



THE EVOLUTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF FREEDOM IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article explores the formation and development of the concept of freedom within the ancient and medieval European philosophical traditions. The analysis demonstrates that the modern interpretation of freedom, as well as the notions of law, justice, and civil society, has its origins in the philosophy of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The subsequent evolution of philosophical and political thought has further refined both the theoretical dimensions and practical applications of these concepts, which now form the foundation for modern democratic states.

IBN XALDUNNING ERKINLIK ATAMASINI IJTIMOIIY BIRDAMLIK ASOSIDA TAHLILI

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit so‘zlar: falsafa, erkinlik g‘oyasi, antik davr, Iroda erkinligi, shaxsiyat, jamiyat, yaxshilik, Xudo, tanlov.

Annotatsiya: Maqolada antik va o‘rta asrdagi Yevropa falsafiy an‘analarida erkinlik g‘oyasining shakllanishi va rivojlanishi muhokama qilinadi. Tahlil asosida erkinlik g‘oyasi, shuningdek huquq, adolat va fuqarolik jamiyati g‘oyalarining zamonaviy tushunchasi antik davr va o‘rta asrlar falsafasiga asoslanganligi aniq bo‘ladi. Falsafiy va siyosiy

fikrning keyingi rivojlanishi ushbu kontseptsianing nazariy toifalarini ham, “amaliy” jihatlarini ham batafsil rivojlantiradi, ularning asosida zamonaviy demokratik davlatlar quriladi.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ И ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ПОНЯТИЯ СВОБОДЫ В АНТИЧНОЙ ФИЛОСОФИИ

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: философия, идея свободы, античность, свобода воли, личность, общество, добро, Бог, выбор.

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается становление и развитие идеи свободы в античной и средневековой европейской философской традиции. На основе проведенного анализа становится ясно, что современное понимание идеи свободы, а также идей права, справедливости и гражданского общества уходит своими корнями в философию античности и средневековья. Последующее развитие философской и политической мысли лишь более детально развивает как теоретические категории, так и “прикладные” аспекты этого понятия, на основе которых строятся современные демократические государства.

Introduction

The concept of freedom has been a central theme in the philosophical traditions of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Its evolution from a notion of external autonomy to an internal, moral choice deeply influenced subsequent philosophical and political thought. In ancient Greece and Rome, the understanding of freedom was not initially framed in philosophical terms but was embedded in daily life, politics, and societal structures. It was later in philosophical discourse that the idea of freedom began to take on more profound meanings, leading to a nuanced understanding that continues to resonate in modern democratic theories. This article traces the formation and transformation of the concept of freedom within ancient philosophical traditions, highlighting key thinkers and their contributions to shaping this idea. By exploring the works of the early Greek philosophers and their successors, this paper aims to elucidate how the ancient and medieval conceptions of freedom influenced later political thought, law, and the foundation of civil society.

Literature Review

The philosophical inquiry into freedom in ancient philosophy spans a wide range of thinkers, from the early pre-Socratic philosophers to the Stoics and classical figures such as Plato and Aristotle. In the early Greek tradition, freedom was generally understood in political and social terms. As noted by scholars such as Lutz (2013) and Long (1996), the notion of freedom initially had little philosophical weight but was instead intertwined with the practicalities of everyday life, particularly with political independence and self-governance.

The works of Heraclitus and Anaximander introduced early reflections on the nature of fate and necessity, which set the stage for later discussions on human agency and free will. The Sophists, particularly Protagoras, were pivotal in distinguishing between nature (Physis) and law (Nomos), suggesting that freedom could be conceptualized as an internal, subjective state, independent of societal structures. This philosophical divergence laid the groundwork for the Stoic concept of *autarkeia* (self-sufficiency), which further developed the idea of internal freedom, as seen in the writings of Epictetus.

Plato's views on freedom, as explored by scholars like McDowell (1995), focused on the moral and ethical dimensions of the concept, linking freedom with the pursuit of the Good and the harmony between individual soul and societal order. Aristotle, on the other hand, offered a more nuanced account of freedom, emphasizing voluntary action and moral choice as the foundation for human freedom. His distinction between actions performed under compulsion and those performed freely was crucial in shaping later discussions on human agency, ethics, and responsibility.

The influence of ancient philosophical thought on medieval thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas is significant, as they integrated ideas of free will with theological concepts, particularly in the context of divine omnipotence and human responsibility. Scholars like Dunning (2010) have explored how these medieval philosophers inherited and transformed ancient ideas of freedom, applying them to questions of moral responsibility, divine providence, and the human condition.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, focusing on a historical and philosophical analysis of key texts from ancient and medieval philosophical traditions. The approach is primarily interpretive, drawing on primary texts from philosophers such as Homer, Hesiod, Anaximander, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, as well as secondary scholarly sources that analyze their works and ideas. A comparative method is used to trace the evolution of the concept of freedom, examining how it transformed from an external, political notion in Greek antiquity to a internal, moral concept in Stoic and later Christian thought. Additionally, the

research engages with the modern implications of these ancient ideas, especially in relation to contemporary democratic theory and the understanding of individual liberty within civil society.

