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Of Human Bondage and the Question of Free Will

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Abstract

Of Human Bondage (1915) by Somerset Maugham might be considered to be the story of a boy's rite of passage, of a troubled love affair or to have a touch of Maugham's own growth from boyhood to adulthood. However, the novel exceeds these simplistic approaches, touching upon the most intriguing questions of the human condition: the triggering principles of human actions and the question of free will. In this questioning, Maugham's main philosophical inspiration is Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and he borrows the title of his book from Spinoza's magnum opus, *Ethics* (1677) in which "Of Human Bondage" is the title of an episode. In his Ethics, Spinoza defines the concept of bondage as man's inability to have full control over his actions and thoughts and he suggests that even though a human being has the knowledge of good and evil, certain faculties of human nature might lead to false knowledge or imperfection in his/her actions. The novel's protagonist, Philip, who struggles with this bondage that surrounds him like an alien power that comes from within, as Maugham describes it, becomes the object of this discussion of human freedom or imprisonment carried out by Spinoza and other seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers such as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume. Thus, the aim of this paper is to discuss the issue of the 'inescapable' bondage of man and the possibility of free will as embodied in Maugham's *Of Human Bondage.*

Keywords: The question of free will, *Of Human Bondage*, Somerset Maugham, Benedict de Spinoza, determinism.

Of Human Bondage ve Özgür İrade Sorunsalı

Öz

Somerset Maugham'ın Of Human Bondage (1915) adlı romanı bir bireyin çocukluktan erişkinliğe geçişinin hikayesi, sorunlu bir aşk hikayesi ya da Maugham'ın kendi hayatının bir yansıması olarak okunabilir. Ancak roman bu yaklaşımların çok ötesine geçerek, aslında insan var oluşunun en tartışmalı sorunlarından birisine dokunmaktadır: insanın eylemlerinin kökeni ve özgür irade sorunsalı. Bu sorgulama sürecinde Maugham'ın en önemli felsefi ilham kaynağı Baruch Spinoza'dır (1632-1677). Öyle ki romanın başlığı aynı zamanda Spinoza'nın en bilinen eseri olan Etika adlı metninin bölümlerinden birisinin başlığıdır. Bu eserinde Spinoza insanın esareti kavramını bir kişinin kendi davranışları ve düşünceleri üzerinde kontrol sahibi olamaması olarak tanımlar ve kişinin doğru ve yanlış

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kavramlarının bilincinde olmasına rağmen insan doğasına içkin olan bazı etkiler sebebiyle doğru davranışı sergileyemeyebileceğini söyler. Maugham'ın romanının başkarakteri Philip, Spinoza'nın tanımladığı bu esaretin pençesinde mücadele eden bir birey olarak karşımıza çıkar ve bu anlamda da özgür iradenin mümkün olup olmadığı tartışmasının da merkezine yerleşir. Bu bağlamda, bu makalenin amacı Spinoza ve Hobbes, Hume ve Bacon gibi birçok düşünür tarafından tartışılmış olan özgür irade ya da insanın "kaçınılmaz" esareti sorununu Maugham'ın bakış açısından irdelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özgür irade sorunsalı, *Of Human Bondage*, Somerset Maugham, Benedict de Spinoza, belirlenimcilik.

INTRODUCTION

Somerset Maugham was a very productive novelist and a playwright whose value as an artist has mostly been overlooked. Although his work was appreciated and well-received by the reading public and critics such as Gerald Gould, Theodore Dreiser and Marcus Aurelius Goodrich,[1] his work was mostly dismissed and ignored by critics and intellectuals such as Lytton Stratchey and Virginia Woolf (Curtis-Whitehead 2003: 1). In Woodburn O. Ross's words "[f]ew contemporary authors have been praised as highly and condemned as completely as has W. Somerset Maugham" (1946: 113). One reason for this disfavour or lack of interest in Maugham's works as literary merits may be explained with Spencer's evaluation about the tone of his works which is "that of a man talking to friend in a club" (1940: 3). Spencer also argues that "the critics have not only branded Maugham with unflattering epithets; they have done something very harmful to his reputation than that – they have neglected him by putting him to one side of the main current of literature in his age" (1940: 2). Maugham has also received positive criticism from several critics such as Richard A. Cordell who wrote one of the two book-lenght studies on Maugham and he suggests, in this introduction to Maugham's masterpiece *Of Human Bondage* that, as a writer "[a]lthough [Maugham] declares that he never pretends to be anything but a story-teller, his fiction actually yields a harvest of facts and ideas" as epitomised by the very same novel (1956: xi).

