
UNIT 4 FREEDOM

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Definition and Kinds of Freedom
- 4.3 Historical Development
- 4.4 The Problem of Free Will
- 4.5 Existence of Freedom
- 4.6 Nature of Freedom
- 4.7 Limits of Freedom
- 4.8 Positive and Negative Freedom
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Key Words
- 4.11 Further Readings and References
- 4.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we try to understand the concept of freedom in all its complexities beginning from the Greek period. The problem of Free will, is the key issue examined and studied in detail, giving special emphasis to deterministic theories and explaining the position of its opponents in detail. By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Distinguish and explain different kinds of Freedom
- The problem of Free will and various philosophical approaches and theories about it.
- Explain the nature and limits of Freedom
- Describe the difference between positive and Negative Freedom

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Human is both intelligent and free. Freedom is another title of human excellence and nobility. It represents a great window for looking in to the mystery of human, to acquire a more correct, more complete and a more adequate comprehension of human. Both in the practical and theoretical fields freedom constituted an intricate problem from age old times. In the practical field it was the social, economic, political and cultural chains that often bound human in chains. In the theoretical field the question revolves round the problem of free will. Human distinguishes oneself above the other beings, above all precisely because one is gifted with free will.

4.2 DEFINITION AND KINDS OF FREEDOM

Freedom is the right to act according to one's will without being held up by the power of others. From a philosophical point of view, it can be defined as the capacity to

determine your own choices. In can be defined negatively as an absence of subordination, servitude or constraint.

In general, by freedom we mean absence of constriction. Constriction can be due to various causes and accordingly there can be distinguished various forms of freedom, such as:

Physical freedom – immunity from physical constriction.

Moral freedom : absence of constrictions through the oppressive forces of moral order such as rewards, punishments, threats, etc.

Psychological freedom: it is a human capacity in choosing to do or not to do a thing when all constitions for action are already present. It is a power to make the choice fall in favour of one of various alternative possibilities.

Political freedom: Outer or political freedom, or personal liberty is the absence of outward restraints, with respect to speech, freedom of thought, religious practice, the press and the freedom to modify one’s outward circumstances.

4.3 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

It is often said that Greek philosophy was unsuccessful in giving a proper solution or even effectuating a satisfactory enquiry in to the very problem of freedom. There are three principal reasons why they didn’t have a deeper enquiry in to this vital problem. a) because it considers all things as subject to fate, an absolute will, superior to humans and to gods, which consciously or unconsciously determines an action. b) according to Greek-thought human makes up part of nature and is subject to general laws that govern onself, by which one cannot behave differently. c) human is subject to the strong influence of history, which is conceived in Greek thought as a cyclical movement, in which everything repeats itself within a certain period of time.

The problem of free-will was first definitely stated as a problem of Christian theology. The problem arose, in fact, from a number of different roots in Christian belief. Christianity asserts on the one hand that human does freely choose one’s actions, but also asserts on the other hand statements not evidently compatible with . For example, God being omniscient knows from all eternity what actions a human will in fact perform. That is why Augustine puts this question, why has God created human free, knowing that one would abuse this gift? Aquinas makes a different question; how is it possible that human is free if God is the principle and ultimate cause of everything?

In the modern period there was another shift of perspective from theocentrism to anthropocentrism. Freedom is no longer a question of rapport with God but a rapport with other faculties and with the society. During the contemporary period, the phenomenon of socialization and of its consequences brings freedom into consideration above all in the social perspective. Freedom today is no longer compromised by extra-worldly or infra-human forces, but by human, social forces created by humans themselves.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Define freedom and explain its various kinds.

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2) Why did Greek thought fail to provide proper solution to the problem of freedom?

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4.4 THE PROBLEM OF FREE WILL

In philosophy, the question of freedom often goes with the question of free will. The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau asserted that the condition of freedom was inherent to humanity, with the implication that all social interactions subsequent to birth imply a loss of freedom. He made the famous quote: “ Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” Jean Paul Sartre famously claimed that humans are “condemned to be free” – because they always have a choice. But determinism claims that the future is inevitably determined by prior causes and freedom is an illusion. Do we have free will? The history of the discussion of free will is rich and remarkable. David Hume called the problem of free will “the most contentious question of metaphysics, the most contentious science.”

