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# UNIT 3    HUMAN AS INTERDEPENDENT

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## 3.0    OBJECTIVES

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- To see how humans are dependent and interdependent on the world and on each other.
- To see how independence emerges from such interdependence.
- To attempt at a definition of freedom that is relevant and contextual.

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## 3.1    INTRODUCTION

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After having seen the human condition as being in the world this chapter looks into human life as dependent and interdependent on the world and on fellow human beings. That will help us to appreciate the freedom that humans enjoy, at least sometimes.

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## 3.2    HUMANS AS DEPENDENT

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Humans have, for the most part, taken themselves out of the “natural” world. We often overemphasize technological advances at the expense of the environment. Rapid exploitation of finite natural resources and uncontrolled waste are acceptable in many businesses as the only way to grow. The price of this way of thinking is starting to come into the light. Modern high-tech lifestyles are competitive instead of communal and cooperative. An effect of this competition is the human-created deserts in place of once lush forests. We have polluted virtually every corner of the planet. Instead of taking just what the environment can replenish, we tend to take it all—right now.

Most scientific concepts involve breaking living organisms into parts, labeling those parts, and treating those parts as something somehow separate from the whole organism. Most people believe that the universe is comprised of boundless building materials from which technological progress can flourish. In contrast, in the systems theory, the basic principle underlying life is processes. In a process,

one thing depends on another. If one step in the process doesn't occur, then the subsequent steps cannot occur. The system comes to a halt.

Thus, in the ecological approach to nature, the world and its inhabitants are seen to be interdependent. Everything relies on everything else for survival and prosperity. In contrast to many human institutions, the functioning of ecosystems is to establish cooperative relationships. The relationships promote the harmonious integration of systems.

In a natural setting, the competitive struggle for existence might at first glance appear to be mere brutality (whereby one animal eats another animal). However, the overall scheme is a sort of cooperation. Some species of fish, for example, swim in massive schools. This is perhaps a part of the acceptance by this species that some fish are sacrificed for the good of the whole species. The predator usually captures the weak and the old fish. If you follow evolutionary theory, this is good for the species, because it strengthens the species' genetics. In other words, the stronger fish will survive and they will produce stronger offspring. This is actually one of the underlying themes of evolution (Systems Theory 2010).

The ecological approach is also seen, for instance, in the mangrove forests. Everything depends on everything else for both survival and prosperity. For example, the immature shrimp rely on the decomposing leaves of the trees for food. If there is an abundance of leaves, the shrimp flourish. If there is a shortage of leaves, the shrimp population decreases. If the shrimp population decreases, it is likely that the other animals that rely on the shrimp for food, such as the kingfishers and many species of fish, will decrease in numbers. Looking back even further, another example in the mangrove is the relationship between the mud and its many dependents.

The mud is made up of decomposing leaves, bark, and other sediment that come into the mangrove forest during the tides. The mud is food for bacteria and plankton. The bacteria and plankton is food for immature crabs. The immature crabs are food for small fish. Small fish are food for bigger fish. Humans are at the top of this food chain. They eat the fish. However, if the mud is not in the mangrove forest, many species suffer the loss, such as the crabs, fish, and humans.

In sum, everything in the world, no matter what it is, depends on something else for its existence. If you understand and accept the systems theory you see the need for a balanced ecological view of the world, the need for changes in the manner in which we do business with each other, and the need for a general shift in technology toward a more friendly use of the limited supply of natural resources. Human beings are no exception and they are totally dependent on the world for their survival and well-being (Systems Theory 2010).

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### 3.3 HUMANS AS INTER-DEPENDENT

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From the above perspective, we can see how human beings are dependent on nature and also inter-dependent on each other. A powerful articulation of such respectful interdependence is made in 1854, when the U.S. President made an offer for a large area of Indian land and promised a "reservation" for the Indian people. Chief Seattle's reply, quoted below with modifications, has been described as the most beautiful and profound statement on the environment ever made. It

speaks of the inter-dependence of the whole earth on each other (See Kochery 1998).

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of the earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man. The white man's dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget their beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the body heat of the pony and man – all belong to the same family.

So, when the Great Chief of Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land, he asks much of us. The Great Chief sends word he will reserve us a place so that we can live comfortably by ourselves. He will be our father and we will be his children. So we will consider your offer to buy our land. But it will not be easy. For this land is sacred to us. This shining water which moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must remember that it is sacred and you must teach your children that it is sacred and that each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father. The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children. If we sell you our land, you must remember, and teach your children, that the rivers are our brothers, and yours, and you must henceforth give them the kindness you would give any brother.

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves one. He leaves his father's graves behind, and he does not care. He kidnaps the earth from his children. His father's grave and his children's birthright are forgotten. He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert.