The novel touches upon the most intriguing questions of the human condition: the triggering principles of human actions and the question of freedom or free will which, as Cordell suggests, "even as a child he craved" (1937: 12). Throughout this questioning, Baruch Spinoza is Maugham's main inspiration. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza defines the concept of bondage as "[m]an's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects" (1994: 197) and suggests that even though a human being has the knowledge of good and evil, certain faculties of human nature might lead to false knowledge or imperfection in his/her actions. Spinoza explains this with the fact that man's actions are determined by passions, or 'affects' as Spinoza chooses to call them, and by the environmental factors. Through this reasoning, Spinoza questions the possibility of free will. The novel's central character, Philip, who struggles with this bondage that surrounds him like an alien power that comes from within, as Maugham describes it, becomes the object of this discussion of human freedom or imprisonment carried out by Spinoza and other seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers such as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume. Thus, the aim of this paper is to discuss Maugham's treatment of the issue of the 'inescapable' bondage of man and the possibility of free will as embodied in *Of Human Bondage*.

The Question of Free Will

The question of free will has always occupied intellectuals of various cultures beginning with the Greeks. As Michael Allen Gillespie points out, the first discussions concerning the problem of free will were raised by the Stoics and Gnostics (2008: 142). However, Gillespie also argues that the origin of the modern discussions concerning the issue is the theological discussions carried out by the "Ancient Christianity" (2008: 142). According to Gillespie, the belief in the omnipotence of God and the discrepancy between the divine will and human freedom is the basis of all the following discussions. "If God is omnipotent, how can human beings be responsible for anything at all? And if they are not

[1] The articles by these critics can be found in *The Critical Heritage: W. Somerset Maugham* between the pages 123-139.

responsible, how can they be guilty? And if they are not guilty, how can they be justly punished?" (Gillespie 2008: 142). These questions are discussed by outstanding theologians of early Christianity such as Augustine, Aquinas and later by Luther. Gillespie suggests that Augustine advocated "the independence of the human will not as a foundation for human dignity but in order to show that the source of evil lay not in God but in man" (2008: 142). He argued, in this respect, that the concept of free will is compatible with the divine will. Aquinas on the other hand argued that both divine and the human will are guided by reason which, according to Gillespie, made the absolute and the divine will of the God questionable (2008: 143). Luther, later suggested that nothing in the world could happen without the will of the divine, rejecting the possibility of human free will (Gillespie, 2008: 144). Erasmus, on the other hand, argues that although the world is guided by the principle of causality, it is still compatible with free will.

This discussion was carried out by Rene Descartes and Thomas Hobbes in the seventeenth century. Descartes argued that the universe operated within the laws of causality but as human beings were above the nature in terms of existence, they were thus distinguished and free from its laws (Gillespie, 2008: 17). While Descartes argued for the possibility of free will due to his theory of duality, Thomas Hobbes preferred to discuss mankind as a part and totally subject to nature and its laws (Gillespie, 2008: 17). Gillespie suggests that for Hobbes, "Man is therefore moved not by intrinsic natural impulses, not by divine inspiration or free will, but by a succession of causal motions" (2008: 41). What's more, Hobbes argues that the human dependence on the causal cycle of nature is hidden from mankind and that human beings think that they are autonomous although they act in accordance with external factors and their passions (Gillespie, 2008: 235). According to Gillespie, Hobbes attributes a kind of freedom to humanity by suggesting that mankind is moved by their passions. However, this is only a "practical but not metaphysical freedom" because mankind is predestined to be born with these passions (Gillespie, 2008: 236). Gillespie summarizes his point suggesting that "For Descartes as for Erasmus, there is human freedom in addition to the causality through nature. For Hobbes as for Luther there is only the absolute power of God as the ultimate cause behind the motion of all matter" (2008: 42).

Besides, Hume, whom Maugham was known to read to perfect himself in writing as pointed out by Richard Cordell, contributed to the discussion as a compatibilist in the eighteenth century (1937: 31). Hume agrees that human beings are subject to the laws of nature and to causality. However, the fact that they are a part of the causal cycle, does not necessarily mean that they are not free according to Hume. They still have a choice about whether they would perform a specific action or not. Hume accepts the influence of necessity and responsibility on one's actions. However, he draws a line between 'being caused' and 'being compelled' in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Though caused, as long as a person is not compelled to perform an action, that person has free will according to Hume.

