

Anthony Burgess' novel, A Clockwork Orange: the undetectable right to freewill

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The Not-So-Unalienable Right: Free Will

In the words of Sophocles, “ All concerns of men go wrong when they wish to cure evil with evil.” It has always been argued that when you take away a person’s decision to choose between good and evil in life, the person ceases to have any more meaning than lesser animals. In Anthony Burgess’s novel *A Clockwork Orange* the main character, Alex, undergoes this ordeal when the government takes away his unalienable right of choosing his own destiny. In the novel, Burgess harshly condemns those who would take away the free will of the people and declares that humanity must make the choice between committing bad acts and doing good for themselves, even if the results turn out harmful.

In the beginning of the novel Alex is obsessed with violence. During the daytime he thinks only of the violence he will commit that night. In the nighttime he relishes the feeling of kicking in a person’s teeth and even during his moments of peace and quiet he plays violent scenes over and over in his head. Alex is “ firmly committed to evil; he enjoys sadistic fantasy[s] in which he helps to crucify Christ, and, in a discussion of goodness, calls himself a patron of ‘ the other shop’” (Rabinovitz 15). In addition he “ does not seek forgiveness [for any of his actions]. Rather, he revels and exploits and celebrates in them” (Semansky 11). That is, until he is thrown into jail after robbing and killing an old woman. During his stint in jail he gets into only one fight, yet ends up accidentally killing a man. The jail wardens then deem his brutal and savage personality as a perfect first trial for their new Ludovico Technique. However, from the very beginning the jail

chaplain expresses his doubts in the effectiveness and moral righteousness of the technique: "The question is whether such a technique can really make a man good. Goodness comes from within... Goodness is something chosen. When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man" (Burgess 93). Even before the treatment has begun, Burgess has already plainly affirmed the immorality of those who essentially steal the free will of mankind. The jail chaplain goes on to say:

Very hard ethical questions are involved... you are to be made into a good boy 6655321. It may be horrible to be good. And when I say that to you I realize how self-contradictory that sounds... What does God want? Does God want goodness of the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him? (Burgess 106)

Essentially, the treatment Alex is to undergo will make him no more than a simple farm animal. He will no longer have free will to choose between doing good and bad deeds, because he will merely be automatically inclined to only pursue good endeavors.

Despite the fact that people commit abominable acts of violence, it is still Burgess's view that those who take away the felons free will are committing a worse crime than those committed by the felons. In fact, Burgess views the scientists who take Alex's "capacity for ethical choice" as far inferior to Alex especially because Alex "must be permitted to enhance the possibilities for his salvation by choosing good over evil. A man rendered incapable of moral

choice can never attain salvation; but a sinner may choose to repent and win redemption" (Rabinovitz 15). By denying him a chance to choose his own path, they ultimately deny him the chance to reach heaven. Additionally, by basically severing Alex's moral growth, they leave him stranded and unable to mature and grow into a person who chooses good on his own; he must simply stay a life form with no moral groundings, only internal urgings to do the politically correct and kind things. Since Alex has no option of "evil" to choose from, his "choice" to do the morally correct thing has become an utterly meaningless act.

Later on, despite his brainwashing conditioning him to hate even the thought of violence against himself, Alex attempts to commit suicide; only after which the State removes their Ludovico instruction from Alex's brain, curing him completely. Regardless of the fact that Alex savored evil in the beginning and he was able to feel camaraderie with the reader since he assumed that "at some level they share[ed] his fascination with evil and their dark side," he now seeks to change his old and devious ways (Semansky 12). "In his youth [Alex] may [have been] predestined to do evil; but with maturity comes freedom...[and] Alex grows tired of violence, and reforms" (Rabinovitz 15). If only the guards would have waited, this natural reform in Alex's behavior would have occurred eventually as he slowly matured and the natural progression would have caused much less tension and strife for many people.

A Clockwork Orange is written to represent a very real threat to a future society where the omnipresent government controls everything, despite the

consequences. Alex serves as a reminder that when people, by either r
madness, governmental restraint, political restraint, or societal restraint are
kept from making their own choice between good and evil, they cease to
become a person at all, and simply being to subsist as a life form, no longer
a human being.