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THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF EMOTIONAL FREEDOM

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The present study is based on a systematic and comparative analysis of the specialized literature in the fields of philosophy, psychology and educational sciences and aims at the theoretical and methodological substantiation of the concept of emotional freedom in relation to general freedom and particular freedom. The investigative approach is structured on the theoretical coordinate and the methodological coordinate, in accordance with the rigors of doctoral research promoted within the Doctoral School of Educational Sciences. It is argued that emotional freedom constitutes the mature expression of personal autonomy and an indicator of the internalization of educational values. The theoretical results obtained can serve as a foundation for the further development of a pedagogical model for cultivating emotional freedom in students.

Keywords: *freedom, general freedom, particular freedom, emotional freedom, emotional education, emotional regulation.*

EVOLUȚIA CONCEPTULUI DE LIBERTATE EMOȚIONALĂ

Articolul este elaborat în baza analizei sistematice și comparative a literaturii de specialitate din domeniul filosofiei, psihologiei și științelor educației și vizează fundamentarea teoretico-metodologică a conceptului de libertate emoțională în raport cu libertatea generală și libertatea particulară. Demersul investigativ este structurat pe coordonata teoretică și coordonata metodologică, în conformitate cu rigorile cercetării doctorale promovate în cadrul Școlii Doctorale Științe ale Educației. Se argumentează faptul că libertatea emoțională constituie expresia matură a autonomiei personale și un indicator al interiorizării valorilor educaționale. Rezultatele teoretice obținute pot servi drept fundament pentru dezvoltarea ulterioară a unui model pedagogic de cultivare a libertății emoționale la elevi.

Cuvinte-cheie: *libertate, libertate generală, libertate particulară, libertate emoțională, educație emoțională, reglare emoțională.*

Introduction

Freedom is a concept that has evolved alongside society, from simple to complex, from an elementary meaning – such as the absence of chains – to a multivalent notion such as emotional **freedom**. If, for the ancient Greeks, freedom implied the fulfillment of external conditions, such as participation in the life of the city and independence from any form of constraint, without having a clearly defined emotional meaning, today the concept has undergone semantic transformations, acquiring a deeper significance related to emotional capacities, personal autonomy, emotional self-regulation, and the ability to manage one’s own life.

Thus, multiple perspectives on emotional freedom can be observed, including philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, sociological, anthropological, biological, and legal approaches, addressed by various specialists whose viewpoints are presented in the present paper.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the growing importance attributed to emotions and by the increasingly rapid and profound transformations of contemporary society. Having become a foundation of inner life, emotion represents a central pillar in people’s way of living through its influence on their actions, reactions, and attitudes. In this context, emotional freedom becomes a necessary capacity for improving inner life, with significant influence on external life as well.

Therefore, emotional freedom supports individuals in developing the competencies needed to adapt to the challenges of the modern world (marketing, digitalization, economic and political systems, etc.) and to remain resilient in the face of changes that may have negative effects on them.

Research Methodology

The study aimed to present and analyze the perspectives on the concept of emotional freedom in order to highlight the human capacity for holistic development. The investigation was conducted in accordance with the principles of research in the field of education sciences and involved an extensive theoretical analysis of specialized literature.

In order to illustrate emotional freedom as accurately as possible from the perspective of different disciplines, the methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, and scientific generalization, as well as the interpretative method, were employed. Through this approach, the viewpoints of specialists from different fields were identified, revealing a common element: the human capacity to transform one's life.

Etymology and Historical Background

The concept of freedom originates from the Latin word *libertas*, *-atis*, which means “not to wear chains” and represents a term opposed to slavery. The translation of the term highlights its connection with the idea of freedom, referring to the state of not being subjected to other people, ideologies, or constraints.