The basic philosophical positions on the problem of free will can be divided in accordance with the answers they provide to two questions. “Are we free agents”?, “Can we be morally responsible for what we do”? Those who say ‘yes’ are the compatibilists, who hold that free will is compatible with determinism, whereas incompatibilists hold that freedom is not compatible with determinism. (**Determinism** is roughly defined as the view that all current and future events are causally necessitated by past events combined with the laws of nature. It holds that everything that happens is necessitated

by what has already gone before, in such a way that nothing can happen otherwise than it does. **Causal determinism** is the thesis that future events are necessitated by past and present events combined with the laws of nature. **Logical determinism** is the notion that all propositions, whether about the past, present or future are either true or false. The problem of free will, in this context, is the problem of how choices can be free, given that what one does in the future is already determined as true or false in the present. **Mythological determinism** negates that man is free for mythological reasons: fate, the stars, demons, etc. which impede man from being master of his own actions. **Theological determinism** is the thesis that there is a God who determines all that humans will do, either by knowing their actions in advance, via omniscience or by decreeing their actions in advance. The problem of free will, in this context, is the problem of how our actions can be free, if there is a being who has determined them for us ahead of time. **Sociological determinism** states that all human actions are determined by the pressure exercised by society on individuals. **Biological determinism** is the idea that all behavior, belief, and desire are fixed by our genetic endowment. **Psychological determinism** affirms that the action of will is entirely determined by the intellect and its knowledge).

Compatibilism is the view that the assumption of free will and the existence of a concept of determinism are compatible with each other. They believe that to have free will, to be a free agent, to be free in choice and action is simply to be free from constraints of certain sorts. Freedom is a matter of not being physically or psychologically forced or compelled to do what one does. Thomas Hobbes claims that a person acts freely only when the person willed the act and the person could have done otherwise, if the person had decided to. He sometimes attributes such compatibilist freedom to the person and not to some abstract notion of will. David Hume writes, “this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to every one who is not a prisoner and in chains.”

Incompatibilism holds that there is no way to reconcile a belief in a deterministic universe with a belief in a concept of free will beyond that of a perceived existence. Or in simple words determinism and free will can never go together. One of the traditional arguments for incompatibilism is based on an “intuition pump.” If a person is determined in his or her choices of actions, then he or she must be like other mechanical things that are determined in their behavior such as a wind-up toy, a billiard ball, a puppet, or a robot. Because these things have no free will, then people must have no free will, if determinism is true. Another argument of incompatibilists runs along these lines. If determinism is true, then we have no control over the events of the past that determined our present state and no control over the laws of nature. Since we can have no control over these matters, we also can have no control over the consequences of them. Since our present choices and acts, under determinism, are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws of nature, then we have no control over them and hence, no free will.

Libertarianism accepts the existence of a concept of free will along with an assumption of indeterminism to some extent. Metaphysical libertarianism is one philosophical view under that of incompatibilism. Libertarianism holds on to a concept of free will that requires the individual to be able to take more than one possible course of action under a given set of circumstances. **Free will as a combination of chance and determination.** William James described a two-stage model of free will. In the first stage the mind develops random alternative possibilities for action, in the second an adequately determined will selects one option.

Check Your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

- 1) What is determinism? What are the different types of determinism?
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- 2) What is the difference between compatibilism and incompatibilism?
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4.5 EXISTENCE OF FREEDOM

To prove the existence of freedom in human action, one can present many argumentations, and along the arc of the history of philosophy many of these have been adopted. Some authors call upon the testimonial of consciousness, others call on the intellective constitution of human being, and still others point out the disastrous consequences inherent in the negation of freedom. Among the most important texts in favor of the existence of freedom are those of Origen, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Sartre.

Origen was one of the first authors to write a treatise on freedom. His famous work *De Principiis I* is remarkably profound and systematic work on free will. According to Origen men as well as all other rational creatures are free. Truly man is everywhere in chains, but it is his own responsibility, for the cause of his enslavement is traceable to that very freedom, which he misused. Free will constitutes the very essence itself of rational creatures, by which none of them can be constrained to act by force.

Origen asserts that Divine Providence allows man’s free will full scope in his cooperation with God. He says that if a believer takes away the element of free will from virtue he destroys its essence. This conviction is one of the pillars of Origen’s ethics and theology.

