

UNITED WISDOM

Freedom and Self-Limitation Through a Chosen Rule

Freedom and Action

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

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Epigraph

> *a free multitude*

Benedict de Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, chapter V, §6, translated by R. H. M. Elwes. The RU fragment is our own translation. This concerns a political community rather than a personal habit; that scale is preserved in the comparison below.

What this article is about

Freedom readily appears as the possibility of changing direction at any moment. An accepted rule then seems to diminish it: someone closes paths previously open. Yet such a restriction sometimes helps preserve a chosen undertaking among new possibilities. An artist leaves time for one sketch, a listener decides to hear someone out, a participant checks an existing commitment before accepting another. Possibilities narrow in one respect so particular participation remains possible in another.

This article considers a personal rule chosen for a safe undertaking and open to renewed discussion. The central distinction is between preserving an intelligible reason and obeying a rule solely for obedience's sake. Selected primary contexts from Samuel Smiles, Rousseau and Spinoza concern different questions of habit and political freedom. We compare narrowly without deriving a unified mechanism of self-government. A fictional scene asks who accepted a rule, what it supports, whom it affects and which changes warrant revision.

I. One Canvas Instead of Another Beginning

Imagine Darya, a fictional artist who draws after work and enjoys new ideas. Several unfinished sketches lie on her table, each once important. She regards this pattern as neither an illness nor a moral defect. She simply wants to continue a particular series and see one subject develop. She decides to spend a session's first twenty peaceful minutes on the current sketch before beginning another. This is a personal rule for a definite undertaking rather than a general prohibition on curiosity.

The restriction closes an immediate new beginning without promising completion of every drawing. It grants the chosen object a definite portion of time. Darya can still record an idea and return later. If she needs to explore new images today, she can revise the session

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

separately. Avoid concealing revision as obedience to the old rule. Continuing one sketch and exploring many subjects are different tasks; both can matter and both permit a decision of their own.

Why twenty minutes? Here Darya chooses a small limit rather than an attention standard or universal recipe. Someone else could choose another interval or decline this arrangement. Duration does not establish usefulness. Meaning concerns the reason: giving a particular drawing continuation. If the interval is awkward, examine whether this form suits that reason rather than whether Darya is sufficiently obedient to a command she issued last week.

Two scales of freedom are already visible. Darya reduces immediate switching while trying to preserve continuation of the series. This does not establish that every restriction expands freedom; that would require information about each case. It shows why restriction alone cannot finish an assessment. Ask what is closed, why, by whom and on which conditions before declaring the rule either liberating or meaningless voluntary submission.

II. Who Chose the Rule

Darya formulates the rule herself, but this does not exhaust its acceptance. Perhaps she repeats a teacher's advice or seeks another person's image of a true artist. Borrowing does not automatically make a decision alien. Advice can be intelligible and suitable. Distinguish the reason she accepts from an expectation she merely repeats. If the only answer is that serious people work this way, its object remains unclear for her undertaking and series.

In our scene Darya can name a ground: I want to see one subject develop before comparing it with another. This is limited to her work. It demands no identical order from others and creates no scale of artistic worth. The rule can now be discussed by a comprehensible object. Did it allow the sketch to continue? Has the project changed? Is another form needed? Answers may differ from the initial expectation without needing to confirm it for the sake of an attractive sequence.

Personal choice nevertheless guarantees no absence of pressure. Someone can formulate a rule and later use it against themselves by adding an undiscussed penalty. Darya misses an evening and decides to draw twice as long tomorrow. This does not follow from the original limit. It is a new decision with a separate cost and reason. Assess its content again rather than treating every subsequent order as included in her right to follow a chosen rule.

Who chose therefore includes the possibility of a present answer. Can Darya explain the rule, decline the trial or change its form without threat or humiliation? We measure no psychological state and determine no hidden origin. We preserve conditions for voluntary discussion of a safe task. Under coercion or danger, clarifying reasons is insufficient; safety and suitable

support take priority. Personal rule should not conceal another's demand that someone cannot actually discuss.

III. A Reason and a Command Have Different Lives

Initially Darya chose the rule for her series. A month later she may remember only the command: first twenty minutes on the current sketch. Repetition does not establish a lost reason; familiar order sometimes reduces deliberation over ordinary actions. But if questioning the reason becomes forbidden, matters have changed. The rule now remains because any departure is called defeat rather than because it supports the undertaking. This different restriction should not silently be presented as the earlier one.

