

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Al Franjon M. Villaroya

Beljun P. Enaya

Errol C. Fernandez

2020

Introduction to the Philosophy of the Human Person

Philippine Copyright © 2020 by Al Franjon M. Villaroya, Beljun P. Enaya
& Errol C. Fernandez

All rights reserved. No part of this work or publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the authors.

Artist: Prof. Dean Ruffel R. Flandez

Editor: Dr. Jett C. Quebec

ISBN: 978-621-8155-07-7

Published by ALETHEIA Printing and Publishing House
Davao City, Philippines
peterelicor@gmail.com

CHAPTER 5

FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN PERSON



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To realize that the human person is free and all actions have consequences
2. To appreciate and exercise prudence in one's choices
3. To show situations that demonstrate freedom of choice and the consequences of their choices
4. To become a responsible and authentic person in the exercise of freedom

INTRODUCTION

When the COVID-19 pandemic affected your hometown, you most probably experienced several quarantine measures. You are prohibited from moving anywhere you like. You are obliged to wear your facemask. And you have to physically distance yourself from others to stop the spread of the virus.

In the scenario above, are you free? Do you know the consequences of your actions whenever you choose to do something during the quarantine period? How responsible are you in your choice of action?

Generally, people want to exercise their freedom. Nobody likes to be forced to do things, be imprisoned in an unwanted place, or be stuck in a miserable situation. However, when we think about freedom deeply, we realize there are problems with its nature that we are not aware of.

The classic problem of freedom is whether there is freedom or not. This is the controversy between freedom and determinism. Some people believe that we are free, while others believe that our behavior is predetermined. That is to say, our past actions predict our future behavior. Determinism rejects the idea of freedom because, according to this theory, human behavior is determined by many factors, such as history, socio-economic context, and physiological makeup, among others.

There is also another problem with freedom. If we assume that human beings have freedom, is it limited or absolute? Some people gladly embrace the idea that a human person can do anything he/she wants to do, while others believe that there are certain limitations on what humans can do. When we are in a situation where we cannot do the things we want, we seem to think that freedom is limited. There are

many other issues concerning the concept of freedom, but one thing is certain: freedom is essential in a human person.

DISCUSSION

FREEDOM

As a human person, freedom is vital to human existence. Aside from reason, what distinguishes human beings from animals is freedom. Birds and other wild creatures are said to be free, but do they choose what they do? When dogs poop on the street, it is nonsense to question their 'responsibility' because they do not have the same freedom and responsibility humans have. Indeed, only human beings have the capacity to choose, to be free *from* and to be free *for*.

In this chapter, we'll draw some ideas of freedom from Jean-Paul Sartre. One of his famous maxims is that "man is condemned to be free." For him, the concept of freedom is ontological. That is to say, it focuses on the study of being. The human person for Sartre has no essence or intrinsic nature. Rather, he creates his/her own essence. In short, the human person *is* freedom.

Freedom is the very being of the human person (as being-for-itself), and "to be free" does not mean "to obtain what one has wished" but rather "by oneself to determine oneself to wish" (Sartre, 1965). This means that a person cannot escape from freedom. He cannot choose not to be free because not choosing is even a choice. Not doing anything is actually choosing to do something, and that is doing nothing. For example, when you enroll yourself in college, you were faced with many choices of degree programs. Perhaps your parents or friends told you what course to take. Later on, when you found out that you do not like your chosen course, you may say that it was not your choice in the first place and claim that others pressured you. What you are

trying to say is that you were not free during the time of decision-making.

For Sartre, even when somebody tells you what program to take, you cannot deny that it is you who chose the degree program in the end. In short, you are free what to choose. In this case, what you chose for yourself was the choice of your parents or friends.

Is the freedom of the human person limited? For Sartre, the limitation of freedom is a product of our being conscious of things; it is our choice of limitation. For example, when you go to a mall which is located in a city that is very far from your place, you may think that you are not free to go there because you do not have money or you are busy with your studies. The limitation that you think does not limit freedom itself. Why? It is because you are still the one who chooses that limitation. In other words, you decide to limit yourself with those factors and that very fact means that you are free to choose in any way. You think that those factors can hinder you from going there. Even so, you still cannot deny that you choose to think that way. Most often, we stop thinking and creating possibilities, so we immediately say that we are not free. Why do people say that poverty is not a hindrance to success? And why do people blame poverty for being unsuccessful? There are unlimited choices for the person to think, but what limits is the thought of limiting our actions.

