

The Evolution Of The Concept Of Freedom In Eastern And Western Philosophical Thought (Comparative Analysis)

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Abstract: The article presents a comparative analysis of the concept of freedom in Eastern and Western philosophical thought. It also explores the views of Eastern and Western philosophers on freedom. The role of freedom in Eastern and Western societies is examined.

Keywords: Freedom, society, freedom of speech, Eastern and Western philosophical thought, Eastern culture, rational and emotional aspects of freedom, freedom of will, individual freedom, social freedom.

Introduction

Freedom, in essence, holds a universal human meaning and has almost always been at the center of attention for both Western and Eastern thinkers. At the same time, historical conditions and scientific traditions, which define certain peculiarities, have influenced and continue to influence the formation and resolution of all fundamental philosophical issues related to the concept of freedom (its meaning, main directions, methods of acquisition, etc.). The unique characteristics of Eastern culture and lifestyle are reflected in the concept of freedom. These include: the forms of weak social reproduction, the stability of lifestyle, the dominance of religious and mythological ideas, the regulation of thinking patterns, neglecting individual characteristics, and the suppression of the individual's interests within the group to the point of their complete disappearance. In relation to freedom, an important positive feature of the West is that it has a system of perfect legal norms that protect the autonomy of the individual and its freedom from possible attacks. On the other hand, the existing state is trying to implement equality and freedom in people's personal lives.

Literature Review

In the early philosophical ideas, the concept of freedom in both the West and the East was often described as the destiny of the wise and the moral ideal of individuality. This was not accidental. It was related to the social system and historical conditions of that time. In slave societies, and especially during the feudal era, it was very difficult to resist state violence in the pursuit of freedom, so many thinkers saw the way out in enriching the inner world of the individual.

A particular interest in the history of philosophical thought is sparked by E. Fromm's analysis of the evolution of the concept of freedom. According to him, the religious interpretation of freedom, the fatalistic view of freedom, and its portrayal as a subjective feeling and perception by the individual are not convincing. First, the religious interpretation of freedom is aimed at strengthening the individual's belief in divine power. Second, the fatalistic idea leads to the desire to hold the individual accountable for their actions and to punish them for it. The third argument is not convincing because many philosophers (Spinoza, Leibniz, and others) have refuted this position by pointing out its inconsistency. E. Fromm sadly emphasized that those who later dealt with this issue attempted to resolve it without taking into account the role of unknown forces in human activity, not realizing that this was impossible [1.89 – 90].

Research Methodology

During the research, scientific-philosophical principles such as systematics, theoretical-deductive reasoning, analysis and synthesis, historical and logical approaches, and comparative-contrasting analysis were used.

Analysis and Results

In the philosophical thought of the East, dating back to ancient times, there was a prevalent idea that the ability to control human emotions and desires was the key to nurturing and achieving moral perfection. Later, this concept spread in the East (for example, in Islam) and, with its boundaries, also moved into Western philosophy. Thus, the above idea holds a significant place not only in the philosophy of Ancient Greece, but also in medieval and modern Western philosophical teachings. According to these doctrines, in order to develop and control the desires associated with passions, a person must expand their cognitive abilities and elevate their level of perception.

In general, the concept of freedom has been dominant in Western philosophy, particularly through nationalism. The views of the representatives of German classical philosophy on the problem of freedom are a clear example of this. Thus, from Hegel's perspective, which links world history to freedom, historical progress is nothing more than an evolution in the consciousness of freedom [2. 29].

Therefore, Hegel's concept of freedom sharply differs from the understanding of ancient philosophers and their immediate predecessors. Philosophy before Hegel considered freedom to be the possession of only the wise and philosophers. It was believed that only the wise and philosophers could attain the level of knowledge necessary to reach freedom. Hegel, using modern Germany as an example, demonstrated that freedom could be embodied among the entire population. In general, some of Hegel's ideas about the essence of freedom remain relevant today. However, based on the above, it can be concluded that the contemporary concept of freedom is not significantly different from how past philosophers understood it. Due to the unique characteristics of historical periods and the level of development of knowledge, there are significant differences between them. The progressive tendencies in the development of philosophy itself played a major role in this. As an example, we can mention the expansion and democratization of other ideas along with the concept of freedom. Thus, in ancient philosophy, freedom did not belong to society as a whole, but to a select group of people. Socrates, Plato, and other prominent thinkers of that era believed that only the wise could be free [3.164].

In the West, particular attention has been given to understanding the types of freedom—legal and real. This topic is extensively addressed in Leibniz's works. According to him, legal freedom has an official character. At the same time, when there is a certain threat to personal freedom, legal freedom plays an important role, as it helps individuals exercise the rights stipulated by law. This is especially evident in the case of states with a well-developed legal system.

The widely spread Western tradition of defining freedom as perceived necessity was further developed in the works of the famous 20th-century philosopher K. Jaspers. According to him, a person's true freedom is closely linked to their awareness of the possibilities for freedom. On the other hand, freedom, in Jaspers' view, is inseparable from human goals. In general, Jaspers believed that true freedom is characterized by how a person perceives the world. This quality enables a person to overcome potential dangers, understand their successes and failures, and, as a result, find their "self"[4.75].