In the selected chapter VI of *Character*, Smiles discusses habit and repetition in forming character. This is a historical moral outlook rather than contemporary experimental theory. We borrow neither sweeping promises nor his measure of personal assessment. Our narrow question concerns repeated activity's connection with the reason for choosing it. Primary context read.

The number of evenings supplies no automatic answer for Darya. A month of adherence may reveal mechanical repetition without the development she wanted. Has the subject changed, is learning needed, or does the activity no longer fit? No explanation is predetermined. Repetition is a known fact; its significance for the goal is separate. If significance is unknown, acknowledge it rather than adding discipline as though that word already establishes benefit.

Preserving a reason can also support continuing. Perhaps several evenings reveal a suitable result: the arrangement allows work on a desired colour relationship. She can retain it for another limited interval. This concerns her observation, not habit's worldwide power. Reason and command stay connected through content, revisitable without destroying a rule at every doubt or granting an instruction perpetual authority over a future person.

IV. An Earlier Decision Meets a New Possibility

Inspiration arrives at the session's beginning and Darya wants a clean sheet immediately. Her rule encounters an opportunity it did not detail. If every interest automatically cancels the order, it cannot preserve the intended interval. If every new interest is forever prohibited, its object changes. It originally concerned one session's beginning rather than rejecting future ideas. Both expansions need separate decisions even if they emerge almost unnoticed.

Darya can briefly record the idea and return to the current sketch. This is one way of preserving two tasks within different limits. It guarantees neither the idea's survival nor better work on the existing drawing. Our scene measures no creative outcome. Its point is that exception and postponement differ. Deferring a beginning until an agreed boundary does not

reject its content. This can sometimes keep a peaceful limit from becoming a dispute over entitlement to interest.

A new possibility sometimes has a definite deadline. An invited participant is available today, the light changes in an hour, or a present task needs other material. The rule may then obstruct the reason for the session. Check the deadline rather than using it as a convenient justification for every switch. If information changes the situation, Darya can revise the order. A reasoned exception does not establish that the original rule was always unnecessary or can never be used again.

An earlier decision matters between these extremes. It reduces reconsideration of an entire undertaking at every ordinary switch without closing every new fact. Someone can distinguish an appealing option from a condition warranting revision. No correct distinction is guaranteed. The decision remains human, with grounds, mistakes and possible return. When accepting an exception, name its object so today's change does not become an unnoticed new rule falsely attributed yesterday's agreement tomorrow.

V. A Rule Does Not Govern Someone Else

Darya shares a workroom with someone close to her. Her first twenty minutes concern her drawing, creating no duty for him to stay silent or leave. If quiet is needed, she can request a suitable time and hear a reply. Sincere acceptance turns no personal restriction into a shared agreement. Otherwise her rule's authority expands to another's participation although she chose only her own activity's form. Self-limitation changes meaning: someone else is now restricted.

Suppose an agreement exists. The other participant can report changed conditions today. This does not cancel Darya's rule altogether; the shared space needs present clarification. Postponement, another available method or an agreed exception are possible. None follows automatically from a personal command. Distinguish what Darya can do alone from what requires agreement from someone whose reasons may be only partly known.

A rule can also affect promised participation. If Darya agreed to help prepare a shared gathering, her artistic order does not cancel that arrangement. She can discuss a change without declaring personal freedom sufficient grounds for another's acceptance. Nor does another gain authority to demand every abandonment of her art. Specific conditions and promises are at issue. Replacing them with a general victory for independence or duty loses the people and known content of their shared undertaking.

Examining a rule's freedom therefore includes its boundary. Conditions for drawing can be personal, shared and external. Darya can restrict switching but not another's agreement. If threats or coercion prevent peaceful discussion, a voluntary trial should not become a method

of enduring danger. Philosophy does not replace support. Even in an ordinary safe scene, precision keeps a useful personal decision from becoming an unaccepted demand extended to someone else merely because a plan finds it convenient.

VI. A Restriction's Cost Must Remain Visible

The rule preserves time for a sketch at a cost: a new image is postponed and sometimes never develops. Calling this increased freedom cannot justify denying loss afterwards. A restriction may be suitable with its cost acknowledged. Preserving every possibility unchanged promises more than this arrangement offers. Compare particular gains and deferred paths without creating a numerical measure we lack and do not need for this discussion.

A small initial cost can change. Darya receives an assignment to explore several variants rapidly and finds the old beginning delays necessary comparison. The undertaking differs now from an ordinary desire for a fresh sheet within the same series. Name the changed object. Revision then rests on today's task rather than fatigue with an old label. If the ground is unclear, a limited check or stopping is possible without inventing a persuasive story for an immediate decision.

