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Review of

On Freedom: Organizational Science Examined Philosophically

by Peter Gibson Friesen,

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Significant Work on a Unified Theory of Psychological & Social Development Based on the Theme of Human Freedom

Many writers have written on theory of knowledge, history, psychology and logic, as distinct areas of inquiry, in the course of their careers. David Hume and Bertrand Russell come to mind, as examples of those who wrote on history and philosophy in separate works. Peter Friesen, in a unique fashion, writes not only about the above areas of knowledge, but presents an historical, and developmentally unified theory of individual and social development, based on the theme of human freedom, the title of the book.

Friesen does not attempt to situate his insights within complete historically articulated frameworks, which would be an exhaustive study, and require multiple volumes. We'll return to that point, later. He does focus upon a number of writers -- Plato, Freud, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Abraham Maslow -- who present multi-disciplinary views of human and societal development within unified and single frameworks.

The two main, and very disparate sources of inspiration are Elliott Jaques and G. Spencer Brown. Each is widely considered as a ground-breaking figure in their discipline, Jaques in psychology and management theory, and Brown in non-Aristotelian logic and its application. Elliott Jaques, did ground-breaking work in the science of organizational structure, relating this to the time-frames of different levels of corporate management. Jaques was a student of Melanie Klein, the famous object relations psychoanalyst. In object relations theory, the young child internalizes the parent as being good or bad, and develops their own self-esteem in relationship to that internalized object. Object relationship theorists regard subject-object interplay as key in human development, rather than Freud's theory of sexuality. It was later, in his career, that Jaques turns to organization structure as the other, and analyses that other in terms of optimal time frames of corporate leadership. Friesen doesn't discuss much of Jaques' pre-management background, but this writer can't help but think of his (Jaques') work in terms of the possible reapplication of aspects of object relations theory to management theory, with organizational leadership time frames having, perhaps, some correspondence to the life cycles of individual psychological maturation.

Friesen employs a system of logic, and its unique notational form, as developed by G. Spencer Brown, to help explain the development of his main points, in particular the role and importance of intention, in action. Brown's logical symbols denote and connote social and psychological attitudes, and have value that goes beyond logical possibilities. This includes the notational signs, including the circle, having pictorial value to point beyond themselves to possibilities in the world. The system is also non-Aristotelian, meaning that it is not bound by the law of contraction (or excluded middle), so that to assert a and not a simultaneously, is not a contradiction.

Continuing with our discussion, Friesen indicates, early on, common features that Plato and Freud have in common, which is to regard the state as the individual writ large. Actions, by the individual and state, are expressions of reason, intent, and the freedom to act. The choices made, through intention and rational choice, by the individual, and the state, seem to express a rational unfolding of possibilities, which historically has manifested as democratic governance of the state, and freedom of belief and action for the inhabitants of the

state. This is a main theme of the book.

Another set of unifying figures that Friesen brings into the book, are the two psychologists/psychotherapists Lawrence Kohlberg and Abraham Maslow. He views them as endeavoring to unify cognitive and moral development, an attempt going back to Plato, he notes, “who advanced the idea that Justice and Self-Actualization are synonyms.” (p.88, PDF file). Thus, Maslow’s concept of self-actualization could express the psychological aspect of freedom to act, for the individual in a democratic state.

This all leads to converging the disciplines, and unifying the life experience of the individual around certain modes of being, or ways of experiencing the world. Such a society could consist of self-actualized beings who live in the social-political context of (bourgeois) democracy and freedom. However, he also believes that reason and faith, and science and religion, respectively, would no longer view its sister dyad as antithetical to itself (which has been the Enlightenment view), but as existing harmoniously, and in a continuum of experience, as it were. Thus, religious belief is viewed as a private matter that is not viewed as antithetical to democracy as practiced in the state, or as experienced by individuals. This expansive vision of the social progress of societies, viewed historically, and of individual tolerance of others, is an outgrowth of, and culmination of the methodology and framework, that we’ve attempted to describe here.

As an examples of this expansive merging/converging of disciplines he writes that expansion or expanded spirituality, parallels political liberalism, though the book eschews such labels as liberal or conservative Friesen expresses his main points, and really presents the credo of the book, in these words:

- (1) One should not help another without their permission.
- (2) Meet them were they are, and not where they should be.
- (3) Avoid condemnation of the person, and address only the error of their thought.
- (4) While addressing the errors of others, we must address our own.
- (5) Endeavor to allow rather than prescribe Truth. Truth is what it is. It does not appear and disappear because a person or group of persons believes it or doubts it. It does not become truer because a theory or theories bring one closer to it or places thinking in alignment with it.” (p.186, PDF file)

This vision opens up toward liberal democracy, rather than a Marxist view in which freedom solidifies bureaucratically into a restrictive structures, whether it be dictatorship of the proletariat or the next historical stage described by Marx and Lenin, namely a socialist state. Nor does such a credo espouse a (neo) conservative position of promoting competition among individuals for wealth and status, though it places no restrictions on upward or downward class mobility.