Philosophers have had varied perspectives on the concept of freedom. From Antiquity to the present day, numerous authors have proposed fundamental models that represent important moments in the evolution of this concept. In ancient Greek thought, freedom was appreciated through several dimensions: the absence of any form of submission, such as being a slave or a prisoner; the right to actively participate in civic life; and the degree to which an individual belonged to a society capable of self-governance.

Thus, it can be observed that the Greeks attributed an initial meaning to this notion, namely a political meaning, which differs from contemporary perspectives where freedom can be discussed from multiple viewpoints, such as sociological, psychological, legal, and others.

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, freedom has several meanings, including “the possibility of acting according to one's own will,” “the state of a person who fully enjoys civil rights,” and other meanings referring to the absence of captivity.

Therefore, we can synthesize the semantic evolution of the word *freedom*, from “life in the *polis*” in ancient Greek society to “the capacity and power of an individual to lead their life according to their own beliefs and principles”.

Emotional Freedom from a Philosophical Perspective

Philosophers such as Aristotle, René Descartes, and Baruch Spinoza associate freedom with free will, in the sense that human beings have the capacity to choose among several possibilities without being constrained or influenced by internal or external factors. Thus, free will is expressed through a cognitive capacity for selection, which implies a certain level of autonomy and responsibility.

According to Aristotle, one of the most influential philosophers of Antiquity, a person manifests free will when they must choose between two antagonistic alternatives and possess the appropriate resources to carry out the action and assume its consequences [3].

From a modern perspective, Baruch Spinoza argued that “everything is determined by the necessity of the divine nature,” thus presenting a different viewpoint, according to which human beings are not truly free, since real power derives from universal natural causes [17, p. 224].

Descartes, another representative of modern philosophy, presents free will as a human quality that highlights an individual's moral and cognitive abilities, uninfluenced by the external environment, contributing to the awareness of one's level of responsibility.

On the other hand, Descartes argues that “*not making choices is also a choice.*” He associates freedom with indifference, suggesting that the more indifferent a person is, the freer they become, implying the usefulness of maintaining a minimal level of emotional involvement [17, p. 225].

Immanuel Kant defines freedom as the “*relationship between an intelligible cause and its phenomenal effect,*” emphasizing the necessity for individuals to understand the motives underlying their actions without being forced by various external factors. In this sense, the understanding and management of emotions, as well as emotional regulation, should be capacities previously developed by individuals [15].

Henri Bergson states that in order to be free, a person must possess self-knowledge. He views freedom as an internal mechanism of emotional reactions, manifested in spontaneous choices guided by affectivity rather than by rational deliberation, and not constrained by external pressures [6]. For the Stoics, emotional freedom arises from the mind's perception of reality. Epictetus explains that individuals should accept what they cannot change and use their minds to confront and adapt to reality, regardless of whether the structure of the universe is natural or divine [26, p. 1111].

Therefore, the perspectives presented show that emotional freedom consists in the capacity to understand life and to assume both decisions and their consequences.

Emotional Freedom from a Psychological Perspective

Paul Popescu-Neveanu, referring to the ideas of Michel de Montaigne, states that “true freedom means having great power over one's own being (...) a proof of self-mastery, knowledge of the world and of one's own self, connection to the highest level of values, and the promotion of these values” [23, p. 412–413]. From this perspective, a free individual is one who possesses the capacity for self-knowledge and understanding of the world, based on which they make decisions or act according to their own principles, without encountering internal limitations or constraints.

Viktor Frankl, a neurologist and psychiatrist, brings a distinctive perspective on emotional freedom grounded in his personal experiences in Nazi concentration camps. In his work *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl recounts events from that period, observing the reactions of prisoners and noting that those who had a purpose in life (such as love for someone or a sense of responsibility) were more likely to survive.

He concludes that the freedom to choose one's attitude toward life is the only thing a person cannot lose and that no one can take away [13].

According to Sigmund Freud, “unconscious psychic life determines conscious psychic life” [12], meaning that individuals often make choices dictated by the subconscious – a domain that cannot be fully controlled. This perspective suggests that complete emotional freedom is impossible because of automatic defense mechanisms operating at the unconscious level.