I do not know. Our ways are different from your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. But perhaps it is because the red man is a savage and does not understand. There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the unfurling of leaves in spring, or the rustle of an insect's wings. But perhaps it is because I am a savage and do not understand. The clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at night? I am a red man and do not understand. The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond, and the smell of the wind itself, cleansed by midday rain, or scented with the pinion pine.

The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath, the beast, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not seem to notice the same air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to

the stench. But if we sell you our land you must remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives the same sigh. And if sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred as a place where even the white man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow’s flowers. So we will consider your offer to buy our land. If we decide to accept, I will make one condition. The white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers.

I am a savage and I do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand rotting buffaloes on the prairie, left by the white man who shot them from passing trains. I am a savage and I do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive. What is man without beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts soon happens to man. All things are connected. You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land. Tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we taught our children, that the earth is our mother, whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know: all things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life: he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself. Even the white man, whose God walks and talks with him as friend to friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny. We may be brothers after all. We shall see. One thing we know, which the white man may one day discover, that our God is the same God. You may think now that you own Him as you wish to own the land; but you cannot. He is the God of man, and His compassion is equal for the red man and the white. This earth is precious to Him, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator. The white man too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste.

But in your perishing you will shine brightly, fired by the strength of the God who brought you to this land and for some special purpose gave you dominion over this land and over the red man. That destiny is a mystery to us, for we do not understand when the wild buffaloes are all slaughtered, the wild horses are tamed, the secret corners of the forest heavy with scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills blotted by talking wires. Where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone. The end of living and the beginning of survival.

**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1)   What is the evolutionary significance of brutal and competitive struggle in nature?

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2) “The end of living and the beginning of survival.” What is its significance?

3.4 HUMANS AS INDEPENDENT

This unit introduces us to the notion of human independence and freedom which will be further elaborated in the next unit.

There’s a big difference in asking “Are we free?” and “Are we *really* free?”. The former question implies an issue whose answer we are “in the dark” about. The latter format suggests that we are naturally and spontaneously inclined to hold that we *are* free: recent events or findings have surfaced so as to make us have second thoughts about it all. And this is precisely the case. Of course, we shall not just “take for granted” the fact of our freedom (that would be an unpardonable sin of dogmatism in philosophy): we shall cast about for reasons, evidences, “pointers” that would seem to confirm this “unphilosophical conviction” to which we all subscribe, consciously or unconsciously. After all, we commonsensical people just *know* we are free: for instance, right now I can reflect on my free reading of this page and realise that there is nothing internally that compels me to go on reading. At any time I can just put it down and go and do something else – it’s all up to me, to me and my freedom. On the other hand, there have been the studies of men like Freud and Skinner who appear to challenge this smug assurance of ours.

Our unconscious (or sub-conscious) determine us far more than we realise and at times are the causes of what we had been thinking were our personal, arbitrary and whimsical choices. It might well be that *all* our so-called “decisions” stem not so much from our free choice but from obedience to past conditioning of which we are yet unaware. Then again, if – as pious believers put it – “everything is in the hands of God”, if all that happens has been already predestined by Her/Him, then where does our freedom and initiative come in, if at all? Finally, just what is freedom anyway? In fact, the problem is rendered all the more complex because we can speak about “freedom” in various contexts – in psychology, politics, religion and so on. In the texts quoted at the beginning of this chapter, for instance, Topol and Manuel are not speaking of the same freedom as Mme Roland or Orestes. And even when we are all speaking of freedom in the same context, not everyone is in agreement as to what is meant by the word. For instance, while many people argue for the need for political freedom – that the State should not take away one’s freedom and, on the contrary protect it – they may actually differ with each other while appearing to be great advocates of freedom. This could arise, for instance, from the fact that one group is thinking about the “freedom to *have* more” (therefore uncontrolled capitalism etc.) And another group is more concerned about the “freedom to *be* more” (so controlled capitalism or no capitalism at all). And that is just one example.

What dimension of freedom shall we be focusing on in this unit? Obviously psychological freedom, the mastery over one’s actions which is often referred to simply as “freedom of choice”. This is the basic or root freedom in human being, without which it would be silly to speak of political freedom or anything else. This will involve us having to pay more attention to the objections raised against it by psychologists as Freud and Skinner. We shall leave to *The Philosophy of God* the main responsibility of reconciling human freedom with divine providence though we may say a thing or two in passing here. Nor will we completely ignore political and other expressions of freedom (Desbruslais 1997).

### 3.5 THE PHENOMENA OF FREEDOM

Freedom is very much an “in” topic these days. We find the word emblazoned on everything from T-shirts to wall-posters. Advertisements appeal to potential customers by stressing how this brand of cigarette or this make of jeans proclaims freedom and the casual, uninhibited look. Graffiti often features freedom, liberty and spontaneity as key inspirations. New styles in art and literature rehearse bold, “free” new ventures, forays into uninhibited self-expression with a minimum of rules and planning. And the most insulting words we can use against anyone today are “Capitalist” and “Fascist” (or “imperialist,” a slight variation) and all these terms imply a person who has scant (if any.) respect for freedom.

