

Is unbridled freedom
a myth or reality
education essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Freedom” has been an object of study and discussion since antiquity. The definition, extent and implications of the idea of human freedom have been discussed in disciplines ranging from the arts, humanities and even the sciences.

Freedom has been variously defined by many people. These definitions can be broadly classified into 2 categories for simplicity.[1]

External Freedoms

These include Legal and human rights that are conferred on human beings from the outside. These are circumstantial in nature. Their absence, misuse or withdrawal can be clearly seen and is usually protested against.

These include freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, Freedom from want, Freedom from fear, freedom of association, freedom of thought, etc.

Internal Freedoms

These are more Metaphysical in nature. Internal freedoms concern our inner mechanisms, thought- processes and the freedom to self-determination.

These are less obviously visible, more complex and have far reaching consequences for our powers of decision making, judging accountability and responsibility.

It is these internal freedoms that are the subject of interest for students of psychology and for those interested in understanding human behavior.

The most contentious issue has been whether human beings can be free at all. Is Unbridled Human freedom a myth? Are we always constrained by internal and external forces that shape our ideas and beliefs or does each individual have some autonomy to make his/her own decisions? Generally speaking, the disparate views on this issue fall into three main categories[2]

The Deterministic View

The Libertarian View

The Compatibilist Approach

The first two approaches agree that both freedom and natural causality cannot exist simultaneously. However, they derive two opposite conclusions from this incompatibility. The deterministic approach asserts that there is no possibility of freedom. Thought, action, events are already decided and human choices are severely constrained by events beyond our control. The idea of freedom is hence an illusion.

The libertarian approach says the exact opposite. Inspired by modern, rationalist school of thought, it concludes that human beings have unlimited choices and are absolutely free to pick and choose, to think and to act, keeping in mind physical limitations. . These choices may be influenced by certain factors, but these decisions have the power to change the direction of natural events.

The third approach is therefore called the compatibilist position. Some actions are free, while others are reflexive. Freedom and free will is

understood as a part of the workings of the human brain. A person is
<https://assignbuster.com/is-unbridled-freedom-a-myth-or-reality-education-essay/>

responsible for an action when this action results from a conscious intention. To be responsible for an action is not to be ultimately responsible for it, in the sense of also being responsible for all the events in the causal chains that led to the existence of the conscious intention that determined the action.

In this project, we will be taking the third position. We will attempt to show, by taking some examples relevant to our lives, that unbridled freedom is indeed a myth. Further, we propose that unbridled freedom is not an ideal to be cherished either. There are certain limits to the freedom that one person can enjoy, without trespassing on the freedoms of others or spreading chaos and disturbance in society. It is desirable to have some restrictions that enable us to live in society and differentiate us from animals.

The first restriction that human beings face in the exercise of unlimited freedom is the constraints put upon us by society. Human beings are social animals that have agreed to give up certain rights and freedoms in order to gain the benefits of living in society. This has been explained by various social theorists under the idea of the “ Social Contract”.[1]

Living within society, human beings are influenced by three types of factors.
[2]

The genetic factors

The way they are activated

Interaction between inner potential and outer surroundings

The first factor talks of our inheritance from society and parents. Both in terms of genetic material passed down to the next generation, as well as the collective social conscience, which is “ a determinate system of ideas and beliefs which creates social likeness among all members of society”[1].

The second factor consists of inner characteristics inherited from our parents as they are expressed in us. Some are recessive, some are dominant, but both types play a role in determining who we are.

The third factor brings in the importance of the interaction with society from birth, that moulds and shapes our personality in millions of imperceptible ways.

The third factor is considered to be the most relevant and potent since its influence begins the moment we are born and serves to shape and mould the ideas generated through the first and second factors.

Society is always present, both inside and outside us. It guides our behaviours, determines the range of our choices and influences our decision making process. Most of the time, we are unaware of this situation. Many times, we do not mind this intrusion.

“... because most of the time we ourselves desire just that which society expects of us. We want to obey the rules. We want the parts that society has assigned to us”[2]

This is evident in the way that advertisements[3], for example shape our choices. Individuals are often attracted to products that they may not

otherwise buy, need or use, purely on the basis of the way it is presented on <https://assignbuster.com/is-unbridled-freedom-a-myth-or-reality-education-essay/>

the television, in the print media etc. The advertising and marketing industries try to appeal to this tendency- to seek the opinion of others, to do what everyone else is doing, to conform to social norms and standards- to their own advantage.