Origen harmonized the freedom of the will with the plan of Divine Providence. In doing so, he constituted himself the defender of free will. As he expounds his theory, providence envelops free will, impels it in the direction of good conduct, disciplines it, and heals it. The universe is cared for by God in accordance with the condition of the free will of each man, and that as far as possible it is always being led on to be better, and... that the nature of our free will is to admit various possibilities.

After Origen the problem of freedom always remained at the centre of the philosophical reflection of Christian authors. Authors like St Augustine has dealt it with original approaches. He says that as the rational soul is characterized by understanding, which is oriented towards knowledge, it is also characterized by will, which is oriented towards free choice. Augustine considers Cicero's reasoning against God's foreknowledge, "If there is free will, all things do not happen according to fate; if all things do not happen according to fate, there is not a certain order of causes; and if there is not a certain order of causes, neither is there a certain order of things foreknown by God." Against this argument, Augustine maintains both human freedom of the will and divine foreknowledge of all future events. Even if there is free will and an absence of any all-encompassing deterministic fate, there can still be "for God a certain order of all causes," among which causes are our freely choosing wills.

Aquinas distinguishes between the free choice of human for us, and the natural instincts of the "brute animal." He says that the "brute animal" does not have any free choice, but in place of free choice the animal has an instinct to do something. For example, when a deer sees a wolf, the deer instinctively runs away from the wolf, not by free choice, but of the natural instinct of fear for the wolf.

Human does not choose of necessity. And this is because that which is possible not to be, is not of necessity. Now the reason which it is possible not to choose, or to choose, may be gathered from a twofold power in human. For human can will and not will, act and not act. Again one can will this or that and do this or that. The reason for this is seated in the very power of the reason.

Descartes regards the freedom of the human will or liberty of choice to be so great that it is the respect in which we most resemble divine infinity. His initial analysis of human freedom – as our having the power of choosing to do a thing or choosing not to do it — seems ordinary enough. But then he shows us a more complicated version of his definition, it consists alone in the fact that in order to affirm or deny, pursue or shun those things placed before us by the understanding, we act so that we are unconscious that any outside force constrains us in doing so." He holds that the power of free will is the greatest perfection in human, through the exercise of which we become masters of our actions and thereby merit praise or blame.

Kant says, we could not prove freedom to be something actual in ourselves and in human nature. We saw merely that we must presuppose it if we want to think of a being as rational." Kant also thinks that there is a sort of circle in our thinking about the relationship between freedom and morality: we assume that we are free so that we may think of ourselves as subject to moral laws," and we "think of ourselves as subject to moral laws because we have attributed to ourselves freedom of the will. He then ends with: Freedom is, therefore, only an idea of reason whose objective reality is in itself questionable.

Hegel's most renowned discussion of freedom traces the evolution of freedom in three stages of world history. In the world of the ancient Orient, people do not yet know that the Spirit – the human as such – is free. Because they do not know this, they are not free. They know only that one person is free; but for this very reason such freedom is mere arbitrariness, savagery, stupefied passion. It was among the Greeks that the consciousness of freedom first arose, and thanks to that consciousness they were free. But they, and the Romans as well, knew only that some persons are free, not the human as such. To the Romans only citizens were free, and the slaves were not. It was first the Germanic peoples, through Christianity, who came to the awareness

that every human is free by virtue of being human, and that the freedom of spirit comprises our most human nature. Therefore, World history is the progress in the consciousness of freedom – a progress that we must come to know in its necessity. Hegel also adds a discussion on the freedom of the human will. He says, ‘The will is free, so that freedom is both the substance of right and its goal, while the system of right is the realm of freedom made actual.’

Sartre proposes an interesting view on free will when he says, “either human is wholly determined (which is inadmissible, especially because a determined consciousness - a consciousness externally motivated – becomes pure exteriority and ceases to be consciousness) or else human is wholly free.” This shows us that Sartre believes that human is free to do what one wants. He writes, “I am condemned to always exist beyond my essence, beyond the urgings and motives of my act: I am condemned to being free. This means that it is impossible to find other limits to my freedom than freedom itself or if one prefers, this means that we are not free to cease being free.”