On the other hand, many of those who present themselves as champions of freedom seem to show scant respect for anyone who is not quite prepared to toe the line as far as their understanding of “what is freest and best”. Apart from terrorists and freedom fighters (one man’s freedom fighter is another man’s anarchist.), there is subtle as well as not-so-subtle manipulation of public opinion and value-systems by the media. Scientific and technological progress has often been harnessed to refine techniques of brain-washing and “population-programming” in such carefully hidden ways that few would realise how the decision-process is being quietly taken away from them. And science and technology is ever discovering new and more efficient means for Big Brother and his efficient thought-police to observe and flush out dissenters – not to mention speedier methods to isolate, punish and silence non-conformists. Even in relatively innocent matters like fashions of dress and fads in art, how much does real “freedom of choice” operate and how much is it a matter of artificial needs and wants created by “decision-makers” who enjoy almost unlimited power and whose sole goal is profit?

As if this were not complicated enough, we note that in English (unlike most other languages) we have a choice of two words to speak of this topic: *freedom* and *liberty*. Are these merely synonymous? Strictly speaking, no words are. And, even if they are used synonymously in general practice, can they afford us some valuable insights as an aid to reflection? (Desbruslais 1997)

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) “Freedom to *be* more.” What is its meaning?

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2) What is freedom of choice?

### 3.6 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF FREEDOM

Ask the average person what freedom means and you can be almost certain to get the “pat answer”: doing whatever one wants. If I can do what I want I’m free; if I can’t, I’m not. As simple as that. In other words, any restriction or rule is seen as inherently bad, as anti-freedom. But suppose we were to press the question, Socrates-like. “And suppose there is this religious fanatic who’s not certainly insane but is quite convinced that all women are evil, sinful creatures and is resolved to murder as many of them as is possible. Or the case of a person who feels that s/he must make a human sacrifice to appease the wrath of the gods he believes in, or in order to wrest from them some favour. Would you allow these people to “do what they want” and kill some innocent victims – especially if these victims were to be people near and dear to you?” No doubt, the embarrassed answer would be no – and so it should be, whether the victims be total strangers to one or not. This, quite likely, would lead to scaling down of the earlier confident assertion: “I mean, well, doing whatever I wish, so long as no one else gets hurt.” But is that enough? What if, for instance, my parents wanted me to become a priest or a religious or get married to someone whom I detest? If I were to refuse, surely I’d “hurt” them. In which case, would it be a free act if I were to agree? Here there is a clash between what I want to do and hurting someone. This definition is equally self-defeating, as Desbruslais notes (Desbruslais 1997).

Furthermore, if either of these popular and uncritical definitions is pushed to the extreme, no real human relationships, no love and no friendship would be possible. Indeed, Sartre is quite consistent with his views when he condemns all inter-personal relationships as either veiled forms of sadism or of masochism. For Sartre “man is freedom” and Sartre understand human freedom as something that is meant to be absolute, something that must never surrender even the slightest shred of personal autonomy to any norm or rule, however noble or spiritual it may sound. Every human inter-relationship, then, involves the collision of two autonomous worlds. Now, the only way for any permanent kind of relationship to develop in such a case is either for one of the two persons to capitulate before the other, to willingly annihilate himself or herself before the other and claim to find joy in that (hence, masochism) or, on the other hand, to ruthlessly suppress and trample underfoot the autonomy and freedom of the other and find, in that, the delight of alleged love or friendship (hence, sadism). Any pretence at establishing a loyal relationship is nothing but that: pretence, self-deception, *mauvaise foi* (bad faith). As one critic has summed it up so well, for Sartre the act of freedom resides in the saying of a relentless and proud “No”. As long as I say no to people, to ideals, to norms – in short, to anything that seeks to impose itself upon me from outside, or to draw or inspire me externally – I remain free.

Sartre cannot conceive of a possible 'Yes' which not only does not destroy freedom but actually enhances it. Paul Ricoeur has a lot to say about this latter and we shall soon go into it.

Again, if freedom is merely "doing what I want", then we would have to admit the drug addict who helplessly sets about fulfilling her/his deep inward craving (her/his "want"), even at the cost of brutal murder and robbery, is a totally free person. After all, s/he is doing "what s/he wants". And the human being who is strong enough to resist the urge to rape a lone and defenceless woman would be less free than the degenerate soul who, at the slightest stirring of his loins, ventures off to slake his lust (his "want") on the first hapless victim. In the former case, one is suppressing her/his want and in the other case s/he is fulfilling it. So we need to go a bit into just what level of me is doing the wanting in question. Is it the superficial selfish me or the deeper human self? (Desbruslais 1997).

