

The Paradox of Freedom

Freedom is a word that gets thrown around a lot, usually as some kind of vague rhetorical ideal, used as justification for some action. At the same time, it's typically unclear what exactly constitutes this "freedom," and at the extreme of it, the idea is contradictory. This is a surprisingly crucial issue, which is very much worth calling attention to.

The contradiction is quite simple to describe. I'll begin by stating firstly that there are people, and there exist social interactions between any number of people. Secondly, some subset of the possible social interactions are oppressive - that is, these interactions can limit the freedom of one or more of the individuals involved. Now, we declare that everyone is to have complete freedom - that is, anyone can choose any of the possible social interactions to partake in. Immediately after setting this system in place, those who have had oppressive interactions exerted over them have immediately lost their freedom, despite setting up the system to have total freedom. Total freedom, then, is a contradiction - it's a rhetorical disguise, which really doesn't mean anything at all, and any attempted implementation of it will allow for complete oppression. After all, an oppressor is very free indeed. Such "total freedom for all" does not logically exist, at least not in a naive manner.

Total freedom is a contradiction, but there's no logical reason to strive towards it as an ideal. Instead, it makes much more sense to suggest a system in which oppressive social interactions are somehow forbidden - what I will refer to as a "just society." This sets the stage for the creation of regulations, whatever form those may take. If we shift our goal is to maximize freedom while maintaining a just society, the implementation of justice itself becomes subject to the optimization problem - in other words, we want to avoid using oppressive means to prevent oppression, and we want people to be as equal as possible, minimizing imposed restrictions across the board. A very good candidate for such a system is **social accountability**. This may entail processes such as social support to prevent and disincentivize oppressive social action, and social rehabilitation to correct any pre-existing oppressive tendencies. This can be thought of as a sort of fluid, organically consensus-based direct democracy.

In an ideal just society, then, oppression / power is to be regulated, and the people are to be the regulators, via social accountability built on equality and consensus. This would extend very generally to all forms of oppression, regardless of the mode by which it is exerted. It is worth pointing out that this quite naturally includes the distribution of resources - this fact often gets accidentally overlooked by the erroneous application of the "total freedom" idea to resource management, resulting in the concept of the "free market." Note that we have established this argument as inherently meaningless and contradictory. The idea of a just society produces the conclusion, instead, that the people are to collectively manage the

production and distribution of resources. This is of central importance to the general idea of a just society, and of democracy by extension. There is no sensible standard by which one might accept one but not the other - it is inherently dissonant to make such an arbitrary distinction between modes of oppression.