In *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), David Hume (1711-1776) agrees with Spinoza that "[a]mbition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, public spirit; these passions, mixed in various degrees, and disturbed through society, have been, from the beginning of the world, and still are, the source of all the actions and enterprises, which have ever been observed among mankind" (1994: 60) and he reaches a more explicit conclusion, suggesting that "[b]y liberty, then, we can only mean *a power of*

acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will." (1994: 69). This means, if people have the power to perform an action, they can be seen as free, but the action – the nature, content, structure of the action – in question is already determined by powers beyond them. Thus, the freedom Hume talks about is only a surface freedom, an illusion of freedom and the patterns of our actions are determined as embodied in *Of Human Bondage.*

The discussion was carried out during the nineteenth century between the Hegelian rationalists and the positivists like Emile Durkheim and Auguste Comte. Hegel argues, according to Ramon, that

> *such thing as will has a tripartite character: first, the possibility of abstracting from any specific content: second, the possibility of resolution to action (that means the abandonment of the tenacity of abstraction and refusal to action); third, the possibility of taking as an action guideline or principle, not just the satisfaction of impulses or desires, being what they may (Hegel would speak of finite ends), but that which expresses the very essence or character of will, namely, concrete universality (Hegel would speak of infinite ends).* (2015: 316)

In Hegel's frame of mind human beings are to some extent subject to the causality surrounding them, yet not in a slavish sense as the animals are. Kant, on the other hand, suggests in *The Critique of Pure Reason* that a freedom of this kind is like the freedom of a clock to move forward, taking sides with the determinists.

Henri Bergson, who stood on the indeterminist camp of the discussion of free will, published *Creative Evolotion* in 1911, only four years before the publication of *Of Human Bondage,* celebrating the free will of the human beings as their distinctive quality, the prerequisite of human consciousness and the source of their creativity (1922: 117, 211, 262). Later Bergson's standing is embraced by Deluze and the determinist cause is advocated by the structuralists. Thus, the problem of free will is a problem that lies on the basis of modernity and there has been an on-going debate about it which does not seem even close to being resolved even today and Somerset Maugham, just like many other prominent novelists of the time, like Dostoevsky and his *Notes from the Underground,* contributes to this vibrant discussion of his time in his works, on the determinist side.

Maugham's Glass Prison

Actually the problem of free will is a recurrent theme in most of Maugham's novels. As Richard A. Cordell points out in his Maugham biography, "[t]he years taught [Maugham], like Philip, the delusion of free-will (man is tied to a stake, and his freedom of action consists in occasionally determining whether he shall trot around clockwise or counter-clockwise in the prescribed circle), and he came to the not unpleasant conclusion that man is able to view and study the pattern of his life rather than to design and complete that pattern" (1937: 32). As Ross also points out, *Making of a Saint,* is the story of Filippo being "tormented by a passion which he cannot conquer" (1946: 114) just like *Mrs. Craddock* who cannot shake her love for Edward Craddock, a cold, stupid tenant on her estate. *The Merry-Go-Round* also does not offer any "refuge from the tempest of passion to its characters (Ross, 1946:114). *The Magician* narrates a literal bewitchment of Margaret and her inevitable enslavement (Ross, 1946: 115). Besides the influence of the unreignable passions on human behaviour, in *The Hero* "For the first time Maugham pays attention to the frustrating influences of an environment as well as to those of an individual's irrational desires" (Ross, 1946: 116). Ross believes that through this frame of mind Maugham develops

> *an implication concerning the very nature of the immediate motivation of all human actions. If a person rationally wills to choose one course of action but is compelled by some perhaps obscure part of his nature to follow another, than his rational will is not free. And if the person who struggles vainly against the promptings arising from the dark, mysterious, and unconscious depths of his own nature is a valid type of humanity, then humanity is not free to make rationally governed choices but is psychologically in bondage.* (1946: 116)

However Ross points out that Maugham's first direct and open implication about his deterministic philosophy is encountered in *Of Human Bondage.* In this work, Maugham "successfully projects his psychological determinism against the background of a mechanistic, naturalistic interpretation of life. The novel is thus principally concerned not with events but with a philosophy" (Ross, 1946: 117). Ross argues that with each episode, the main character of the novel Philip discovers more and more of his physical and phychological limitations until he finally has to acknowledge his bondage and the insignificance of his existence within the circle of life (1946: 118). He goes on to suggest that through Philip's story, Maugham discovers what motivates human action is indeed the nature of things, which he takes as "interacting psychological and environmental complexes" (Ross 1946: 120).