Taylor Carman (2019) explains the example of Sartre in a situation where the person is seemingly confronted with an obstacle. When a person climbs up the mountain and encounters a boulder, that person would see it as an obstacle and perhaps say that the mountain is not climbable. However, the obstacle in front of the person is only a limitation as far as the person's goal is concerned, that is, to climb up the mountain. For another person who may also encounter the same boulder and who does not have the same

goal of climbing the mountain, he/she may see the boulder as an ugly thing, but not an obstacle. In this case, the seeming limitation of freedom is an outward expression of freedom, that is, the person's choosing of goal in climbing the mountain. Freedom is still present in that situation where you can see that the person still chooses how he/she sees the boulder. Of course, the boulder becomes either an obstacle or anything else because the person has chosen a certain goal.

For instance, in the case of fatigue or any physiological challenges, fatigue is not a choice. The choice lies in what the person does with it. How? When the person stops walking, stopping is the choice but not the natural occurrence of the physiological fatigue. However, one has to note that fatigue can also be the consequence of a pre-choice. That is to say, it is only a result of what has been chosen before, such as taking a walk or climbing the mountain with the given physical condition.

The only thing that the person cannot be free is not being free. Not choosing is still choosing. This sounds paradoxical. In that case, is it acceptable to do whatever one wants? Well, whatever you do, you are free. Does this mean that one can take an enemy's life? This question sounds alarming, especially when the justification is that the said enemy is a criminal. In this case, is the person still free to do the act? There is no denial of freedom here. However, being free also means *being responsible*. We should never forget the concept of responsibility when talking about freedom.

RESPONSIBILITY

When people talk about freedom, what is being emphasized is how a person is free. However, for Sartre, when there is freedom, there is responsibility. We have established that the person is freedom, and that is, he/she

cannot escape from freedom, he/she cannot do away with responsibility. The absolute responsibility of the person is freedom itself.

Sartre defines responsibility as the "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or an object (Sartre, 1993). When a person is free, the person is also responsible. Whatever the person chooses, he/she is the author of the choice. For instance, Laura stays at home because she does not want to get infected with the virus. Laura's choice to stay is a manifestation that she is free. Is she free when, in fact, there is a policy to stay at home? Of course, she is free because she chooses to stay or to follow the policy. She is the author now of her choice to stay at home. In other words, her responsibility is her free choice. If she owns her choice and does not deny that she truly is free to make such a decision, she is responsible.

To understand the concept of responsibility is to recognize freedom. For this reason, Sartre argues that the person is condemned to be free. He explains that when a person chooses, he/she chooses himself/herself because, as implied earlier, the choices make the person what he/she is. Sartre adds that when "man chooses his own self, we mean that every one of us does likewise; but we also mean that he also chooses all men in making this choice." Everyone wants to choose the good, not evil, which cannot be good without being good for all. This means therefore that the person consequently carries the load of the world. Sartre says,

Furthermore, this absolute responsibility is not resignation; it is simply the logical requirement of the consequences of freedom. What happens to me happens through me, and I can neither affect myself with it nor revolt against it nor resign myself to it.

Moreover, everything that happens to me is *mine*.
(Sartre, 1965)

Responsibility is being the owner of one's choice. Many clamor for freedom or demand that they should be given absolute freedom. However, we forget that being free comes with responsibility. Some people, however, disown their freedom, thereby neglecting their responsibility. They forget that their choices have consequences.

AUTHENTICITY

Before we explain the meaning of authenticity, let us first understand what *bad faith* (or to be irresponsible) means. For Sartre, bad faith is a self-deception. It is the denial of one's freedom. When you chose your college course, and later on, deny that you chose it and instead accuse your parents or friends of choosing it for you, you are in denial of your freedom. In his explanation of bad faith, David Weberman (2011) notes:

It is worth noting that bad faith, as described by Sartre, is not an uncommon occurrence. How often do we deny or overlook the fact we are not truly trapped by circumstances but are indeed much more free than we are inclined to believe and more responsible for our lives than we might like to admit? And how often do we deny or fail to appreciate that many of the unpleasant things in our lives are simply beyond our control?