Some costs make a rule unsuitable for our safe discussion. Pain, danger, coercion and needs for specialist assistance are not tests of fidelity. We suggest no dietary, treatment or other important rules requiring appropriate knowledge. Personal formulation does not turn risk into free necessity. Stopping and suitable support matter more than adherence in such conditions. Even peacefully, someone can decline a restriction whose cost they no longer accept.

Visible cost makes decisions more precise without guaranteeing correctness. Darya may compare badly or learn more later. Cost is therefore linked to returning to a reason. A rule need not justify itself every minute, but its future assessment should not be prohibited. Someone can choose a limited trial and subsequently discuss the known. This limitation does not establish weakness; it fits incomplete knowledge of how a form operates in a particular task, if such knowledge is needed.

VII. Political Freedom Has Another Scale

In I.VIII of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau connects obedience to an accepted law with moral freedom. His context concerns civil status and shared political life rather than a personal schedule. Primary section read. Darya does not legislate her sketch in the same civic sense, and abandoning twenty minutes cannot be assessed as violating a social contract.

In V.§6 of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza distinguishes a community established by free people from a conquered one, with different governing ends. This historical political argument establishes no benefit of private rules. Complete chapter V read. Both brief quotations retain

that political context. We equate neither voluntary drawing with conquest nor every everyday postponement with political liberation or enslavement.

Why make the comparisons? They show freedom and rules discussed at different levels where obedience cannot replace questions of ends and participation. Scale determines content. Darya's personal trial has a small object, permits refusal and establishes no authority over others. Political texts examine shared life's organization. A similar question about purposes creates no identity of relationships, rights or consequences. Our map retains differences rather than promising a universal answer for individuals, families and states alike.

The primary voices consequently remain separate. Rousseau, Spinoza and Smiles are not authors of one discipline technique. Their selected contexts help pose questions; answers in the fictional scene are our bounded interpretation. Readers who reject an author's political assumptions can still discuss reason and command on their own content. This needs no fabricated agreement among traditions and acquires no obligatory force from placing numerous famous names alongside one another.

VIII. An Exception Needs Its Own Description

Darya departs from the order once to make an urgent sketch for an agreed gathering. One account says she has completely lost her ability to follow rules; another identifies an exception with a definite reason. Opening a fresh sheet proves neither. We need to know the undertaking chosen and why. Our scene supplies the reason as authorial content. In an actual case it may remain unknown, never to be guessed from an impression of someone's discipline.

An exception need not permanently change the rule. It may concern one case after which the earlier order remains suitable. Repeated exceptions sometimes show a rule no longer describes the undertaking. Then discuss another arrangement rather than retaining an old command surrounded by unspoken amendments. Numbers alone do not choose the answer. Exceptions' objects matter: a changed task, unavailable condition, revised interest or another reason named only with sufficient information.

Nor should every departure be retrospectively declared deliberate revision. Darya may have opened a sheet and invented an explanation later. We do not know this or assert a concealed cause. We distinguish earlier grounds from present reconstruction. Someone who cannot remember why they changed the order can acknowledge it. A subsequent decision need not first prove that every past step was wholly free, correct and transparent to their own account.

The practical concern is understanding an exception's significance for continuation rather than punishing it. Does the reason remain? Does the form fit? Should another participant be told? Questions may lead to return, refinement or withdrawal, with neither success guarantees nor diagnosis. Their limited purpose keeps a rule discussable when facts cease to match its initial

formula. Someone need neither erase all experience after one change nor make immutability their only evidence of authorship.

IX. Revision Differs From Cancellation

Darya changes the rule: begin with a selected question about the drawing rather than twenty minutes. She wants to understand two colours' relationship, then choose further participation. This revises the form while retaining its reason. If the series no longer interests her, she can cancel the rule altogether. The second change is not secretly the first. Naming what remains and ends prevents either option being hidden under development when the decision's object is unknown.

Revision may reveal that the form was too broad. Darya applied it both to finishing a series and to open exploration despite their different tasks. She now limits it to a particular kind of evening. This does not establish a meaningless earlier choice. It identifies refinement after experience: the past choice had its old content and today's acquired new content. Someone can acknowledge this without presenting the entire history as continuous improvement containing nothing superfluous or unsuitable.

Where others are involved, cancelling a personal formula does not cancel a shared promise. Darya can change her artistic order while agreed assistance at the gathering remains separate. A new date or form may need discussion and a reply that inward cancellation cannot create. Revision's freedom has a human boundary: I can change my reason and action, but consequences for a shared task neither disappear with my rule nor become another's duty merely because I no longer accept it.