Another example of purely external factors influencing personal decisions is seen in the concept of opinion and exit polls. The Indian government has banned the airing of exit polls on television, until all phases of voting is over, due to the fear that expected results in one region may hamper the influence the voting patterns in other regions. Similarly, opinion polls can often become opinion-generating mechanisms.

Another factor that has been very effective in influencing thoughts, actions and behaviour has been religion. All over the world, various religions have encouraged people to think within preset frameworks. There are however, two sides to this coin.

The unifying potential of religion has been well researched by thinkers such as Emile Durkheim who has claimed that- " A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i. e., things set apart and forbidden-beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community all those who adhere to them." [1]

This positive view of religion is countered by Karl Marx who refers to religion as " opium for the masses" i. e. something that distracts them from alienation and hardship in this life, by promising leisure and comfort in the next, thereby serving the interests of the bourgeoisie.

As an intrinsic part of the society we live in, religion- whether we accept it or not- is an important factor that influences the early development of our personalities. Its morals, values and teachings are instilled in us, and even if later in life we choose to turn away, these collective values remain with us.

Another crucial institution that shapes us is the education system. The issue of freedom within the classroom and its importance in the learning process has been the subject matter of many debates. It is evident that unbridled freedom in a classroom, especially when the students are young or immature will only lead to chaos and confusion. The focus will be diffused since the authority of the teacher- who enforces discipline and concentration in the class will be lost. Also, the students, who are unaware of future benefits of studying certain difficult or complex subjects, will tend to avoid them altogether. As we have all experienced ourselves, unbridled freedom in the form of no attendance constraints usually leads to high levels of absenteeism.

However, it is also important to consider what would be the case in a class with absolutely no freedom at all. Where the teacher is the absolute dictator and students have no rights, and only one duty- to listen to the authoritarian teacher. Such a scenario cannot be beneficial to the overall growth of the students. Their creativity will be stifled. Not allowed to ask questions or think independently, their curious and questioning natures will be subsumed under the weight of conformity, mediocrity and obedience. Education then divorces itself from understanding and development of the personality. It reduces to merely rote learning and superficial information gathering. This will have

consequences for their future where they will be unable to take any independent decisions, never having faced that prospect earlier.

As earlier, the most beneficial approach lies in the middle of these two extremes. Children must be given freedom within the classroom and within the education system. But how much authority should the teacher retain and how much he/she should leave the children to make their own decisions is a difficult question to answer.

A number of theories have been put forward by various authors in this regard. Pioneers in child developmental theory- Jean Piaget (1896-1980), and Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), have powerfully influenced beliefs about interacting with children, how to set up learning environments, and expectations for children's development.[1]

There are some similarities and differences between Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories and these differences influence how teachers struggle and negotiate the location of their control and the children's freedom in child-centred classrooms. The key difference between Piaget's cognitive- constructivist theory and Vygotsky's social constructivist theory lies in the role each theory assigns to the individual child and the social context of play in a Child's development. Although both approaches support the idea that individuals construct knowledge, Piaget and Vygotsky viewed nature (individual) and nurture (social context) as taking different roles in this process[2].

From the Piagetian perspective, individuals construct a personal reality based on previous knowledge and new experiences. Knowing is therefore, an interaction between the environment and the individual. For Vygotsky, <https://assignbuster.com/is-unbridled-freedom-a-myth-or-reality-education-essay/>

learning is an interactive and constructive activity, and both society and individuals play essential roles in learning.[3]

Both approaches emphasize the importance of social adaptation and social interaction in children's learning, the difference comes in determining the direction of influence, that is, whether knowledge is constructed as a result of social interaction and then internalized (the Vygotskian view), or whether knowledge is constructed by the individual as a result of experience and then refined through testing in social situations (the Piagetian view)

Moreover, both approaches locate learning within a social context, but each attributes different functions to that context. For Piaget, the importance of the social context is that it provides children with a means of testing the knowledge they had constructed. For Vygotsky, the social context is both the source and the cultural repository of the learning.

The classrooms guided by Piaget's theory give children the greatest degree of freedom. Teachers set up a rich environment for children to explore by themselves. Teachers are observers. On the other hand the classroom applying Vygotsky's theory seeks to find a balance between teacher-directed and child-initiated activities. Teachers assist children and give them challenges in order that children may attain the top level within their zone of proximal development.