Although Ross does not mention it in his discussion of Maugham and the concept of free will, the primary guide of the philosophy inflicted in *Of Human Bondage* is the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, who follows the same pattern of thought with Luther and Hobbes. Spinoza is a seventeenth century Dutch philosopher who worked on optics, the existence and the being, the relationship of the self with its surroundings, the Cartesian perception of man and the universe and on the possibility of human freedom or free will. Spinoza objected to the Cartesian belief that human beings are separate from and superior to nature. His determinism provides that humanity is a part of and subject to the laws of nature. Besides, unlike Descartes, Spinoza argues that the mental faculties and the physical faculties of a human being are not distinct from each other and are of the same substance. As opposed to Descartes, who argues that the mind is the only reliable aspect of human existence, Spinoza considers the mind as not distinct from the body but rather a part, a faculty of the body. In brief, the mind is not a superior entity that would lead to the perfection or the reformation of humanity and the environment. Rather, Spinoza believes that human beings are flawed by birth and that the motivations of their actions can be ill-driven which rests on the fact that human actions are guided by, what Spinoza calls, the 'affects'. So even though one has the knowledge of the right, one might be triggered to do the wrong under the influence of these affects.

According to Spinoza, there are three basic primitive 'affects' that govern human actions: desire, joy and sadness. He argues that all the other human 'affects', such as rage, jealousy and hate are originated from these three basic affects and that these 'affects' have the power to control human actions. Spinoza, as a determinist, has a strong belief in the idea that the universe operates as a causal chain of events and that the triggering origin of human action in this chain is these 'affects'. As İlham Dilman also points out in *Free Will: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction,* Spinoza believes that nature runs through a causal chain to which human beings are subject and by which they are driven in their actions, such as instincts, desires, environmental factors and ego-centric drives such as greed and will to power (2001:128). In this respect, Dilman reaches the conclusion that Spinoza "represents

human beings as merely a small part of a huge machine that grinds on relentlessly. The motion of the machine goes through each of us, transmitted through the motion of wheels within us, thus giving us the illusion that we do some of the moving, or at least contribute to the motion" (2001: 128). This illusion of freedom complicates things even further. Although people are determined by factors that are out of their control, according to Spinoza, they think of themselves as free agents. Spinoza explains this illusion with the fact that human beings "are ignorant of the causes by which [they] ha[ve] been determined to act" (1994: 248). In other words, a man thinks that he is free in his actions, because he is not wholly aware of the factors that motivate him to commit those actions. In a simpler sense, people might be aware of what they want to do, but they are not aware of why they want to do it. They are not aware of the fact that their actions are performed under the influence of the 'affects', and that they are indeed guided, passive and slavish which makes absolute freedom an unreachable ideal in Spinoza's frame of mind.

The main character of *Of Human Bondage*, Philip, is the embodiment of Spinoza's idea of human bondage and his club-foot is one of the most comprehensive symbolism of this bondage because he is depicted as a passionate young boy trapped in a deformed body. His club-foot brings a bondage to Philip beyond physicality. Even from the beginning of his life at school he gets tormented, humiliated, bullied and casted out because of his club-foot (Maugham 1956: 43-4). His club-foot, in this sense, becomes a "barrier between them and him" (Maugham 1956: 50). However, the concept of free will is referred to as an illusion so deeply rooted within Philip and it is so realistic that he is ready to embrace the idea that he is free, at once. He thinks of himself as a free, rational agent, however, when an undesirable action is performed, it becomes clear that reason is not the governing principle that triggers the action and that it has no power what-so-ever to prevent it. As defined by Philip, this bondage is like an alien power that comes from within himself, as if "he [i]s swayed by some power alien to and yet within himself, which urged him like that great wind of Hell" (Maugham 1956: 478). Obviously, through the representation of Philip, Maugham suggests that all human actions are motivated or governed by powers beyond their control and that Philip is not free to choose but instead is urged to behave in a certain way by his instincts, passions and the social conditions.