Cancellation may suitably finish a trial. Darya learns the arrangement does not fit her present interest and returns to another form. This need not be failure of discipline; it supplies a limited fact about a particular task's suitable form. If the reason is unclear, say so. Accuracy matters more than a positive verdict about oneself: what was chosen, what happened and what is accepted now. A rule serves discussable participation; stopping need not create a new demand always to live without rules.

X. A Person Remains Behind the Restriction

Darya can retain, revise or finish the trial. Freedom is not measured by the number of open sheets. It is discussed through relationship to reasons, available revision and a rule's boundary. This is our limited map of a safe personal decision, not a universal theory. It establishes neither usefulness of every chosen limit nor a need for every undertaking to obey an earlier command. Some activities suit exploration, others an agreed sequence, with their objects examined separately.

Primary comparisons keep their scales. Smiles considers habit within historical character ethics, Rousseau civil status and Spinoza political communities' ends. We construct no common mechanism of inner authority. Their questions help avoid treating obedience as sufficient description of freedom. The scene returns a rule to reasons and affected people while preserving uncertainty where facts cannot support stronger conclusions.

A rule can protect time while requiring change. These are compatible statements. Its initial reason is no perpetual law for a future person; a present exception makes no earlier choice nonexistent. Darya retains authorship through naming participation and new decisions within known limits rather than demonstrating complete immutability. Continuation, refinement or withdrawal may follow. None acquires correctness merely by appearing stricter or freer from outside.

Ask specifically what this restriction now supports and which cost you accept. Then ask where its authority over your action ends and another's agreement, an external condition or necessary assistance begins. Answers guarantee no ease and cancel no consequences. They preserve someone able to discuss a rule's meaning. Self-limitation need be neither victory over oneself nor abandonment of freedom: meaning appears in a definite participation that can be examined and revised.

What this means in practice

If you wish, consider one small personal rule in a safe, reversible undertaking. Avoid treatment, diet, dangerous work or important commitments requiring professional decisions. Name the rule, its reason and what it temporarily closes. Identify people affected by its conditions. Any required agreement must be obtained separately; personal writing cannot manufacture it.

Ask which known changes warrant revision: another task, unavailable conditions or an unaccepted cost. Select a limited trial if suitable. Add no punishment for departure; that would be a new decision rather than a necessary component. Stop under threats, pain, coercion or unsafe conditions and use appropriate support.

After the selected period, describe what the rule supported, unknowns and whether you want to retain, refine or cancel it. Conclusions concern only this undertaking. They establish neither strength of character nor future freedom. You can decline the trial or finish early. The aim is an intelligible connection between restriction, reason and voluntary participation rather than a contest in obedience to yesterday's command.

Key quotation

> *living for its own ends*

Benedict de Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, V.§6, the sentence contrasting free and conquered communities. The RU fragment is our own translation. Political subject and opposing ends are preserved. This does not establish that Darya's private rule equals the organization of a free state.

Connections between traditions

Smiles considers repetition in a historical moral discussion of character. Rousseau I.VIII concerns freedom in civil status. Spinoza V.§6 distinguishes political communities' ends. Rule and purpose can bring these questions alongside one another, but habit, civic law and political organization remain different subjects. None is declared a universal self-government technique.

Darya's fictional scene is our application rather than an example found in those authors. Unlike a Confucian consideration of relational forms, someone here chooses a restriction for a personal undertaking, identifies cost and preserves revision. Shared conditions need separate agreement, which personal order does not automatically create.

Sources

1. Samuel Smiles, *Character*, chapter VI, selected paragraphs on habit and repetition; Project Gutenberg2541. Selected primary context read, not the entire chapter or book. Paraphrase used; historical quotation allowance is not reset.

2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, I.VIII and adjacent I.VII context, translated by G.D.H.Cole; Project Gutenberg46333. I.VIII read completely; its political concept is not equated with a personal schedule.

3. Benedict de Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, chapter V, especially§6, translated by R.H.M.Elwes; Constitution Society. All seven sections and two notes of chapter V read, not the entire treatise. Specific versions retain territorial and editorial rights limits; worldwide freedom is unestablished.

Tags

freedom, self-limitation, rule, choice, reason, purpose, habit, revision, exception, cancellation, Smiles, Rousseau, Spinoza, political philosophy, character, personal decision, agreement, others, conditions, cost, creativity, drawing, voluntariness, safety, boundaries, authorship, historical sources, United Wisdom

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.