Two other writers who have provided valuable insights about the tension between children's autonomy and the teacher's authority in classroom teaching are John Dewey (1859- 1952) and Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Both, Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1998) and Montessori's *Absorbent*

Mind (1995) discuss many points about the relationship between children's freedom and teachers' roles in education. Although their ideas about education are widely considered to be child-centred, they hold divergent views about children's freedom and the role of the teacher.

In Dewey's Progressive Theory, democracy is the aim of schooling. The curriculum is child-centred and is rooted in the ideas of continuity and interaction in a social context. Learning is experiencing.

“ Teachers and children decide together what experience is meaningful to each individual student's current learning needs and later development. Moreover, the experience is always a transaction taking place between the individual and the environment.”[1]

Therefore, as children develop within a school that functions like a democratic society, they learn and develop the ability to function well in the larger democratic society. Dewey (1998) believed that children's freedom should be constructed, that it is not simply a product of their free will. He made a distinction between freedom based entirely on free will (doing whatever one wants to do) and freedom of intelligence, which is constructed from purposes that are intrinsically worthwhile, through observation and exercise of judgment in real-life situations.[2]

Further, he believed that,

“ Guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils' intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it”[3]

Therefore, teachers should act as the representative and agent of the interests of the group as a whole, and should be responsible for each Child's on-going growth with the community.

Moreover, Dewey indicated that the ideal aim of education is the creation of self-control. The mere removal of restriction or external control is no guarantee that children have self-control.[1]

Maria Montessori believed that children and their proper education is the key to building a new world. Education must develop the potential abilities of children, who (she believed) are endowed with unknown powers. The role of education is therefore, to offer an orderly environment and materials which children can explore, by themselves, in order to promote their development. Montessori's educational philosophy is centred on the interaction between objects and the individual. The teacher acts as an observer to find a child's inner spirit and offers an orderly environment in which children can develop and grow.

Montessori believed that the child has the power to teach herself. Children can adapt and have the ability to develop freely, which can become directly visible if their minds are not oppressed by adults who may limit the child's "inner work and weigh down his spirit"[2]

She indicated that child herself must become the centre of education and should be guided by her inward mind. Therefore, the teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives that inspire children to develop without any need of direct instruction

However, Montessori did not ask teachers to completely abdicate authority. She believed that authority does not come from the "adult's dignity", but from the help that parents or teachers are able to give to their children. Therefore, authority consists of teachers' aim to help children construct their work, without posing a threat to the children's minds or reconstructing the children's work.[3]

Although Montessori suggested that teachers should refrain from either interfering with children as they are absorbed in their work or preventing children's free expansion, she still believed that teachers should interrupt children if the children persistently annoy the others, because it means the children's spirits or disciplines of development would unfold negatively. Therefore, the teachers should interrupt to break this negative development and guide children toward the "right track"

These theories lead to 2 types of classrooms, with varying degrees of teacher control and children's freedom. It would be generally expected that these ruminations on students' freedom would lead to a low teacher control and high student freedom scenario. However, this is not the case.

Low Teacher's control, High Student's Freedom

Some people may assume that the progressive way of teaching should be located in this quadrant because they believe high teacher control (the application of teacher authority) may oppress children and cause unjust power relationships between teachers and children.

However, it has been seen that is impossible to help children attain educational goals without the teachers' guidance.

Those who advocate this view must critically examine the following questions:

Does teacher control have to be contradictory to children's freedom?

Does teacher control automatically oppress children's freedom?

Does teacher control prohibit children's learning initiatives?[1]

High Teacher's control, High Student's Freedom

Reflected by both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories. A teacher may respect and value children's unfolding development, but he/she must also set up the expectations and goals for learning and give some guidance to children. In this kind of interaction, teacher control and Children's freedom are not thought of as opposite to one to another; they coexist and both are highly valued in the " whole" process of teaching[2]

This process of education, that gives great degree of freedom to the student, yet locates a certain degree of guidance and control with the teacher has implications for the professional domain as well. When these students grow up and enter organizations, the degree of freedom they are used to exercising and the decision-making skills that have been instilled in them through the process acquire great significance. The degree of freedom that an organization gives to its employees is also an important factor.

The interaction between freedom given to employees within an organization and the degree of freedom the employees are accustomed to function under is very complex and gives rise to different types of behaviours.

For example, those who are brought up through a process that involves high degree of control by parents, teachers etc. may, on finding a low control environment within the organization, be unable to function and take independent decisions, or they may end up mis-using those freedoms.

