

Freedom a comparison between durkheim and freud essay



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Freedom means different things to different people. Freedom can encompass the philosophical idea of being free but it can also encompass the physical act of being free to pursue one's desires. In other words, one can feel free from worry, fear or debt and/or realize their freedom to choose their own life path. The philosophical approach to freedom has been widely addressed by many experts in the field. The idea of freedom is closely associated with the idea of free will.

A human's ability to have free will determines how much inner freedom each person has while governmental or other authoritarian control dictates how much outer freedom each person has. The opinions of Emile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud are analyzed as they relate to freedom. Each theorist offers different insight into human freedom and these will be compared and contrasted to form a comprehensive understanding of freedom. Finally, a personal opinion will be offered which makes a determination about which theorist is the most persuasive. Emile Durkheim was primarily concerned with social phenomena and how this affected human beings.

He believed that human behavior was dependent upon the social environment one was a part of. Therefore, the ability to submit to that environment was the most important determinant of freedom. " For man freedom consists in deliverance from blind, unthinking physical forces... The individual submits to society and this submission is the condition of this liberation" (Durkheim, 1972, 115). At the same time, Durkheim felt that much of the social environment was dependent upon realities that were separate from those created by human activity.

In other words, Durkheim believed that human freedom relied on the ability for humans to adapt to the society in which they lived based on such outside factors such as the climate. " Social phenomena are usually classified according to considerations which might appear at first sight to be wholly unconnected" (Durkheim, 1972, 52). Rather than viewing social phenomena independently, Durkheim suggested that the connectedness of all phenomena, such as religion and law, work together to create a social environment. The human ability to submit to this all encompassing environment is what determines freedom.

Individual values are an important part of society and an important part of human freedom. The internal values within each individual person help determine what kind of life one pursues. However, much the values that people internalize are based on the society in which they grow and live in. " Undoubtedly, social life is composed of values, and values are properties added to reality by human consciousness" (Durkheim, 1972, 63). Therefore, it can be assumed that the societal values important in any given society are what drive humans to value certain things such as freedom.

At the same time, it can also be assumed that if a person had grown up and lived in a different society their opinions regarding freedom would be much different. Each individual value that is revered in a specific society can be studied separate from the others and how humans view each value is determined by society. " But these mechanisms are natural facts, which can be studied scientifically; these evaluations which human judgment makes depend upon causes and conditions which can be discovered inductively" (Durkheim, 1972, 63).

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Freedom itself can be studied apart from any other social phenomena but how each person defines freedom is highly dependent on the values that society has taught them. For example, in the United States one way that many women define freedom is the ability to raise children and work at the same time. In Saudi Arabia, women view freedom much differently because the restrictions on the female gender are so extreme as compared to other cultures. To go even deeper into the notion of social obligations dictating how humans view freedom, a look at personal objectives and moral behavior is necessary.

Society almost always dictates the social phenomena associated with gender roles. Therefore, American men may view their role as the breadwinner and supporter of their family. While they are free to choose a different course for their lives, many men take on this role while still considering themselves free to make their own choices. However, society is an underlying dictator because it tells men what is expected of them and men who do not adhere to these expectations are often looked down upon.

When I carry out my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I comply with contracts; I perform duties which are defined, externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom" (Durkheim, 1972, 64). These types of traditional roles allow a society to operate and also provide freedom to its inhabitants. " Life could not thus be subdivided; it is a unity, and consequently its basis be only the living substance in its totality" (Durkheim, 1972, 69). Ultimately, the ability to have freedom relies on the acceptance of societal roles and the ability to submit to them.

This may sound like the opposite of freedom, but human beings are not created to live in a world free from responsibility. “ The perspective of nothingness is an intolerable burden for us” (Durkheim, 1972, 94). In order to enjoy freedom, humans must be given choices and societal values allow human beings to work towards a peaceful existence because true freedom is only possible when actions have “ meaning and significance” (Durkheim, 1972, 94). Sigmund Freud had several opposing viewpoints regarding freedom.

The most important difference between Freud and Durkheim was their belief regarding human beings and their freedom within society. While Durkheim believed that societal expectations and social phenomena were important parts of human freedom, Freud believed that civilization restricted freedom. “ The liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization. It was perhaps greatest before there was any civilization... The development of civilization imposes restrictions on it, and justice demands that no one shall escape those restrictions.