In the earlier phase of his life, Philip is depicted as a non-questioning, dependent boy with no power to act. He is under the control of his uncle who is a man of religion. His strict religious education at the boarding school contributes to the pressure over him further and he feels so surrounded by this sense of restriction that even though he rejects religion, he cannot cut himself loose from the morality imposed on him.

> *When Philip ceased to believe in Christianity he felt that a great weight was taken from his shoulders; casting off the responsibility which weighed down every action, when every action was infinitely important for the welfare of his immortal soul, he experienced a vivid sense of liberty. But he knew now that this was an illusion. When he put away the religion in which he had been brought up, he had kept unimpaired the morality which was part and parcel of it.* (Maugham 1956: 316)

The rules and the patterns that he is supposed to live his life by are obviously determined and imposed on him through education from the very early years of his life on. Philip realizes what this kind of education does is to teach him that he "ought to behave exactly like everybody else. Philip want[s] to find out how he ought to behave, and he [thinks] he could prevent himself from being influenced by the opinions that surrounded

him," however this is proven to be highly unlikely as the novel proceeds (Maugham 1956: 316-7).

For the rest of the novel Philip is the subject of a massive amount of influence by his conditions and environment. According to Maugham, time, culture, class and family into which they are born is very determining in what kind of a life they live. Maugham especially puts emphasis on the economic aspect of the issue and through Philip's experiences he indicates that lack of money and anxiety of survival can be the most degrading thing for people. He further asserts that "Money is like a sixth sense without which you cannot make a complete use of the other five" (Maugham 1956: 305). In his early years his uncle has complete control over his actions and the decisions concerning his future. As he goes to Germany to study "[h]is imagination and the books he had read had inspired in him a desire for the Byronic attitude." (Maugham 1956: 110) Here, he is highly influenced by the German Romanticism which is taught to him by his mentor Warton. He reads Goethe and listens to Wagner and embraces the specific perspective of the world that is embraced by the Romantics, only until the arrival of another Englishman, Hayward. Hayward keeps discussing with him the aesthetic issues such as the ugliness of life in opposition to the beauty of art and "[b]y the end of August [...] Philip was completely under Hayward's influence" (Maugham 1956: 127). Then, he gets acquainted with the notorious naturalist drama of the period when he goes to see the plays of Ibsen and Sudermann "witnesse[s] a series of works in which the vileness of mankind was displayed before him" (Maugham 1956: 142).

Theatre brings him into another state of mind: "To him it was real life. It was a strange life, dark and tortured […] Philip was carried away by the sordid intensity of it. He seemed to see the world again in another fashion, and this world too he was anxious to know" (Maugham 1956: 142-3). This pessimism is intensified with the pessimism of Schopenhauer who "attracted his youth; and he believed that the world he was about to enter was a place of pitiless woe and of darkness." (Maugham 1956: 154)

As he returns to England, he meets Miss Wilkinson who brings the French influence upon Philip by giving him *La Vie de Boheme* by which he was "enraptured" (Maugham 1956: 166). Upon reading *La Vie de Boheme,* Philip decides to go to Paris to study art where impressionism is sparking discussions concerning the worth of such paintings especially of Manet, *Olympia* of whom marks the rise of the movement. Philip is startled by the life at the cafes, the discussions on art, politics, life, and religion and this new attitude gets under his skin. Here, he realizes that "Faith had been forced upon him from the outside" and that "It was a matter of environment and example" and regarding this he thinks that "A new environment and a new example gave him the opportunity to find himself"(Maugham 1956: 138-9). Still, each of these new social and cultural spaces changes him in accordance with is unique principles rather than liberating him to be his own person.

What's more, Maugham discusses that even being a member of a society per se means that one inevitably has to sacrifice his/her freedom to fit in, in a Hobbesian sense:

> *Because we are gregarious we live in society, and society holds together by means of force, force of arms (that is the policeman) and force of public opinion (that is Mrs. Grundy). You have society on one hand and the individual on the other: each is an organism striving for self-preservation. It is might against might. I stand alone, bound to accept society and not unwilling, since in return for the taxes I pay it protects me, a weakling, against the tyranny of another stronger than I am; but I submit to its laws because I*

> *must; I do not acknowledge their justice: I do not know justice, I only know power.* (1956: 256)

Maugham suggests that there is a tension between the society and the individual and that the individuals' needs are neglected for the sake of social well-being. Furthermore, this is justified as a necessity through concepts such as virtue, vice, sin et cetera. In Maugham's own words "Society stood on one side, an organism with its own laws of growth and self-preservation, while the individual stood on the other. The actions which were to the advantage of society it termed virtuous and those which were not it called vicious. Good and evil meant nothing more than that" (1956: 318). Obviously, Maugham believes that, as socialized individuals, there is no way to break free from the determined patterns of the society.

