

What constitutes human freedom?

What human Freedom is NOT

The notion freedom is used for very different meanings, desires, and dreams, which are often inconsistent. For good logical reasons, you can say what Freedom is not, even if some things would be tempting:

- Human freedom does not mean that everyone can do whatever they want.
This may contradict to what other people want. And freedom is an equal right to everybody.
- Freedom is not a freedom from rules.
Rules and conventions can be a source of freedom, when they avoid unnecessary conflicts and ensure smooth processes. Setting rules for this purpose is an essential part of freedom.
However, setting good rules requires qualification. It is undeniable that freedom needs good rules.
- Freedom is not a freedom from challenges.
Challenges are inevitable in life. It becomes dangerous when challenges are over-challenging. The stronger the challenge, the more freedom (competences, cooperation and resources) is required to master it.
- Freedom is not a freedom from responsibility
One can only be responsible for what one has the freedom to bring about. So, if you have the freedom to make a difference, you cannot evade this responsibility.
- Freedom is not a claim to be shielded from an uncomfortable reality.
Otherwise, ignoring of uncomfortable challenges would be justified. This attitude is often a symptom of being (partially) defeated by a challenge.
Such a defeat is also a major reason for populist attitudes, the longing for conspiracy theories, a lack of empathy and violence that can be justified on these grounds.
Life simply does not take place in a hotel room with room service and a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door.

Freedom is the possibility to make life worth being lived, in the world as it is and as it could be. But what offers this possibility? How can you obtain it and how can you extend it?

What constitutes human freedom

Human freedom is made out of:

- your own orientation,
- your own abilities,
- the cooperation with others (their different orientations and their variety of abilities included)
- and the available means

This allows to give the following definition:

Freedom is the justified feeling of

- having sufficient orientation and skills, and
- having sufficient supportive cooperation and funds,
in order
- to master upcoming challenges and
- to be able to follow your own interests and creativity.

How can this definition be justified?

- Without orientation, it remains unclear what has to be done and why. Action can be blocked due to uncertainty and the absence of aim, purpose and direction.
- Without skills, you cannot implement, what your orientation demands.
- Most things in this world cannot be realized without cooperation and support by others.

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- Challenges are inevitable and inescapable. They can only be mastered. You can't choose them. You cannot ignore them. You have to prepare for them in order not to be overwhelmed by them. Being over-challenged results in loss of control and thus in a loss of freedom.
- People want to be up to their challenges. They do not want to experience failure and being over-challenged. They want the competence to look for their own wellbeing.
- Without interest and creativity, there would be a lack of motivation, to shape life and to demand freedom in return.
- We experience, that each of us has own talents that want to be tried out and developed. They demand for frequent use, simply because they are felt to be interesting and inspiring and often also effective for mastering the needs of normal life.
- The desire to apply your creativity and to follow your interests turns out to be a major driving and guiding force in your life.

So, freedom consists of four capabilities and two dependencies.

The four capabilities are: Orientation, Skills, Interests, and Creativity.

They are capabilities of your own body. They cannot be taken away from you. They are your “freedom capabilities”. They also shape your own identity.

Freedom is not a status but a process: the process of developing and applying “freedom capabilities”.

Even though you own “your mix” of these capabilities, they also depend on the social cooperation, support, and influence, which you obtained or missed, while developing your dispositions into trained abilities. Wherever you stand, you stand on the shoulders of your parents' generation, just as they stand on the shoulders of former generations.

The two dependencies that characterize human freedom are:

- **Cooperation and Support** by others (with their orientation and competences, and
- **Means** (and the right to use them)

Both don't belong to you. They are granted by the society in which you live. How much property one can own and for what purposes it can be used, depends on a country's political system and laws.

Property can be taken away from you. And cooperation and support are also granted by others and can be withdrawn.

So, freedom is more than the absence of suppression. **Suppression** wants to control your orientation, your means, your skills, your cooperation, and how you use them.

Freedom is to decide yourself, on the usage and development of your “freedom capabilities”, your interests and your creativity, based on fact guided thinking – a prerequisite for increasing freedom.

Different opinions about freedom come from different views on where the borderline between freedom and ruthlessness is located and accepted in a society. This borderline is permanently under test. It is driven by competing interests. Consequently, there is no freedom without a fair balance of interests, which defines the borderline between freedom and ruthlessness. This can only be achieved by empathy and fact guided thinking – the only means to find a common base for an agreement.