans into a fixed and predictable thing rather than to recognize them to be a subject-perceiving thing.

The philosophical emphasis on the reality and centrality of subjectivity is part of the same intuition that spawned the Relativity Theory. That theory holds that the term “simultaneous events” is literally a *meaningless* expression unless we include the observer in it as a *member of the event itself*; and the observer can vary. In other words, the measurements of space and time are relative to the observer and consequently space–time itself—thought earlier to be objective—has meaning and reality only as it is *observed*. Absolute space–time has no meaning. The situation is identical with all objects, such as our concepts about work.

So work is in reality not a thing or an object, not a state of affairs or a sequence of events, but a subject–object interconnection. Work, as a pure object, or a fixed and given place, does not exist. Applying the principle of subjectivity to leadership and workplace coaching, there is no meaning to the *object* “work” or “boss.” Work is what it is only as it is related to the perceiver. This point must be remembered by every leader, since there are only subjective and individual solutions—that is, decisions and freely undertaken definitions—not exclusively objective criteria.

Social Fact

So far I have emphasized the freedom or *subjective* pole of intentional consciousness—the zone of negative withdrawal from identification with the world. We must now emphasize the structure and the realities of the *objective* pole.

A job—or, more generally speaking, an organization—is a fundamental and inevitably important *social* fact (as an institution). It is a social fact, and one of major proportions and great significance. For example, when a young manager says she will define her very own concept of the use of power, then one must first ascertain whether her decision, while it is free, is also taken with full recognition of the social fact of the institution of which she is a member. The institution of work exists importantly in the legal, economic, social, psychological, religious, and moral structure of society. The manager is surrounded in truth by the ineluctable facts of the social reality of that institution. The existence of these facts cannot be denied any more than can be the fact of gravitation.

Philosophic freedom properly understood recognizes that it is primarily attitudinal—a choice of attitudes. That is, in this case, “freedom” means withdrawal from—not a denial of—the hard and immutable facts of life, which include entrenched social institutions. Consequently, freedom vis-à-vis these hard facts means first of all freedom to manipulate, as through technology, or manage with a view to changing these facts. Technology presupposes knowledge of the laws of nature, that is, of ultimate facts, which can then be manipulated according to the desires of individuals and teams. In short, science and technology are the result of a commitment to discern how we can trick reality into changing—not by a direct assault but by what is the equivalent of an end run in football, a maneuver to outwit the defense. We cannot turn a supertanker in the ocean simply by swimming against its side. But the combination of motors, propellers, and rudders overcome the resistance to push and enable us to manipulate the behemoth to turn!

Secondly, freedom as withdrawal from social fact also means the choice of an attitude or posture toward these immutable facts: passive, active, indifferent, engaged, disengaged, resentful, accepting, skirting, repressive, deceptive, and so forth. Attitude is a matter of insight or intuition and is not amenable to control or manipulation. Philosophically speaking, leadership means insight, intuition, self-knowledge, self-disclosure, and reeducation rather than manipulation, control, and technology.

Once these limiting facts and the concept of accountability are recognized to exist, much less liberal behavior will follow from these insights than is usually associated with philosophical free thinking.

Individual or Situational Fact

A specific work situation or reality already exists for the employed *individual*. In other words, it is futile and unphilosophical for a person to think and to act as if his or her life situation were different from what in fact it is. A philosophy of freedom is supreme realism: it is as realistic about the enormity of our *freedom* as it is about the *limits* of life. Philosophy makes the additional discovery that, while pain is not lessened by realism, realism is nevertheless experienced as a (perhaps *the*) genuine value. Improving a work situation must begin with the actual facts of the workplace. Day-dreaming about what might be is simply choosing failure in the real world.

Power

The *role of power* in organizations—its *importance*, its *meaning*, and the manner of proper *expression*—is equally open to free choice and definition. Again here, and importantly so, the prevalent uses of “normalcy” and “need” are, strictly speaking, meaningless. This matter, because of its centrality, deserves separate elaboration. It will be discussed later in this chapter.

Aloneness

Awareness of freedom is a lonely matter. All aspects of the relationship between an individual ego and work are decisions or postures that must be taken (and exist with) an understanding and appropriation of the total independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency implicit in our individual ability to think alone and for ourselves. The solitary and lonely transcendental ego can and must undertake the creation and emotional meaning of values, roles, and conceptions

of reality. In simple words: a mature and authentic attitude toward work begins with an *authentic individual*. An authentic person is one who can be alone, individual, solitary, and free. That person is then ready to choose commitment to any world, including that of a workplace.

Risk

Disclosure of the structure of one's freedom points to the open and undetermined character of consciousness and life. That sense of openness is also the experience of futurizing time, that is, how we are drawn forward by our vision of how we want things to be. If we now combine the totally undetermined openness of futurizing time—which is the sense of philosophic freedom—with the finitude of social fact, especially impenetrable death, we legitimize *risk*. Risk-taking is a natural consequence of understanding freedom. Risking is as inevitable as freedom itself. Not-risking is itself a different sort of risk, but it is risking nevertheless.