Philip is also depicted to suffer from the bondage of his 'affects', such as his excessive pride, envy or pettiness. Even as a school boy, because of his pride, "he did everything to alienate the sympathy of other boys [although] he longed with all his heart for the popularity which to some was so easily accorded" (Maugham 1956: 83). He struggles within the grasp of several passions such as jealousy, obsession and selfishness and when these passions are not fulfilled he gets violent or unpleasant even though he knows that his behaviours are insensible. His jealousy for his best friend Rose at school, for instance, somehow leads him to unwillingly push him further away.

> *When Rose went away he felt suddenly sick with misery. He did not know why he has answered in that fashion. He would have given anything to be friends with Rose. He hated to have quarrelled with him, and now that he saw he had given him pain he was very sorry. But at the moment he had not been master of himself. It seemed that some devil had seized him, forcing him to say bitter things against his will ... The desire to wound had been too strong for him ... It was pride: it was folly too.* (Maugham 1956: 90)

Even his most serious decisions are hindered by his pride, such as his decision to leave school despite the objections of his uncle and the headmaster of the school. Although he thinks that it "would be pleasant to end up his school days with glory and then go to Oxford," he chooses to leave school not to look like a "fool" in the eyes of his uncle. (Maugham 1956: 106-107)

Philip deeply feels this bondage in his adolescence, too. Although he does not really desire Miss Wilkinson as a sexual companion, he feels obliged to have intercourse with her. "He wished with all his heart that he had not suggested the plan ... She looked grotesque. Philip's heart sank as he stared at her; she never seemed so unattractive: but it was too late now. He closed the door behind him and locked it" (Maugham 1956: 178-9). Although he struggles harder to be more in control of his fate as he grows older, he keeps being "tired out by the violence of his passion" (Maugham 1956: 82).

Philip's hardest trial regarding his passions starts when he meets Mildred, the woman he is deeply obsessed with. Philip meets Mildred at the coffeehouse where she is a waitress and her reckless treatment of Philip hurts his pride so much that he desperately tries to change her opinion of him to be able to restore his self-confidence. He knows that "[i]f she had treated him with civility he would have been perfectly indifferent to her; but it was obvious that she disliked him rather than otherwise, and his pride was wounded. He could not suppress a desire to be even with her" (Maugham 1956: 332). Many times he decides to stop seeing her, but each time he ends up sitting at one of her tables. The more she pushes him away, the more he is drawn towards her. He gets angry, he hates her at times but still

"[h]e could not get her out of his mind. He laughed angrily at his own foolishness: it was absurd to care what an anaemic little waitress said to him; but he was strangely humiliated [...] He tried to think of other things, but he had no command over his thoughts" (Maugham 1956: 333-4). At last he manages to take Mildred out for dinner but Mildred does not stop seeing other men for which Philip feels even more humiliated. Even though he "detest[s] Mildred now with all his heart" and even though he realizes that he is "a matter of complete indifference to her," he keeps trying to get closer to her (Maugham 1956: 337-8). No matter what the circumstances are, he madly and helplessly wants her.

Through Philip's relationship with Mildred, Maugham makes his readers question the nature of love. Is love pleasurable or is it trouble? Is what Philip calls love, really love or is it some kind of obsession or bondage? Is the source of love the desire to share or the desire to own? No matter what the answers to these questions are, Philip suffers from the conditions created as a consequence of his feelings. In his own words he is "[a] slave because [he] can't help [himself], but not a contented one," (Maugham 1956: 401) and he wonders "Would he never be free from that passion" (Maugham 1956: 757).

Through the end of the novel Philip is made to change his plans to go abroad and practice medicine, this time for Sally, the daughter of his close friend and his future wife. Out of the feelings of devotion and gratitiude, he feels oblidged to change his entire plan concerning his future and "[h]is wedding present to his wife would be all his high hopes. Self-sacrifice" (Maugham 1956: 752-5)! Then, Philip realizes that the idea of self-sacrifice is a deception and tells himself that marriage is what he has always wanted.

