

Psychology of adjustment, unit1, question#1

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Question Explain Erich Fromm's twofold meaning of human freedom. Erich Fromm, a psychoanalyst and social theorist born in Frankfurt, Germany, contributed a particularly important theory about human freedom to psychology. According to Fromm, the meaning of freedom is twofold. He states that freedom means that a person "has been freed from traditional authorities" (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). On the other hand, however, freedom also means "actualizing one's individual destiny" (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). Ultimately, this twofold meaning of human freedom is much more complex than initially meets the eye.

The first part of Fromm's analysis of human freedom details the external impact of obtaining freedom. Essentially, gaining freedom in the world means that a person is their own judge, jury, and executioner. They alone are in the driver's seat of their life. A human who has obtained freedom does not have to answer to anyone, including authority figures. Authority figures are a myriad of people including parents, teachers, police, or anyone who is in a position of power over another person. This meaning of freedom is simple in both concept and nature and represents the most basic and understood aspect of a human achieving freedom.

The more complex meaning of freedom comes with Fromm's explanation that freedom "actualizes one's individual destiny" (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). In Fromm's estimation, this aspect of freedom is much more ambiguous. According to Karen Duffy and Eastwood Atwater, authors of the book entitled *Psychology for Living*, freedom in the more specific sense of an individual's destiny encompasses the notion of "self-direction" and achieving all that a person is able to in their lives in terms of their "intellectual, emotional, and social potential" (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). This

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type of freedom is much more complicated than simply not having to answer to an authority figure. The freedom to direct one's own life and destiny comes with the potential consequences of alienation, isolation, insecurity, and anxiety (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). One reason for this is that the reality of having the freedom to choose and control one's own life can be an extremely daunting and lonely task for some people. The fear, anxiety, and insecurity stem from the possibility of making the wrong choices. Fromm believed that this is why so many people simply prefer to not have their freedom and simply allow authority figures to make the decisions for them and control their lives.

According to Duffy and Atwater, those few people who are able to handle both meanings of true freedom are labeled as "self actualized" (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). People who are self-actualized are defined as "individuals who accept responsibility for their lives and carefully scrutinize the alternatives available to them" (Duffy and Atwater, 2008). Ultimately, self actualized individuals are not afraid of making the wrong choices about their destiny because they know that they have the power to make better choices the next time around. In Fromm's estimation, those who fall within the category of self-actualization are truly free individuals.

References

Duffy, K. G., & Atwater, E. (2008). *Psychology for living* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Custom Pub.