

SOC 347

CHARON, CHAPTER 5

Are Human Beings Free?

Learning Objectives

- Society & Freedom
- Social forces
- Social construction of reality
- Deviance ideology and language
- Socialization and the control of self
- Society as the origin of freedom

Question

From your view of contemporary US society, which of statement is more applicable?

- a. Society encourages divorce
- b. Society discourages divorce

Freedom

Ability to control one's life

- Individual choice
- Self-direction

But does the individual really choose what he or she does?

Aspects

- some freedom is possible
- no absolute freedom—degrees of freedom
 - a. freedom of thought
 - b. freedom of action
- power of society/social forces
- some able to resist and “escape”
- We exaggerate how much freedom we actually have

Assumptions

- We have control over our actions
- Criminal justice assumes humans have responsibility for their actions
- Judgment Day is predicated on free choices of individuals

To be free

One understands, chooses, directs what one thinks and does

- actor is active
- self control
- one is responsible for thoughts & actions

Freedom

- What one thinks, does, and is
- To understand and the consequences of one's options
- Have opportunity and ability to become the director of one's own actions
- To choose what one does

Free Thinking

- Ability to exercise control through thinking
- Ability to makes choices through thinking through situations
- Ability to take charge through thinking his or her actions and its consequences
- Without freedom to think—freedom to act is empty

Limitations of Free Thinking

- acting without thinking
- act with thinking that is controlled by others

Free Action?

- Able to think freely and act freely
- Free if one can move without being controlled externally or internally
- When movement is interfered—one is not free
- Society controls, directs how we act and what we do
- Action is always constrained
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What is Free Action?

- —doing things
- ability to do things freely
- abilities to match thinking

Control of Thought

1. Culture
2. Language
3. Social Structure
4. Social Power
5. Limited Understanding
6. Social construction of reality

1. Culture

- ideas, values, rules--culturally fabricated
- culture contains taken-for-granted truths
- influences how we think about the world
- culture is functional: produces inequality, capitalism, “terrorists”, etc.
- produces fascism
- culture is tricky—difficult to accept contrary evidence (worst practice).

2. Language

- ideas, values, norms, through language
- sets parameters within which we think
- words fabricated to support society's ideals
- we think & see in word “pictures”
- Non-“named” reality unavailable to thinking
- limited language—leads to limited thinking

3. Social Structure

- reality based on social position
- perspectives attached to positions
- our social status set produces what we believe & see
- class, gender, race, ethnicity impacts thinking
- Labor market
- generational perspective

4. Social Power

- Elites influence how others think
- elite ideologies exaggerated to appear as “truth”
- media manipulations as positive facts
- brainwashing by social organizations
- scientific evidence—massaged by hacks
- to get ahead—one has to articulate the consensus of the powerful.

5. Limited Understanding

- understanding involves language
- Impossible to understand every situation
- cultural bias affects understanding
- racial inequality creates misunderstanding
- poor molded to become conservative—
despite little to gain
- some understand—but their actions are
limited

Social Construction of Reality

- our beliefs are embedded in social context
- difficult to know exactly what is reality
- we learn about reality through social interaction
- there is never a perfect understanding of reality

Control of Action

1. Control of thinking
2. Social institutions
3. Socialization
4. Social positions
5. Social control

1. Control of Thinking

- culture is intertwined with action
- culture controls what we do (e.g. US and materialism)
- self-concept (negative or positive) arises out of social interaction

2. Social Institutions

- institutions create groves for us to follow
- societies create legitimate ways of doing things
- people get used to these ways and follow without thinking about options
- institutions take away choice
- Institutions--roads difficult to walk away from
- TV—dominant American recreational institution

3. Socialization

- Agents direct/reinforce what they want us to do
- Agents mold us to follow directions others approve of
- Rewards/punishments attached to actions
- Some opportunities made available to us
- Expose to some things & excluded from others
- Role modeling—produces identity and imitation (very critical)
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4. Social Positions

- we act according to our class positions
- gender-role expectations
- poverty—limits options
- wealth—increases options
- social rank determines our actions
- rank determines level of prestige, honor, identity, and actions

5. Social Controls

- Rewards and punishments
- punishments for breaking the law, taboos, norms, etc.
- promotions and honors for good citizens
- social controls ensure that we follow certain actions

Freedom Control Factors

- Family/peers
- pastor/church
- Society/culture
- habits (the worst factor)
- Unconsciousness/Emotions/impulses
- social class/marketplace
- Government/neighborhood
- teachers/school
- heredity

Sound Mind

- Self-controlled
- Focused
- Orderly
- Able to discern between fantasy and reality

Steven Lukes

Autonomous Individual

- exercise conscious and critical evaluation
- engage independent and rational reflection
- form intentions & reach practical decisions
- discuss own actions with self (important)
- tell self what must be done
- free thinking and ability to be self-directed
- ability to use a “special” kind of language

Factors that Limit Freedom

- social forces
- social interaction
- socialization
- social structure
- culture
- social institutions

State Society Relations

- Institutions fabricate to maintain commitment
- People are socialized to feel good about being part of the society?
- National symbols
- Defining people as outsiders serves to bring loyalty

State Society Relations

- punishment to those defined as threats
- Rituals & reverence to the state
- State presented as wielding redemption
- sense of belonging bind peoples together
- Institutions “deliver” to produce conditional loyalty
- People perceive that the society works