Again, after telling us that human is wholly free, he tells us that since we are free we are responsible for our actions.” The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that human being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on one’s shoulders; one is responsible for the world and for oneself as a way of being.” He says that even if one does not want to be responsible, one cannot be without being responsible for one’s actions, “For I am responsible for my very desire of fleeing responsibilities. To make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon Others is still to choose myself, and suicide is one mode among others of being-in-the-world.”

4.6 NATURE OF FREEDOM

There are three principal moments in a free act: deliberation, judgment and election. Deliberation is the phase of exploration, research and inquiry about the object or action. Judgment is the phase of evaluation. Election is the phase of decision. The free act requires that, that which is wished to be done is known. It implies an attentive examination. The free act which culminates in election is a complex action, which is the result of a dialogue between the intellect and the will. St Thomas maintains that the free act belongs substantially to the will, also depending on the intellect. Freedom is the faculty which human enjoys to determine oneself to an action and to being its cause, after having taken consciousness of the considerations that such an action carries for one’s life.

Human will is a faculty parallel to the intellect. While the end of intellect is still truth, not this or that truth, but the truth as such, the absolute truth; so the end of will is good, but not this or that particular good, but rather absolute universal good. It is only in absolute good that will finds its perfect satisfaction and its perfect happiness. But in reality the intellect never proposes to the will a concrete good which has all the charisma of the absolute, universal good, but only particular and limited goods. Therefore these goods are sometimes tend to be repelled or rejected. Here resides the profound reason by which the human will is free. Human is the author of the free act. The cause of the free act is the person who fulfills it, not God or the angels or demons, stars, nature, society, the socio-political structure. Freedom is a very special gift which only human possesses, while all the other things of this world lack it.

4.7 LIMITS OF FREEDOM

Human is free, but not unboundedly free. Freedom does not identify itself with the being of human, but constitutes its fundamental property like living, thinking etc. Therefore, freedom is also subject to certain limits and is controlled by certain conditions. Human is not free from being corporeal, social, sexual etc. One is not free to use language to one’s pleasure. Human cannot remove oneself from a certain dependence on the world, society and history. Human freedom is also conditioned by passions. This conditioning has always been seriously taken by the philosophers in all periods of time. In the normal situations the passions exercise a strong influence over us, but at the same time we are not slaves of passions in that we can combat and reject its assaults. The theory of Freud that all human activity is determined by the libido finds fewer and fewer supporters in the recent times. The human affective dimension cannot completely be reduced to libido. The influence of the affective part of human on the rest of human is real and profound. It can sustain or impede, favor or oppose, because there exists opposite affective tendencies for everything which human does: love-hate, joy-sadness, hope-fear etc. Though there is a strong affective pressure, the will in normal conditions remains free and sovereign with respect to all the other faculties of human. It is only in certain abnormal conditions that human becomes completely subject to passions.

4.8 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FREEDOM

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin makes an important distinction between ‘freedom from’ (negative freedom) and ‘freedom to’ positive freedom. The positive one is the realization of one’s self in spontaneity, a freedom to develop one’s potential. The negative freedom theorists hold that freedom is essentially something negative, namely the absence of restraint or impediment to our actions. It is the freedom from oppression, needs and authority etc. Freedom as the absence of restraint means unwilling to subjugate, lacking submission or without forceful inequality. T.H Green defines positive freedom as a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying and that too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others. It is more than the mere absence of impediment to our desires. The freedom to be genuine, one should be provided with full opportunity other than the interference of others. A large number of philosophers now reject the view that there are two irreducibly distinct conceptions of freedom, one positive and the other negative. According to MacCalum, there is only one concept of liberty and that is best understood as always one and the same triadic relation between a person, an intended action and a preventing condition. Freedom is always of someone, from something, to do, have or be something. The disagreement between the adherents of positive and negative freedom are often about one or the other aspect of this triad, i.e., what a person is to stand for, what an impediment is and what is to be counted as a wanted or intended action.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the views of Origen and Hegel on free will.

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2) Is freedom limited? If so how?