This whole approach is very fruitful, in this writer’s view, and future studies should be done that would examine the thought of thinkers from the history of logic, psychology, epistemology, history, and science. Several figures and traditions within philosophy tradition come to mind, and I’ll present them here, briefly.

As we’ve indicated, Friesen views freedom as an expansive rather than contractive concept. One could trace this back to Fichte, who writes after Kant, in the early 19th century. One is free to express oneself act until they touch the skin of another being, which limits them. In other words, Fichte’s approach is driven by the expansive power of possibility, in which the self-expands to the limits possible to it until it affects the freedom of another self to expand. Such a system was at the time, viewed as political liberal, rather than as conservative (or contractive to the expansion of individual freedom). This reflects the Romantic optimism of the period, along with the hope that Napoleon would usher in democratic reforms, as David depicts in his famous painting of Napoleon, on horseback, crossing the Alps. Hegel too, initially expressed optimism for the spread of democratic reforms by Napoleon in his famous saying, that when he saw Napoleon riding, it was like World-Spirit on horseback.

Within the German tradition after Fichte, the thought of Schelling and Hegel could be studied in connection with Friesen’s main points on the development of societal and individual consciousness. Schelling

develops a theory of nature out of Fichte's theory of the self (which comes to self-awareness through the not-self), and expands the not-self into the world of nature, which unfolds freely, according to its possibilities.

To be sure, Friesen's work, "On Freedom..." is not a speculative idealist system like Hegel's or Schelling's. His work has significant elements in common with Hegel and Schelling, however, insofar as they all attempt to describe the moving forces in nature and society as whole. Hegel uses dialectical logic (as described in the famous thesis-antithesis-synthesis formulation) as the logical underpinning of his famous work, "Phenomenology of Spirit," while Friesen uses the logical and non-Aristotelian system of Brown as the logical underpinning of his system. Schelling's dialectics is closer to Friesen's than Hegel, in this writer's view – the other, as nature, expresses itself as outpourings of the whole, through its various forms in nature, as Schelling describes in his book on philosophy of freedom. Hegel is more concerned with the parts and their dialectical interaction. The negation of negation (which expresses "synthesis" in his dialogical logic) is key for Hegel, and is not part of Friesen's system nor Schelling's – the latter two thinkers stress development of the whole, from internal movement, rather than the dialectical interplay of parts, which, for Hegel, manifest as historical periods, in his "Phenomenology of Spirit."

Further study of Friesen's work could also be done in the context of modern literary constructionism and deconstructionism. This point is supported by Friesen's own extended discussion of Northrup Frye's famous work, "Anatomy of Criticism." He considers this work at some length, and in particular, the significance of the play of opposites in literary genres, as the fact that tragedy and comedy contain significant element of the other, which Frye calls mythic narratives (see p 91ff PDF file).

Another tradition for comparative study of Friesen's work, is that of liberal democracy, as in the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, and also such modern philosophers of history who work with different traditions -- John Rawls, with distributive justice, Richard Rorty with American naturalism and pragmatism, Andrew Bowie with the tradition of German idealism and Don Ihde with phenomenology,, among others modern thinkers.

Lastly, let us mention that August Comte's developmental approach to historical development in stages, has some resemblance to Friesen's approach. August Comte, a 19th century French philosopher, presents a theory of historic periods which progress from classical through modern, culminating both in the experimentally and rationally based science of the day, and democracy as a corresponding social expression. These are also expressions of rational intent and freedom, which are concepts that Friesen also presents. Comte's thought is evolutionary and could be considered in connection with evolutionism as it has historically evolved. Friesen makes reference to evolutionism, as well.

"On Freedom: Organizational Science Examined Philosophically" by Peter Gibson Friesen is very much a literary orchestration, in the best sense of the word. It presents a multifaceted interdisciplinary approach for understanding the most basic forces in history, society and in the individual's development. He attempts to unify psychological self-actualization with socio-political freedom of expression, apart from social class or government regulation. He incorporates these insights in a unified theory of management, supported by a system of logic, as well.