Abraham Maslow views emotional freedom as a consequence of the satisfaction of basic human needs, as these are essential for individuals to free themselves from fears or psychological blockages. Once these needs are fulfilled, individuals begin an upward journey through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In this process, they learn to cope with external pressures, develop emotional capacities, and base their actions and decisions on their own values, ultimately reaching the highest level: self-actualization. This process refers to achieving one's personal potential at the highest level [18].

According to Daniel J. Siegel, emotional freedom is conditioned by mechanisms such as mindful presence, mindfulness, and the space between stimulus and response. Conscious presence is a mental capacity that refers to the objective observation of lived experiences; in other words, the individual becomes aware of what they experience without identifying themselves with those emotions.

The “Wheel of Awareness”, an exercise suggested by the author for developing emotional freedom, functions in the following way: the center of the wheel represents the state of presence, while its spokes act like antennas through which the individual comes into contact with various experiences. The challenge is to return to the “center” in order to remain present and avoid becoming attached to any particular experience [27].

From a psychological perspective, emotional freedom is therefore conditioned by psychological abilities such as self-knowledge, meaning-making, and the management of one's own emotional experiences.

Emotional Freedom from a Pedagogical Perspective

According to Ion Neacșu and Mihaela Suditu, emotional freedom is developed through reflection, practice, and educational guidance [20]. In this sense, the earlier emotional–affective education begins, the easier it becomes for children to develop capacities for emotional control, awareness, and acceptance of emotions.

Once these abilities are acquired, students develop authenticity, meaning they are able to express their emotions appropriately without fear or pretense. In order to cultivate these capacities, the authors emphasize the crucial role of the teacher, who serves both as a model and as an emotional guide for students.

In their work, the authors propose sets of affective exercises designed to stimulate emotional development, based on educational methods such as retelling, group work, and conversation.

Sacaliuc L. [25] emphasizes the importance of developing emotional competencies from early childhood education, as this is the stage when preschool children learn mainly through play and imitation. This development is supported through several educational contexts: the routines within personal development activities, which create predictable environments where children know what follows; the existence of a calming space, which helps children develop emotional self-regulation; and the activities carried out in kindergarten that foster cooperation and empathy.

Last but not least, the teacher represents a strong emotional model. Similar to Ion Neacșu and Mihaela Suditu, Sacaliuc argues that the acquisition of emotional processes such as emotional awareness, appropriate emotional expression, self-regulation, and empathy contributes to the development of emotional freedom.

Through the work *Emile, or On Education*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that it is healthy for a child to develop in accordance with their natural nature, since a child is inherently good at birth, while social influences often prevent authenticity. The author defines authenticity through states of emotional sincerity, spontaneity, and inner coherence. This means that each child should not feel forced to hide their emotions but should be able to express them as they truly are, react naturally rather than follow imposed behavioral patterns, and allow their actions to reflect what they genuinely feel [24].

In the author's view, these are the necessary conditions for the development of emotional freedom. Otherwise, emotional freedom may be lost, and the child learns to hide or fear their own emotional experiences.

Therefore, according to pedagogical perspectives, emotional education is beneficial from early childhood, as it develops competencies and capacities for autonomy and self-discipline, which ultimately lead to individual freedom.

Emotional Freedom from a Sociological Perspective

Michel Foucault considers that “the way people see the world,” reflected through behavior, thinking, or expression, is grounded in a dominant conceptual framework shaped by the historical period in which individuals live. Thus, people relate to a system of reference that constantly evolves, bringing changes in collective mentality. Foucault's perspective suggests that freedom is culturally conditioned by social values and practices [29, p. 13].

According to Eva Illouz, emotional freedom is constructed according to social models and is shaped by capitalism, in which emotions become instruments of marketing—emotions sell and are sold. At the same time, it is limited by cultural norms, within which relationships are negotiated according to costs and benefits, and love is no longer purely authentic but becomes subject to negotiation [16].

