

Is it Possible to Measure if Anyone is Free to Any Degree? Can Freedom be Proved?

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While freedom is a possibility, it is not possible to determine whether humans can be truly free. The attempt to prove freedom through reason or evidence is not possible. Discovering the variety of ways human beings do not walk in true freedom while hoping that there is residual tangible action is all one can really obtain. Most people and societies have an inflated view of the level of freedom they actually have access to. Because society representatives continually remind us we are free, a society is built on the belief that people are free, and responsible for their own actions which makes it easy to take the limited freedom we have for granted. Critically examining what freedom really means is not done. Freedom has two aspects including freedom of thought and freedom of action. While it is difficult to achieve freedom of thought, freedom of action is impossible to achieve without it. Society will always influence humanity, while also forming the ability to control their own lives.

When it comes to understanding freedom, it is important to recognize that freedom is analyzed in terms of degree. There is no such thing as absolute freedom, only degrees of freedom. Certain individuals will be more free than others just as certain societies will be more free than others. American culture emphasizes the consequences of individual choice, that punishment and reward await us after death in accordance to the free choices one makes during life. Those who come from conditions such as abuse, war, or poverty are not exempt. Charon defines freedom as one's ability to control his or her life, and questions who is actually in charge. "To control one's own thinking and acting is a matter of cause: what causes, what directs, what shapes, what influences the human being?" He asks if an individual is conditioned to respond to life, or if we are trained or oppressed then we are not in control. To be free is active, not passive, and is self-directed rather than directed.

Sociology teaches us that what an individual may think and do are not things we determine, control, or choose. An individual's belief is created by one's social life, what one does is influenced by beliefs and social causes. Psychology, economics, biology, anthropology,

political science, social psychology, and all other science assumes control rather than freedom is emphasized. This affirms that freedom is limited. For sociologists, society is the reason for freedom, while the necessary prerequisites are social. The creation of language, self, and mind which is created through social interaction makes freedom possible. The organization of society thrives on individual freedom. The active, rather than passive, nature opens the door for deliberation, problem solving, and ongoing complex organization. Organizations can not continue if it is rigid, and in total control. The balance of order and freedom is highly important. The existence of freedom must be understood as relative, never absolute.

When reality comes from the position of organized life, people have specific perspectives that are attached to their positions. Perspectives may be from the top while the other from the bottom. Both the upper and lower class live in the same world, but have very different places and positions. Another example of different perspectives is leaders and followers or professors and students. Cultural dynamics control thinking by positioning us in relation to others and causing all in the same organization to believe alike, and cause us to see our position in relation to others and what the world may look like through the other's position. The pressure perspective of the position placed on individuals allows thinking to be controlled. This is done when taking the perspective of our position is acting appropriately in a position that demands appropriate thinking. If we are to succeed in a position, it is better to change our thinking to what the position requires. People also have a relationship with each other within social structure and teach us how we should think in that position. For example, if we take a job we are slowly taught what people in our position are supposed to think within the social hierarchy.

Social structure is important when understanding that high positions are given to individuals with the predetermined opportunity and ability to influence how others think in society. The perspective of the poor is usually a mixture of beliefs developed during the interaction of other poor people and ideas from wealthier people. Charon states that the poor often become conservative in society, even if there is little to gain from the way this society is set

up. With the poor controlling advertising and education/political institutions, it is not directly their ideas that are taught. They are influenced by the ideas of those who control these avenues such as the rich. The accumulation of experiences, reading, imitation, trial and error, and more affects our ability to freely think. Knowledge about the universe is necessary for choice, working through situations, and rationally controlling our actions. This is why a free society encourages debate, criticism, exploration of truth, and critically observing perspectives.

A free society encourages both free thinking and acting, both of which are linked in several ways. Free action involves movement. Moving without external or internal control promotes freedom. When one's movement is tampered with, freedom is revoked. This is why society has a control of individuals. Its control over what we think restrains, directs, and controls what we do, where we go, and how we act. Charon states that we act in a world where what we do as well as what we think is a product of much more than our free choice.

Freedom neither comes naturally or simply. Its very existence relies on a society that both allows and encourages it, does not oppress it, and individuals actively pursue it. Charon reiterates the fact that to work actively for the freedom of others requires intelligence, courage, and sacrifice. Some may tempt us to give up freedoms or forcibly take the little known freedoms we have. Recognizing who these oppressors are, and how to liberate ourselves from their tactics is of the utmost importance. The rights an individual has achieved through society were fought for by others. Charon leaves us with the perfect statement, "Freedom should not simply become a slogan or a meaningless word; it should become a profoundly complex way of thinking and acting, never complete, always tenuous, always attacked, and always worth creating and defending."

References

Charon, J. M. (2013). *Ten questions: A sociological perspective*. Thomson/Wadsworth.