4.9 LET US SUM UP

The essential character of human is that one is a *homo volens*. The gift of will, a most precious gift is the distinguishing mark of human beings from all other beings. In the past, the Greek mind was unaware of this. The understanding of freedom as indeterminism was foreign to the Greek consciousness. It was a static mind-set, without knowing the dynamics of human freedom. The problem of the freedom of will is not a simple issue, but it poses a great net-work of difficulties. These difficulties are not unrelated with each other; rather they are part of a great network – the center of which human as a reflective conscious being and human as part of physical nature; conditioned by and acted upon by nature. Thus comes the theories of determinism, indeterminism of various kinds. If human is made a problem of nature, and if freedom of choice is completely arbitrary, as the theory of evolution wishes to do, the real freedom will always remain an illusion. Even if in the practical level every form of oppression and inequality disappears, in the philosophical plane, the freedom of will may always remain a point of discussion.

4.10 KEY WORDS

- Determinism

: It is the view that all current and future events are causally necessitated by past events combined with the law of nature.
- Compatibilism

: It is the view that the assumption of free will and the existence of a concept of determinism are compatible with each other.
- Incompatibilism

: Is the view that there is no way to reconcile a belief in a deterministic universe with a concept of free will.

4.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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4.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

- 1) Freedom is the right to act according to one’s will without being held up by the power of others. From a philosophical point of view, it can be defined as the capacity to determine your own choices. There are different kinds of freedom such as Physical freedom which is the absence of any physical force or constriction, Moral freedom which is the absence of any constriction through rewards or punishments, psychological freedom with the capacity to choose to do or not to do an act when all the constituents of an act is present. Political freedom is that which is assured by the government such as the freedom of speech, religion etc.
- 2) There are three reasons why the Greeks failed to adequately address the problem of freedom. It had a deterministic view because of which it considered all things as subject to fate, an absolute will superior to men and to gods, which consciously or unconsciously determines an action. Secondly, according to Greek thought human makes up part of nature and is subject to general laws that govern humans, by which human cannot behave differently. Therefore, human is not ultimately responsible for one’s action. Thirdly, it is believed that human is subject to the strong influence of history, which is conceived as a cyclical movement, in which everything repeats itself within a certain period of time.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

- 1) Diterminism is defined as the view that all current and future events are causally necessitated by past events combined with the laws of nature. It holds that everything that happens is necessitated by what has already gone before, in such a way that nothing can happen otherwise than it does. The different kinds of determinism are: *Mythological determinism* which states that human is not the controller of one’s actions, because they are controlled by stars, devil or one’s fate. *Theological determinism* assumes that God determines all that the humans will, either by knowing in advance or by decreeing actions to humans. *Causal determinism* states that the present state is necessitated by the past events according to the laws of nature. *Logical determinism* holds that all propositions about past present or future are either true or false.
- 2) **Compatibilism** is the view that the assumption of free will and the existence of a concept of determinism are compatible with each other. But incompatibilism totally disagrees with this idea. Incompatibilism holds that there is no way to reconcile a belief in a deterministic universe with a belief in a concept of free will beyond that of a perceived existence. Or, in simple words, determinism and free

will can never go together. If determinism is true then human agent would be like other mechanical things that are determined in their behavior such as a wind-up toy, a billiard ball, a puppet, or a robot.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

- 1) According to Origen humans as well as all other rational creatures are free. Free will constitutes the very essence itself of rational creatures, by which none of them can be constrained to act by force. Origen asserts that Divine Providence allows human's free will with full scope in his cooperation with God. Origen harmonized the freedom of the will with the plan of Divine Providence. Providence envelops free will, impels it in the direction of good conduct, disciplines it, and heals it. The universe is cared for by God in accordance with the condition of the free will of each person, and that as far as possible it is always being led to innumerable possibilities.

Hegel speaks of an evolution of freedom. The ancient orients didn't know that the spirit in human is free, therefore couldn't consider the persons also to be free. The consciousness of freedom first arose in Greeks, but they considered only them to be free and not the slaves. But through Christianity there came the awareness that every human being is free by the very virtue of being human. The freedom of spirit comprises our most human nature.

- 2) Human is free, but not unboundedly free. It is not the essence but only the fundamental property of human beings. Human's freedom is limited by a corporeal body, the social environments, sex, etc. Moreover human freedom is also conditioned by passions. In the normal situations the passions exercise a strong influence over human beings, but at the same time we are not slaves of passions in that we have the power to combat and reject its assaults. All the activity of human cannot be reduced to the control of libido as Freud puts it. Though the