Therefore, the author's perspective shows that, in contemporary society, emotions often represent a form of staged authenticity, being processed and displayed in order to “perform emotionally” within a world dominated by consumerism, multinational corporations, and artificial intelligence. In line with Romanian sociological perspectives, George C. Homans and Peter Blau argue that emotions are “indicators of the quality of relationships and the distribution of power” [8]. From this viewpoint, an individual acquires emotional freedom when they possess emotional resources and an equal position within relationships. In other words, emotional freedom depends on the capacity to negotiate, to have options, and not to depend excessively on a partner. In contrast to other perspectives, these authors suggest that emotions may also be influenced externally by factors such as satisfaction, interaction, and power dynamics.

John Stuart Mill states that “a person is human because of their capacity to choose” [7, p. 589]. Thus, human emotional freedom lies in the capacity to make choices, although society may be justified in intervening in private life under certain exceptional circumstances, and human behavior is influenced by social norms.

Specialists therefore emphasize that emotional freedom is shaped by cultural conditions, values, and social practices. Consequently, it may differ from one society to another depending on the historical period and cultural context.

Emotional Freedom from an Anthropological Perspective

Bălăceanu-Stolnici C. considers emotions to be a complex product shaped by biology, culture, and spirituality. In other words, individuals understand their emotions but also shape and express them according to cultural influences and spiritual dimensions. According to the author, inner balance is achieved through reflection, emotional maturation, and awareness of human nature [4].

Gilbert Durand [10], professor emeritus of cultural anthropology and sociology, argues that human experience develops through imagination, archetypes, and symbolic structures, with emotions organizing the way individuals relate to the world. From this perspective, emotional freedom is conditioned by the capacity not to remain trapped within a single emotional or symbolic register, but rather to recognize symbolic structures, express emotions through cultural forms, and integrate them appropriately in order to navigate different experiential registers.

A similar perspective is presented by Ardelean [1, p. 447], who states that emotional freedom represents a form of liberation through which individuals express their emotions in a way that maintains both inner balance and social harmony.

Furthermore, Moanță [19, p. 139] considers that individuals use coping methods for emotional self-regulation once they become aware that the proper management of emotions brings significant changes in everyday life, improving both mental and overall health across different aspects of life.

In his studies, Georges Gurvitch relates freedom to the human capacity to succeed in accordance with both personal and cultural emotional norms. In this perspective, individuals shape their own life paths while building healthy relationships within their communities [14, p. 588].

From an anthropological perspective, emotional freedom is therefore seen as a construct formed within cultures and civilizations, achieved through self-knowledge, interpretation, and transformation of emotional experiences in accordance with cultural norms.

Emotional Freedom from a Biological Perspective

From a biological point of view, Ardelean [1] states that our ancestors play an important role in the development of emotions and positive attitudes, as they shape patterns that individuals tend to follow. For example, the development of optimism and acceptance depends on how we were raised, the experiences we had within the family, and the emotional models we observed, which gradually become neurobiological processes. Capacities such as awareness and self-regulation represent key premises for controlling emotions and their influence on biological reactions.

Paul Ekman [11], through his research, demonstrated how humans recognize basic emotions expressed through facial expressions, such as anger, disgust, contempt, joy, fear, sadness, and surprise. Within the same perspective, Ekman emphasizes that basic emotions are biologically conditioned, while emotional freedom develops when individuals are able to regulate their own emotions; suppressing or eliminating them produces the opposite effect. In other words, when people become aware of the triggers that generate emotional reactions, they gain freedom if they manage these emotions appropriately rather than surrendering to impulsive reactions.

From a biological perspective, specialists conclude that emotional freedom emerges when individuals recognize their emotional triggers, develop the capacity for self-regulation of reactions, and understand that certain emotional patterns are inherited.