We are back to that "inner conflict" within us, spoken of, among others, by St. Paul himself (Rom 7: 15ff.). We are all conscious of this interior struggle, between a baser, selfish urge and a more loving, nobler drive. We suggested earlier that we interpret these "wars within us" in terms of evolution rather than the traditional language of original sin. Which of these two battling principles in me is the more basic, stems more fundamentally from the deepest level of my "I"? If we wish to define freedom as "doing whatever I want", a lot will depend on which of these two forces take us to the real deep-down "I" in me. Which is the "I" – or, more accurately, the level of "I" – whose wishes I want to help triumph over the contrary (contradictory?) desires of the other?

Finally, if we are all aware that there is an undeniable element of spontaneity and initiative in our actions (sometimes more evident than at other times), are we not also equally aware that there is something else afoot? Often outside situations, persons, events do influence, motivate or condition (which is the proper word) our decision-making? Some people make the unrealistic error of assuming that opting for determinism (that is, that we are the ones who determine our own action – in other words, we are really free) means establishing a kind of total sovereignty of decision-making, that nothing from outside be detected as somehow having a part to lay in our resolve. And so, as soon as such can be detected, they hastily jump to the conclusion that we are not free. Others, starting with the same false presupposition, do a cursory survey of the data and, with equal haste conclude that there is no outside interference and rush to the claim that we *are* free. Both these views stem from unrealistic presuppositions about human freedom. Let us not forget that human freedom is a kind of dialectic between external influence and personal choice. As Ramsey puts it, in a thought-clinching passage: "... A free decision is neither, on the one hand, merely a reaction to stimuli, nor on the other hand is it ... some altogether circumscribed, independent isolated going-on which is all my own. A free decision is a personal response – something certainly my own – but it is a response to a discerned obligation which exceeds 'observables'." (Iam Ramsey, 1960: 16.)

It is not necessary to explain, here, all the ramifications of Ramsey's views, nor even be in total agreement with all that he says and implies in this brief note. Suffice is it to note that the point is well made – and taken, here. From all this, it seems to me, that we should avoid trying to define freedom in terms of absence of restraint. Even the distinction between moral and physical freedom is not



much help here. For this gives the impression that all laws, all restraint is necessarily anti-freedom but the human being who restrains, out of her/his convictions (or whatever) her/his passions and her/his thirst for unbridled power and unjustly-acquired wealth, wouldn't we rather say s/he is freer than the unscrupulous rascal who feels no restraint upon her/himself to rob and exploit the weak? Should we countenance a language that seems to imply that the main job of morality is to take away freedom by bringing restraint? Can there not be good laws which protect and enhance freedom? (Desbruslais 1997).

Let us, then seek to describe freedom in more positive terms, concentrating on the other traditional definition of mastery over one's act (*dominium sui actus*). I am free if the real, deep down "I" is in control of my actions. If it restrains or checks my baser urge, I may feel a kind of surface or temporary sadness or frustration. But, overall, deep-down, I find a pervasive peace and joy.

3.7 SOME RELATED QUOTABLE

- 1) One of the commonest experiences is to meet someone whose belief that he cannot help doing what he is doing (or failing to do) is often an excuse for not doing as well as he can or at least better than he is at present doing. (Sidney Hook, *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, London, Methuen, 1978, p. 179)
- 2) It is now widely recognised among moral philosophers that, no matter how irrefutable the logic of absolute or naturalistic determinism may be, sane and rational human beings, in order to retain their sanity, their rationality, and their human purposefulness in living, still stubbornly insist on deciding, choosing and acting as though they were autonomous, dignified, and free individuals. This is the phenomenon, above all, that still needs to be explained. (H.W.Hintz, in *Determinism and Freedom ...* p.166)
- 3) And now, without comment, here is a "beaut" from Robert Burns: "Freedom and Whisky gang *thegither*"(i.e. go together)

**Check Your Progress III**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answer

1) Freedom is "doing whatever I wish, so long as no one else gets hurt." – Comment.

2) What is "*dominium sui actus*" and how is it related to freedom?

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### 3.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this chapter we have seen basically the interdependence, dependence and independence of human beings and have attempted at a definition of freedom.

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### 3.9 KEY WORDS

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<i>Mauvaise foi</i>	:	it is Sartre’s term meaning “bad faith.” It refers to every attempt at establishing a loyal relationship, which turns out to be nothing but pretence, self-deception or bad faith.
<i>Dominium sui actus</i>	:	it means “mastery over one’s act” and is the traditional definition of freedom.
<b>Freedom</b>	:	The traditional definition of freedom is “mastery over one’s act” ( <i>dominium sui actus</i> ). I am free if the real, deep down “I” is in control of my actions.

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### 3.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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