Freedom within an organization has many meanings, and always involves the complex dynamics between individual freedom and the importance of meeting organizational/ professional targets. Some of these include:

Freedom to have flexible work hours to accommodate family and lifestyle, while still meeting organizational goals.

Freedom to come to leadership with new ideas and opposing viewpoints, while learning to trust people and letting go of absolute control.

Freedom to do things differently by leveraging personal strengths to achieve goals, while still maintaining a professional, formal attitude.

Freedom to leverage social media to communicate professionally and to help build brand awareness for your organization, while not devoting too much time to personal issues.

Freedom to celebrate great accomplishments and milestones, while at the same time, having the freedom to say (without judgment,), “ I don’t know” or “ I can’t handle any more” or “ I made a mistake.”

Freedom to be compensated fairly, equitably, and even sometimes generously

There is no debate that these, and many more such freedoms within the workplace will unleash creativity, encourage an environment of innovation, lead to relaxed and more productive employees, increase employee retention, make jobs more interesting and inspire employees to perform better. But, like in the case of implementing freedom within the education system, here too, there needs to be a delicate balance between employee freedom and organizational support and guidance. To make this possible, one of the major factors is the top leadership and their management style.

Many people contend that this is exactly what makes companies like Google India, MakeMyTrip, Intel Technology, Marriott Hotels, NetApp India the top 5 places to work in (in India). Freedom can be planned. It is the result of a designing triad consisting of the planning agents' assumptions, the planning system's conditions and the opportunities and/or barriers which enhance or hinder the exercise of freedom.[1]

Depending upon the amount of freedom and flexibility that organizations give to employees, and the qualities and skills they expect in their employees, they can be classified under 3 broad categories[2]:

The industrial organization

The Industrial Economy required the mass scaling of production and distribution. It met the requirements for the design of systems for scale, and was successful in plugging workers in to execute their specialized tasks.

<https://assignbuster.com/is-unbridled-freedom-a-myth-or-reality-education-essay/>

This type of organization is based on physical capital. Intellect, obedience and diligence are important employee characteristics. Employees have little or no decision-making freedom.

The information Organization

The information organization Information is used to uncover patterns, reduce the costs of production and consumption and find new solutions to vexing issues. Workers employ their intellect to solve problems relating to data.

This type of organization is based on similar employee characteristics as the industrial, but gives a greater degree of freedom to its employees.

The creative/learning organization[2]

The creative organization is based on ideas and values qualities like initiative, creativity and passion. These qualities are intrinsic to employees, and when given freedom, bloom to provide a competitive advantage to the company. These assets are not physical in nature like commodities; hence the organization needs to work on retaining its highly skilled employees.

Gary Hamel has given some great examples of companies that are innovating in terms of management to encourage these traits in their employees. W. L. Gore is one such example. It has made the list of Best Places to work for the past 25 years. The Great Place to Work organization noted these four aspects of W. L. Gore's culture:

“ People experience tremendous freedom at Gore: the freedom to talk with whomever they need or want to, the freedom to make comments and

provide input, the freedom to bring who they are to work, and the freedom to make commitments.”[3]

To conclude, this paper tries to argue that there is no such thing as “unbridled freedom”. Human beings are essentially social animals and they are born within society. Society shapes and moulds human behaviour, which may also be influenced by certain intrinsic genetic predispositions of individuals.

However, Institutions like Religion, Education, the state, family, friends, etc. have a huge role to play in the way we develop into adults. These may be conducive to the development of a balanced personality. However, they may sometimes be oppressive and may deter us from reaching our full potential in terms of faculties like creativity, innovation, lateral thinking etc.

Further, unbridled freedom, even if it existed, is undesirable since it disconnects us from the social nature of our lives. Unbridled freedom can be destructive, chaotic and may in fact hamper the optimum developmental process, as was explained in the discussion on freedom within education earlier. The situation with high teacher control and high student freedom was found to be the best approach to bringing freedom within the classroom.

Finally, the degree of freedom we are used to exercising and functioning under has a significant impact in the professional scenario- both for the employee as well as the organization. Employees must learn to handle freedom with responsibility and accountability while organizations must work on loosening bureaucratic hierarchical controls and give more freedom to make decisions to their employees.

<https://assignbuster.com/is-unbridled-freedom-a-myth-or-reality-education-essay/>