

Freedom

INTRODUCTION

Freedom is a complex concept, so complex that it serves as good example of what philosophers call an ‘essentially contested concept’. To be sure of that, Gallie (1956) in Adcock (2005:26) posited that, the concept is essentially contested among scholars.

Thus, we should not expect that there will be a single, unifying consistent rule that fits all cases in conceptualizing freedom. Particularly, because freedom is something we value so highly in political theorising, there is a constant debate over exactly what the word means. Hence the concept of freedom will be discussed by looking at the viewpoints of various political theorists.

THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

That, from its origin in the Ancient Greek city-states and their democracies, freedom has been usually been considered a political ‘good’, good for individuals, organizations and society. Freedom concerns human relationships and is clearly related to power in its many forms: financial, physical and political. Literally, freedom is to be free is to be able to translate one’s ideals into reality to actualize one’s potentialities as a person. Freedom is chiefly freedom from ill-health, fear, want, arbitrary arrest and public opinion (Heywood, 1992).

On the contrary, Plato was keenly aware that the emphasis placed on ‘freedom’, so called by the Athenian democracy, created an ill-disciplined people who, lacking self-control, general factions, which degenerated into disorder that, in turn, inevitably gave birth to tyrants and dictators.

A helpful approach to defining freedom was put forward by Sir Isaiah Berlin (1859) in his work “Two Concept of Liberty” which divides liberty into negative and positive liberty. Negative freedom according to Berlin, is the individual freedom from some obstacles (slavery, bondage, and prison, legal, moral or cultural restraint) to free movement. Freedom here implies the absence of external control.

Positive liberty on the other hand, to Berlin, is the individual freedom to some accomplishment or substantive achievement. This consists fundamentally the presence of something quite specific- namely a certain sort of self-direction, independence or autonomy. Positive freedom is the freedom to realise one’s deepest ambition to participate in one’s own governance, and to become who one truly is. Therefore, the freedom to be well educated or to have a job or wealth or medical care is positive freedom. However, Berlin was not comfortable with the positive freedom because he was worried about risk of giving too much power to government or even fellow citizens.

Thomas Hobbes placed ‘order and ‘security’ as much higher political goals than ‘freedom’ in his Leviathan (1651). Men had freedom in the state of nature, a condition in which government did not exist, but this only led to an appalling state of permanent war of all against all in which only the freedom of the strongest had any reality. Hobbes argued that, the creation of the state was a rational response to the excess of freedom previously existing in the state of nature. Freedom was only possible within the order created by the powerful state.

Locke in his perception of freedom is of the view that individuals are not totally free to do whatever they like; rather it should be guide under the purview of laws.

John Stuart Mill, (1859) “On Liberty”, Mill defended the right of the individual to freedom. In it negative sense, it means that society have no right to coerce an unwilling individual, except for self-defence while in positive sense, it means the grant of the largest and the greatest amount of freedom for the pursuit of the individual’s creative impulses and energies and for self- development.

Other philosophers and thinkers mostly modern liberals also approached the subject of freedom in different ways. Like John Rawls defending social democracy in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls argued for liberty in an unequal society. He stated that every person has a right to the greatest possible liberty concomitant with the same degree of liberty allowed to others (Harrison and Boyd, 2003). Rawls sees freedom as ideal that is deeply rooted in human aspirations; freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, freedom to participate in political affairs. To Rawls, the principle of equal right and liberty is when applied to the political procedure defined by the constitution is the principle of equal participation which would be realized within a constitutional democracy. This is according to Rawls is achieved through representative that is in form of legislature with law-making functions to determine policies and freedom that can be protected in the society and the principle of loyal opposition along with freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of assembly which are guaranteed in democracies (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2012). Rawls also stressed the importance of each person having adequate material resources to enjoy their liberty. He did not argue for material equality, only the existence of sufficient material resources for all. To Rawls, freedom, not equality is the paramount priority of politics. Freedom must not be sacrificed in order to achieve a higher degree of material equality. Nevertheless, Rawls argued for the existence of a welfare state to ensure that the poorest in society have the resources to attempt to achieve their greater freedom (Harrison and Boyd, 2003).

Machiavelli stated that freedom produced not only powerful states but also individuals whose strength was not in dominating or influencing others but in the independence of spirit in their ability to think and decide for themselves. He further explained that freedom could be threatened by human selfishness.

From the Marxists perspective, Karl Marx and followers, freedom is not possible under capitalism. The highly exploitative capitalist system reduces both the working class and their capitalist exploiters to a level of servitude to the system. Those who control the means of production may have somewhat greater freedom than those who merely sell their labour to scrape a living, but bourgeoisie and proletariat alike possess a freedom reduced to mere work and consumption. That is to the Marxist freedom is not real because is all about class

domination, even today, capitalism is more inimical to freedom than it was in nineteenth century when Marx analyzed its workings (Sheldon Ward, 2001).

CONCLUSION

As stated freedom is an essentially contested concept on which there are some agreements at the general level, but which will be disputed when we move from the general to particular. The paper conclude that, freedom as a concept is very important in the discourse of political theory and that laws (equality), liberty and rights are interrelated thereby valuable to political theory discourse. Freedom is very important political value to society general and political theory in particular.