The Western model of freedom is also distinguished by the special emphasis placed on ensuring the coordination of individual and public interests. The individual freedoms and interests realized in this way seemed to serve social progress. It should also be noted that the idea of a conflict between personal and social interests is not entirely new in Western philosophy. This issue was thoroughly examined by J. Locke [5.593]. There is no doubt that this idea is quite advanced. Thus, if there is harmony and alignment between individual and public interests, people do not view social norms as rules that limit their freedom. Social norms are necessary rules designed to reasonably regulate people's activities. The functioning of the system of social norms helps to maintain the stability of social relations.

In some cases, the concept of freedom in the East and West manifested itself in two extreme forms. Thus, in the East, the spiritual existence and spiritual freedom of a person were absolutized. In contrast, in the West, emphasis was placed on material independence. It should be noted that both approaches suffer from one-sidedness and, therefore, are limited. When considered separately, they cannot fully reflect the concept of freedom. It must be remembered that a person, on the one hand, is a spiritual being, and on the other, a physical being. They live and act in a specific socio-political environment with multifaceted interactions with other people. Here, certain laws govern freedom, and without taking them into account, the true essence of freedom cannot be understood.

As you can see, the main difference in understanding emerges in the relationship between individual and social types of freedom in the East and West. In the first region, personal freedom is prioritized, while in the second, social freedom takes precedence. This one-sidedness indicates shortcomings in thinking and worldview accordingly. Thus, the East and the West serve as two distinct, unique models of the universal human process of self-knowledge, sometimes standing in alternative positions to each other. Researchers who compare Eastern and Western thought pay attention to this issue, occasionally exaggerating it. They pose the question as if true freedom consists solely of internal freedom, while political (external) freedom is a product of abstract thinking and a mechanical concept unrelated to life [6.21].

In our opinion, it is incorrect to oppose these two fundamental types of freedom, as they are closely interconnected. Personal freedom (individual freedom) is a crucial factor and indicator of a person's moral and overall development. At the same time, political freedoms (public freedom) play a significant role in society. The ability of individuals to exercise freedom in their thoughts and actions, as accepted on a societal scale, is largely dependent on the level of development of that society. As with many other issues, the distinctiveness between these regions in the interpretation of freedom becomes evident at the following point. It can be said that in the West, the idea of freedom, including for the entire society, relies more on rational thinking, where people's emotions and desires are not given due consideration. In contrast, in the East, the emotional aspect prevails in lifestyle and thinking, with rationality being limited in scope.

For example, in the West, the dominance of technological, economic, and legal rationalism, along with the crisis of industrial society and mass consumption, comes with a decline in trust in benevolence, spiritual development, and inner freedom. Under the influence of the development of materialism, relationships based on private property and free competition, as well as human benevolence, empathy for inner struggles, honesty, and other such virtues, sometimes fade into the background. As a result, there is a risk of losing the common spiritual foundation that unites society, and selfishness and individualism rise to the forefront.

According to B. Russell, who noted the role of not only the rational but also the irrational and spiritual aspects of freedom, people feel their freedom due to a better understanding of one another and the spiritual aspects of life. Since freedom lies beyond the rational domain, it cannot be defined logically, and therefore, we must be content with only its certain manifestations [7.451].

There is no doubt about the general correctness of the above idea. However, it is hard to agree that freedom is far removed from the rational domain, since the scientific concept of freedom encompasses the interaction of emotional, sensory, and irrational aspects with mental, intellectual, and rational elements.

Unlike the West, it can be said that in the East, the spiritual and moral aspects of freedom have always been prioritized. Due to the dominance of this way of thinking and worldview over many centuries, the struggle for political freedom here has been weaker compared to the West. As a result, the legal mechanisms for protecting human rights have not developed to the same extent.

In the East, the internal freedom of the subject is prioritized, whereas in the West, the idea of freedom is focused on political direction. A comparative analysis of the attitude towards freedom shows that in the West, the main criteria for freedom are wealth, private property, and rationalism, while in the East, it is human spiritual freedom, moral, and emotional values.

Conclusion.

In general, authors who have conducted a sociological analysis of the value systems between the East and the West have concluded that in the East, virtues such as collective responsibility, modesty, respect for elders, patriotism, respect for mothers, and honor are prioritized. In contrast, the value system of the West is based on individualism, money, rationalism, the desire to assert superiority, aggressiveness, respect for youth, ensuring equal rights for women in society, and other values. This difference is expressed in relation to freedom. The material and spiritual aspects of a person are inseparable. In this sense, the process of meeting material needs requires the organization of production and social relations, rules of coexistence, and more rational principles. From this perspective, it would be unjust to deny the important role of common sense and rationalism in all aspects of societal life. However, since the essence of human nature is more expressed in its spiritual existence, irrational moments, emotions, and emotional states play a special role in its free life activity. In this sense, limiting personal freedom and emotional and volitional activity at every step cannot be accepted. On the other hand, if the potential advantages and opportunities of rationalism in freedom are not sufficiently valued when organizing social and individual life forms, it will lead to undesirable outcomes.

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