It is often easier for us to deny what we do than to claim our own choice, especially when the consequences are not in our favor. Blaming other people for the misery we choose (or for the consequence of our choice) is a manifestation of

irresponsibility because it deceives us that our freedom has nothing to do with it. We forget that our circumstance is also the product of our free choice. Again, responsibility is about owning our choices, and the consequences of our choice are covered in that responsibility. When we believe that the action we choose is the only choice we have, we are being inauthentic.

Authenticity refers to being honest with oneself, which is, being truly free. To be authentic is to project what a person is in relation to his/her own choosing, rather than trying to be somebody else other than what he/she is. This also means that when being true to oneself, he/she accepts the responsibility of freedom. The person is conscious of the choices and actions, and so he/she cannot deny the consequences. He/she becomes what he/she is according to his/her own choosing – that is the consequence of his/her freedom – and so he/she creates the meaning of his/her human life. Facing the consequences means being authentic because the person does not escape from his responsibilities.

When you copy your classmate's assignment because you think the task is hard, and when your teacher catches and reprimands you, you immediately defend yourself by saying that you have no choice during that time. Saying that you are left with no choice is bad faith, which means you are not true to yourself. You could have other options other than copying from your classmate. In this case, you are not authentic since you deny the other possible choices that you could have taken. People tend to blame the situation they are in. This 'blame game' does not show one's authenticity and responsibility.

FREEDOM AND CONSEQUENCES

It must be clear now that because of freedom, the consequences of our actions are inevitable. Let us look at the

situation at the beginning, where you experience the quarantine protocols due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staying at home to avoid getting infected with the virus is a matter of choice. As a human person who is freedom, one may look at the situation as something that limits his/her choices. However, looking at the quarantine protocols as a hindrance shows that the person is not limited in interpreting the protocols. This only means that even during the pandemic period, the person is still free (ontologically). Besides staying at home, one can also enumerate many activities he/she can do at home. Of course, violating the protocols could be one option. Nevertheless, when one violates the rules as a matter of free choice, he/she cannot escape from the responsibility of the consequences. Moreover, when he/she excuses himself/herself by telling the authorities that he/she has no choice left, he/she is guilty of denying his/her freedom. So, what should the person do?

First of all, the person has to commit himself to a certain goal. What is his/her direction? What is his/her choice of action? From there, the person can evaluate the possible choices that he/she may take to reach that goal. Anything the person chooses becomes part of the self. Secondly, choosing oneself is also choosing all human persons. When one chooses, he chooses his/her world, and that world includes other people and the environment. Lastly, the consequences of the choice are inevitable. The fact that all other human beings are freedoms, they also react or choose from the result of your choosing. One must always be ready to face what lies ahead, which means he/she has to be responsible for his/her choices.

The freedom of the human is paradoxically a gift and a burden at the same time. It is a gift because it makes us what we are, but it is also a burden because it makes us anxious for not escaping freedom and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that freedom is crucial in a human person. Despite the philosophical debates on freedom, it remains vital in human life. Freedom always goes with responsibility. No matter how free the person is, he/she must be responsible for his/her freedom. Then, born with freedom and responsibility, a human person may become an authentic human being, a true person who consciously chooses his/her action and courageously face the consequences. Therefore, individual freedom involves the world and freedom of other individuals, and that leads us to the idea of intersubjectivity.

ASSESSMENT

Read and understand carefully the tasks below. Follow the tasks mindfully.

A

1. Set your goal in life. You may choose your goal as a student, as a child, or just as a human person.
2. List down five (5) concrete actions that will help you reach your chosen goal.
3. For each concrete action, list down all possible consequences. The more list of consequences, the better.
4. In at least one paragraph, explain how you will face all the challenges of the consequences.

B

1. Choose one person whom you think is successful in life amidst a difficult challenge.
2. Ask permission to interview the person and record your interview. Inquire what the successful person has done to overcome the challenges and achieve his/her goal.
3. Write your report in a dialogue format.

4. Next to the written dialogue, write your reflection based on the interview in relation to the freedom of the human person.