Emotional Freedom from a Legal Perspective

European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) does not provide a concrete definition of emotional freedom; however, it acknowledges that it is framed by certain legal limits such as freedom of expression, protection of private life and dignity, and the prohibition of degrading treatment (such as torture or bullying) [5, p. 507].

In their studies, Dabu and Gușanu [9] argue that a clear distinction must be made between rights and freedoms in order to determine the external exercise of the latter. Thus, rights are established by law and may be violated, while emotional freedom represents an intimate inner space that must be legally protected.

In this context, legal formulations should provide greater clarity so that inner freedom is not confused with its external expression, which may be subject to legal restrictions.

In an article published on a specialized legal website (drept.md.wordpress.com) [30], the issue of freedom is addressed from both an internal and an external perspective. In this context, a person may manage their emotions internally as they wish, without constraint, since these are considered intimate experiences. However, from an external perspective, emotional manifestations must be regulated in order not to infringe upon the rights of others. Thus, emotional autonomy is regarded as part of private life and freedom of conscience.

Legal scholars have also expressed opinions regarding emotions and freedom. Among them, Odiță A. [21] states that emotions belong to the sphere of private life, which is legally protected. Emotional freedom, therefore, represents a personal right expressed through respect and legal protection. Consequently, emotional freedom is considered part of the right to private life.

Emotional Freedom from an Orthodox Perspective

Orthodox theology states that emotional freedom means liberation from passions and the attainment of inner peace. In this perspective, negative emotions (such as hatred, despair, and others) are considered passions that can be healed through spiritual practices such as fasting, prayer, and confession, through which individuals gain spiritual fruits such as peace, patience, and joy.

Antonie Plămădeală argues that emotional balance is achieved through community life, where individuals learn patience, obedience, respect, and order [22]. The Metropolitan defines freedom as an “inner state whose purpose is to transform for the better the way one lives in the world.”

This perspective is profound because it highlights a process of inner renewal and purification, through which individuals free themselves from what is considered negative and replace it with what represents goodness—namely the attainment of inner peace, forgiveness, and spiritual order.

According to Teodorescu [28], emotional freedom allows the external expression of emotions without constraints, yet it remains limited by morality and responsibility. For the author, true freedom represents the connection with God, achieved through the liberation from and healing of passions.

Conclusions

From the analysis of the presented information, the interdisciplinary nature of the concept of emotional freedom becomes evident. Each investigated field provides different perspectives that converge on the way individuals recognize, interpret, and manage their emotions. Essentially, these perspectives show that emotional freedom is a process within personal development, requiring time and experiences, rather than being an innate ability or a given fact. What emerges from the various perspectives is that emotional freedom is closely related to inner autonomy and the individual capacity to function in accordance with social and cultural norms and contexts.

As presented in this paper, emotional freedom is achieved once individuals develop significant emotional abilities, specific to the perspectives of each discipline. Thus, self-knowledge and free will, according to philosophy; self-regulation and emotional awareness, from a psychological perspective; the development of competencies, from a pedagogical viewpoint; sociology interprets emotional freedom in relation to the social context; anthropology emphasizes the cultural environment; biology highlights the role of the body and physiology; the legal perspective reflects the right to private life; while Orthodox theology understands freedom as a process of renewal and liberation from passions in order to achieve inner peace.

Therefore, emotional freedom represents the common point among these disciplines, reflected in the individual's capacity to shape and direct their own personal life.

In essence, the paper highlights the importance of acquiring emotional freedom as a necessary condition for human development, resulting from the interaction between biological elements, cultural influences, educational pathways, and processes of inner maturation. In other words, emotional freedom proves to be useful in helping individuals make their lives easier and learn to live in harmony both with themselves and with others.

Based on this synthesis, pedagogical models can be developed for any level of education, within which emotional and social education activities may be implemented with the aim of cultivating emotional freedom by forming autonomous, authentic individuals capable of appropriately managing life in the contemporary world.

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