The legitimacy of risk leads to: (a) avoidance of the stultifying and vacuous obsession with certainty and the corresponding compulsion for stagnation, and (b) encouragement of genuine change, growth, and progress. An individual seeking a useful career cannot grow without willing *risks* naturally and spontaneously. Risking is the experience of a self with a future and of a self that is alive and thus in charge of itself. There is joy in risking as there is joy in being free—really free.

Becoming Practical

If the decision is made to get the most out of the possibilities afforded to us by the social institution of work, and given the realities of an individual's *social* and *individual* situation, *then*, and only

then, can practical suggestions follow. Here, finally, is where coaching or development begins. If the intuitive decision to make a commitment to an organization or work has been taken—that is, the choice is made to utilize the institution of work for achieving life's highest meanings—then devices can and will be found to bring about its optimum values.

In sum, if a person fails at work, it is the decision to fail that is at the root of the matter. Once a real decision to succeed has been made—and the full, multilevel structure of that free personal decision must be understood in a philosophical and not in a common sense manner—then the work and organization will automatically succeed. Part of the reason for its success will be a redefinition of success itself.

POWER AND PHILOSOPHY

Finally we turn to the relevance of philosophic insight, especially the analysis of freedom, to the meaning of power in our lives, in and out of work. This takes the form of several principles.

1. *With regard to all aspects of power, the meaning of "normal" does not exist.* That is to say, whatever is averred about the nature and function of feelings about power cannot—in a real and absolute sense—be termed either normal or abnormal, right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable.
2. *More specifically, power is not a "need" in the sense of being a final fact in the definition of human existence.* Standards of the use of power are values—which means free definitions of our nature—not facts, and include an element of freedom. Power as need is equally a value and not a fact, and

also includes an important element of freedom. Admittedly, these elements of freedom occur at a very deep level and their resolution involves the constitution of our humanity itself. Our freedom to define who we are does not mean we can change our biology, psychology, or anthropology. It does mean that we are free to take attitudes toward our biology and psychology and to pass judgment on their relative meaning and importance. The use of this freedom is the philosophical foundation and possibility for the transformation of culture throughout the ages of history.

3. *There are two distinct meanings of power.* One meaning is that power is a specific physical act or behavior. It is in this sense primarily but not exclusively that I am using the word “power.”

The second meaning of power identifies power with the intentionality of consciousness, the meaning-building character of awareness. In this sense power is the *ability* and the *decision* to be physical, bodily, or somatic in one’s being-in-the-world. This definition of power refers to the bodily being-in-the-world: it is the experience of being the body–subject and the body–object, adapting the language of French existentialist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It is a metaphysical concept.

4. *Given the intentionality of consciousness and the identification of power with it, we have three options:*
 - We can be all directed to outcomes, that is, manifest technologists; we can be practical and view ourselves as instruments;

- We can be all spiritual, that is, seeing ourselves as inner souls mostly disconnected from the world of practical affairs; or
- We can be an integration, combination, or compromise of both.

We choose the general outlines of our manner of existence—of our style of life—among these three possibilities or alternatives. There are no absolute norms or standards. We create the absolute by choosing norms.

5. *Thus, the importance of power is a matter of free choice.* That is to say, it exists at the level at which self-deception or bad faith can no longer exist. In other words, we are free to accept, reject, or change the attitudes toward the meaning of power that we have been taught by society, parents, movies, clerics, or other authorities.
6. *Even the manner of the use of power over others is ultimately a matter of choice.* Here Freud's notion of the infant as polymorphous perverse is of central importance. Even though the expression of power may result in actual practice from biological, psychological, and environmental factors, the ultimate philosophical truth remains that these modes of being are values and that these values, in the last analysis, are chosen by each of us. We tend to speak of these matters as cultural rather than individual affairs. For example, with respect to all practices in the use of power, including abuses, the ego is capable of three attitudes: (a) adjust, (b) ignore, or (c) change. In cases of problems in using power,

and the awareness of our freedom, we are confronted, not with the true impossibility of change or adaptation, but rather with a lack of will, motivation, interest, or diminished access to the freedom that is at the heart of every one of us.

7. *The organizational and psychological realities and facts surrounding the use of power—especially if we use power in the narrow sense—lend themselves to a variety of uses, embodiments, value-actualizations, modes of being-in-the-world.* Each of these involves the choice of power. Following are a few of these possible alternatives.

- *Power as pure desire to control others.* The pleasure of dominance, being right, or not being controlled.
- *Power as aesthetic sophistication.* I am referring here to a sentimental type of romantic heroism. In fact, it is not only power that can be used aesthetically. Any bodily function, such as our sexuality, can be used as a foundation that is decorated with aesthetic values. A more common illustration of this possibility is eating. We can eat to survive, but we can also eat with aesthetic, ethical, and other value superimpositions: for example, banquets, celebrations, dinners for special occasions.
- *Power as a mode of religious depth, passion, and expression.* Power here takes the form of surrender, of giving up power. I am referring here to some Oriental practices, especially as found in the Mahasukha doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism.