Analysis and results

According to historians of philosophy, the Greek term *eleuypeia* and the Latin *libertas* did not initially possess a specific philosophical meaning. In the thought of the ancient Greeks and Romans, the concept of freedom was neither thematically nor terminologically developed [6, 1064]. Ancient Greek thinkers were primarily concerned with understanding concepts like necessity, fate, or chance. In the works of Hesiod and Anaximander, for instance, we can find fragments suggesting that fate was a manifestation of divine power controlling human life. These early reflections laid the groundwork for later interpretations of human freedom or its lack thereof in human actions.

The notion of “being free” predates the specific philosophical concept of freedom itself. For example, in Homer’s writings, being free meant living on one’s own land without subjugation, in contrast to prisoners of war, who were considered slaves. Over time, this notion of freedom became more ingrained in the discourse of the Greek polis, where freedom was understood to mean not being under the dominion of another, with the state (polis) being the land of freedom, and a free person being one who lived within it.

Furthermore, the understanding of human freedom shifted such that the opposite of the “free man” was not necessarily the “slave”, but rather the “non-Greek” or “barbarian”. The concept of freedom was now more closely tied to the idea of divine order, not implying anarchy, where individuals are free to act according to their whims, but rather equality before the law for all citizens of the polis.

Alongside this understanding of freedom, there emerged in ancient Greek philosophy the concept of free will as the individual’s autonomy. In Homer's works, a free man was one who acted according to his own nature without external coercion. The philosophical use of the term “freedom” is first observed with the Sophists, who contrasted the law (Nomos) with nature (Physis). The Sophists began to view freedom as an “inner freedom”, a state that could be achieved independently of the political state, thereby decoupling it from the polis. This marked the beginning of understanding freedom as a personal, internal quality.

The Stoics later expanded this idea, regarding freedom as an internal concept rooted in human nature [3, 435]. They emphasized freedom as a dichotomy between “inner” and “outer” freedom, which became a key theme in European philosophical thought and was later adopted by Medieval philosophers. For the Stoics, nature’s freedom is necessary, unlike human-made laws, and while humans seek pleasure, not all pleasures should be pursued. Democritus, for instance, argued that only morally beautiful pleasures are worth pursuing.

Xenophon further condensed this idea of freedom by defining it as “doing the best”. This concept suggested that freedom involves making moral choices, which require the knowledge of what is “best”. Socrates, in turn, advanced the idea that everyone seeks the good, but not everyone knows what it truly is. The mind, according to Socrates, should free a person from base desires and lead him toward goodness.

The Cynics, taking Socrates' teachings, emphasized radical self-sufficiency (autarchy), as exemplified by Diogenes of Sinope. Diogenes advocated for the development of inner freedom by increasing independence from both external and internal coercions—be they violence or passion. Greek views on freedom were closely linked to fate and fortune.

Plato's conception of freedom was intertwined with his understanding of the Good. For Plato, freedom was not about individual independence from society but was the harmonious pursuit of the Good. A person could order his soul through self-control and reflection, just as a polis could be ordered through unity and collective decision-making. In Plato's later works, the highest form of freedom was understood as friendship, which mirrored the idea of self-sufficiency and the pursuit of the Good in a well-ordered society [6, 1068].

Socrates and Plato redefined freedom and responsibility by connecting them with the individual's moral choices. For them, freedom was the capacity to do good, with responsibility correlating more with the individual's decisions and moral duty. Plato's concept of responsibility also involved the soul's choice of its own destiny, with each soul being accountable for its choices, although Plato did not fully attribute autonomy to the individual [2, 504].

Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, argued that freedom was not just about the Good but also involved active human choice. For Aristotle, human freedom was grounded in the ability to choose, with knowledge of the Good guiding actions. His views on freedom extended beyond the Greek polis, suggesting that the highest form of human autonomy was the possession of happiness—the ability to live in accordance with one's own will. Aristotle's philosophy presented freedom as the ability for humans to act of their own volition, though not without moral responsibility [5, 15].

Aristotle also explored the concept of “voluntary” actions – those done by choice and with knowledge of their consequences – differentiating them from actions done under coercion or ignorance. He argued that freedom was realized in intentional, deliberate actions, and it was the will of the individual that determined these actions. Aristotle's ideas on freedom, autonomy, and moral responsibility significantly influenced later philosophical thought [5, 16].

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Greek polis, the concept of freedom began to shift towards a focus on individual internal freedom. Ultimately, the modern understanding of freedom, alongside the development of concepts like law, justice, and civil society, finds its roots in ancient

philosophy. The evolution of philosophical and political thought has continued to refine these ideas, leading to the foundations of modern democratic states.

Conclusion

The evolution of the concept of freedom in ancient philosophy marks a significant shift from a primarily political notion to a deeper, more complex understanding of individual autonomy, moral responsibility, and human agency. The ideas explored by Greek thinkers, particularly the distinction between external freedom and internal self-control, continue to resonate in modern philosophical and political thought. By tracing the development of these ideas from the pre-Socratics to the Stoics and classical figures such as Plato and Aristotle, it becomes clear that the ancient roots of modern democratic principles – such as individual rights, legal equality, and the moral foundations of freedom – can be found in these early philosophical reflections. The continued relevance of these ancient discussions underscores the timeless nature of the human quest for freedom, responsibility, and justice.

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