> *It seemed to him that all his life he had followed the ideals that other people, by their words or their writings, had instilled into him, and never the desires of his own heart. Always his course had been swayed by what he thought he should do and never by what he wanted with his whole soul to do. He put all that aside now with a gesture of impatience.* (Maugham 1956: 759)

This epiphanic moment can be interpreted in two opposing ways. It can be perceived either as Philip's reaching a level of freedom, getting loose of his affects and following his real self or as his justification of his enslavement with an illusion of free will. Of course, we cannot know for sure which one Maugham really intended, but the chess metaphor he uses in *Summing Up* (1938) to define human freedom brings us closer to the latter option. In a chess game

> *The pieces were provided and I had to accept the mode of action that was characteristic of each one: I had to accept the moves of the persons I played with; but it has seemed to me that I had the power to make on my side, in accordance perhaps with my likes and dislikes and the ideal that I set before me, moves that I freely willed. It has seemed to me that I have now and then been able to put forth an effort that was not wholly determined. If it was an illusion, it was an illusion that has its own efficacy.* (1951: 174)

Cordell suggests that Philip accepts life in its own terms at the end of the novel, that is, how he can be happy at last and that "He can listen, often with amusement, to the tale told by an idiot, but he does not distress himself by trying to make it intelligable" (1937: 105). However, Maughams chess metaphor obviously puts forth he will continue to be the pawn of the game. Thus, just like Spinoza, Maugham suggests that even though we have certain surface freedoms in life, man's decisions and actions are determined by the rules of the game.

The question of human freedom is one of the central themes that Maugham treats in his novel and as its title indicates it is the main discussion of *Of Human Bondage*. The novel is about the struggle of a man to be free from the restraining factors that surround him. Philip constantly wishes to have control "immensely to be his own master" (Maugham 1956: 98). However, something holds him back each time, although he thinks of himself as a free agent: "when an action is performed it is clear that all the forces of the universe from all eternity conspired to cause it, and nothing I could do could have prevented it" (Maugham 1956: 256). As Philip further suggests, this illusion is so strong that it makes people feel like they really have a choice but when everything is done, they realize that it was inevitable (Maugham 1956: 402). When this realization occurs he cannot help being "astonished at the weakness of his will. It seemed to him that he was swayed by every light emotion, as though he were a leaf in the wind, and when passion seized him he was powerless. He had no self-control" (Maugham 1956: 478). Maugham argues through the characterization of Philip that thought has no determining influence on the critical decisions human beings make in their lives. Rather, Philip acts "as though he were a machine driven by the two forces of his environment and his personality; his reason was someone looking on, observing the facts but powerless to interfere" (Maugham 1956: 478). At last he unwillingly accepts that "man was a little wheel in the great machine of a complex civilisation, and had as little power of changing the circumstances as an automaton" (Maugham 1956: 499). Spencer points out that Maugham perceived people as entities driven by "a savage egoism" and that it is "impossible for them to aim at anything but their own selfish pleasures" (1940: 6). In this respect, Philip is the embodiment of Maugham's egoistic and slavish perception of humanity, or in Cordell's words he is "Somerset Maugham's Hamlet" (1937: 88).

CONCLUSION

Although *Of Human Bondage* has been interpreted through various different aspects, it obviously deals with the possibility of free will which is one of the basic questions concerning the human existence. Inspired by Baruch Spinoza and David Hume, he characterizes Philip, the protagonist of his novel, as basically the embodiment of modern human surrounded and manipulated by a power that is both innate and external to one's being. Moving back and forth between the determinism of Spinoza and compatibilism of Hume, Maugham finally leans towards the deterministic side highlighting the inevitable bondage of the human. Maugham's preference is understandable when it is considered that *Of Human Bondage* was published at a time when Europe was helplessly driven towards the fiercest war of the European history, the WWI. At a time in which the Enlightenment ideals such as progress and liberty were questioned, Maugham, disillusioned from these modern myths, contributes to the ancient debate concerning the possibility of free will on the determinist side, highlighting, through the characterization of Philip, one's inability to break free from the bondage of the existing conditions, rendering the human a feather drifting in the wind.

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