What makes itself felt in a human community as desire for freedom may be the revolt against some existing injustice and so may prove favorable to civilization...” (Freud, 2005, 82). Therefore, true freedom is only possible when humans go against civilization in order to remain true to their own internal beliefs and values. “ The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization or against civilization all together” (Freud, 2005, 82). Further, Freud focuses more on individual freedom rather than the all encompassing notion of freedom that Durkheim addresses.

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Freud believed that true freedom is only possible when humans are able to hold onto their own individuality even when the rest of society believes or acts differently. “ No doubt he will always defend his claim to individual liberty against the will of the group” (Freud, 2005, 82). At the same time, Freud realizes the difficulty of achieving individual freedom while living in a specific society. If, as Durkheim suggests, human freedom relies on the ability to submit to societal expectations for the greater good, then remaining true to one’s own individual thoughts would go against the achievement of freedom.

Freud emphasizes that finding a balance between individualism and the ability to function within society is as close to true freedom that humans are able to get. “ A good part of the struggles of mankind center round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation - one, that is, that will bring happiness - between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group” (Freud, 2005, 82). An important similarity between Freud’s beliefs and Durkheim’s beliefs deals with the notion of gender roles and societal expectations.

Freud emphasizes that finding the balance between individual values and submission to societal expectations is as close to freedom as one is able to get. He uses anal eroticism as an example. As young children, the excretory system fascinates and as children grow, they realize the importance of cleanliness. The ability to be clean and orderly is an important part of civilization and if a person does not adhere to these societal expectations, they will be looked down upon and will not enjoy freedom.

Even if a human does not value cleanliness, it is important to follow expectations within society regarding cleanliness in order to find the balance that leads to freedom. “ Now we have seen that order and cleanliness are important requirements of civilization, although their vital necessity is not very apparent, any more than their suitability as sources of enjoyment” (Freud, 2005, 83 - 84). Further, Freud discusses gender roles as they pertain to freedom. In ancient civilizations, males realized the importance of keeping their females close to them while the females were willing to stay in order to take care of their children.

While the women certainly had the freedom to take off, they chose to adhere to gender role expectations in order to have the freedom to be with their children. “ The male acquired a motive for keeping the female, or speaking more generally, his sexual objects, near him; while the female, who did not want to be separated from her helpless young, was obliged, in their interests, to remain with the stronger male” (Freud, 2005, 87). Freedom can be defined in two different ways according to these statements made by Freud.

Absolute freedom would mean leaving the family but the closest a person could get to absolute freedom without leaving civilization is to find the balance between personal feelings and societal expectations. “ The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands of civilization” (Freud, 2005, 82) while also accepting other forms and demands. While each sociologist makes important and valid points, it seems that Freud established a closer reality associated with freedom than Emile Durkheim did.

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It is true that society is a function of its parts (humans) but I do not believe that society dictates the entire personality and belief system of humans. Instead, I agree with Freud that one can hold onto certain individual values and beliefs while also accepting other societal expectations. I think true freedom, according to both men would entail living alone without depending on anyone or having anyone depend on an individual. Durkheim feels that freedom is only attainable when humans work together to form a mutually satisfying entity.

This is true to some degree, but I believe that Freud offers a more valid point when he states that humans can live within a society and work towards a better society while also holding on their own personal beliefs. A good example of this idea involves a friend of mine who was a Christian woman but she worked as a teacher in a Jewish school. This friend did not personally believe in any Jewish religious ideas and principles but in order to provide a high quality education for the students she was able to work towards a greater good while also holding onto her own religious beliefs.

Therefore, I agree with Freud that true freedom is possible, it is not very desirable. In order to live with as much freedom as possible humans must be willing to compromise with society. Gender roles and societal expectations are important parts of any civilization. Once again, I agree with Freud that gender roles and societal expectations are important to consider when approaching the idea of freedom. Durkheim's belief is that freedom is attainable when humans simply submit to what society dictates but I do not believe this is entirely necessary.

A certain degree of submission is required in striking a balance like the one that Freud discusses. However, I do not feel that one must put aside all beliefs concerning gender roles and societal expectations in order to achieve freedom. For example, it is expected in many societies that a woman stay home and raise her children while the father goes to work. Some mothers do not wish to stay in the home so she compromises with society in order to hold onto her own beliefs. This is evident in families where the father stays home with the children while the mother works.

The family is still meeting societal expectations that a parent remains in the home but the compromise lies in which parent goes to work and which one stays home. Ultimately, Durkheim eliminates the notion of freedom somewhat by suggesting that happily submitting to society will encourage freedom as everyone works together. Freud's view allows for a greater deal of freedom by allowing humans to remain true to their own values while also considering the expectations of civilization.