- *Power as an expression of love or connection or contribution.* This may mean the sharing of power in the I-Thou sense of Buber.
- *Power as hidden agenda.* Power can also be used as a basis upon which an individual superimposes aggressive, hostile, sadistic, and masochistic tendencies and behavior. This becomes a “hidden agenda.”
- *Power as security.* Power can also be the core, which ties together many other aspects of life, of the idea of security for a home and a family, a tradition, even a dynasty. Here the emphasis of the choice lies on the idea of security and the idea of a place and a group of people that one can call “mine.”
- *Power as instrument.* In addition to the various definitions of power, we must of course mention its exclusive use for production, for getting things done, for willing institutions into being.

Again, it is, strictly speaking, incorrect to say that we have a “need” for any of these modes of self-expression—if we define ourselves not as a biological entity but as a pure consciousness in need of intentionally, freely constituting organizations, giving meaning to objects, and making commitments to lifestyles or self-definitions. It is equally incorrect to say that any of these expressions are either “normal” or “abnormal.”

What is correct is to say that these forms of expression and organization are possibilities and are values and as such are either chosen or rejected by our consciousness. Each makes possible

certain satisfactions and makes impossible other satisfactions. Those are the facts about human existence. And these philosophical-anthropological facts are sensitive to both the freedom *and* the facts of human existence. We are free to opt for or against any of the above possibilities. It is of course true that an option for *A*, for example, may involve the option to repress or ignore or deny *B*, *D*, and so on.

POSTSCRIPT

The concept of freedom is not a unitary idea but a blend—one which, to use Wittgenstein's famous example, consists of family resemblances. The concept of freedom is like a rope, held firmly together by many interweaving and overlapping strands without any single fiber running continuously throughout. These fibers are called "will," "consciousness," "ego," "self," "time," "spontaneity," "passivity," "autonomy," "self-determination," "action," "commitment," "engagement," "detachment," "distancing," and on and on.

Above all, in a philosophy of freedom there always exists the danger that the ideas of realistic *limits* and of *instinctual behavior* have not been adequately emphasized. Stress on free will can misguide one into thinking that this philosophy is relativistic, permissive, libertarian, and in general irresponsible, as well as super-rationalistic in the sense that our conscious and deliberate will controls all life. These misconceptions—especially the latter—must be rectified.

A manager in one of my philosophy in business workshops told me that a twenty-five-year-old employee (who had learned a lot about participation and empowerment) said to her, "I want to

make certain financial decisions on my own.” When the manager, after some uncertain discussion, refused, the employee rejoined, “Drop your participation and empowerment talk; it is doing you no good.”

The employee misinterprets deep freedom to be a device for manipulating her boss to agree with her. Her boss, in turn, misinterprets philosophy to mean that she must ask the employee for permission to hold her own values and self-concepts. Both are in error.

The manager must substantiate the values she has chosen and recognize the total *freedom* and potential she possesses to implement them. She must also understand the final *limits* that society and a set of employees impose on her. Her *response* to these limits is free, but the inevitable consequences of her postures are *part* of that freedom. The structure of freedom itself discloses intrinsic limits: accountability and strict consequences are part of freedom.

Similarly, the employee must recognize her freedom to choose her value system; she must be aware of all the consequences of these choices. Moreover, she must recognize that her manager, who likewise is a separate and free individual, represents an ultimate limit to her. And the employee must choose—with her freedom to define who she is and what the world is—whether to perceive her manager as a projection or an extension of herself or whether to see her as a real and authentic human being in her own right. If the employee opts for the real-and-authentic view, the manager’s individuality and freedom become the true and freely accepted limits to the employee’s individuality and freedom. We must not forget, however, that (because of the intentionality of consciousness, the meaning-ascription power of awareness) the world tends

to mirror the self. The employee's inability to perceive the limiting individuality and freedom of her boss shows that she cannot perceive these qualities in herself. Accusing the manager of not "giving her freedom" means the employee has not claimed freedom for herself.

In general, deep freedom does not mean omnipotence but rather withdrawal into the "nothingness" of consciousness—the "empty space" of awareness. In that nothingness the individual faces the infinite freedom to adopt definitions of self, organizations of experience such as a workplace, and attitudes toward social facts. While we are not free to change the *objects* of consciousness into something that they are not, we are free to use the laws of nature for control and technological rearrangement of objects.

In sum, understanding freedom means nothing without understanding responsibility and accountability. Responsibility means that every apparently minor choice is really a choice of grave and serious consequences, since each choice implies a complete definition of our nature and our world. Responsibility is the fact that each of us is free; accountability is the individual act of accepting and choosing that fact. Furthermore, responsibility as an aspect of freedom is also the understanding that one of our earliest and most primitive choices is to recognize the real limits to our existence. If we choose our limits, then we connect with the world and are thereby healthy. If we deny them, then we sever ourselves from the world and are therefore sick.

Even being free is itself a limit to human existence.