



# If you Marry, Would you Increase or Diminish your Freedom?

**Branya J\***

Director of the Master of Applied Philosophy and Ethics, Strathmore University, Kenya

**\*Corresponding author:** John Branya, Director of the Master of Applied Philosophy and Ethics, Strathmore University, Madaraka Estate, Ole Sangale Road, PO Box 59857, 00200 City Square, Nairobi, Kenya, Tel: +254 734 136 136; Email: jbranya@gmail.com

**Investigation Paper**

**Volume 5 Issue 3**

**Received Date:** August 22, 2022

**Published Date:** September 22, 2022

**DOI:** 10.23880/phij-16000265

## Abstract

The question of whether marriage increases or decreases the spouse’s freedom is a pedagogical way to think deeply about what is freedom and what it entails. The recognised author Isaiah Berlin coined the distinction between freedom-from and freedom-for to analyse political freedom. Leonardo Polo, a Spanish last century philosopher claimed that freedom is difficult to explain because it is what we are, not what we have. It is above our intelligence. Using the penetrating views of both authors we conclude that both freedoms from and freedom for are entwined. Freedom for, or positive freedom requires to free oneself from what limits the achievement of the purpose of freedom for, also named negative freedom. Freedom is seen as an investment in what is valuable.v

**Keywords:** Freedom; Isaiah berlin; Leonardo polo; Marriage

This question if you marry would you increase or diminish your freedom? This question posed to undergraduate, and postgraduate students, puzzled them. It made them think deeper what freedom is. The question does not have an easy answer. The standard answer is that it diminishes freedom. By getting married one cannot do what one was doing as a single. By getting married one must consult with one’s spouse whatever needs to be done. When the children come both spouses are limited even more. The subsequent question is, then why do most people marry? Married life is something we are born in and many of us long for. How to explain this apparent contradiction?.

There are different ways to understand what freedom is and its ultimate purpose is. To try to see how to solve this dilemma we can use Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between freedom from and freedom for [1].

Berlin’s expresses negative freedom as follows, “I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body

of men interferes with my activity.” According to him what prevents negative freedom is only coercion not incapacity. “Coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act. You lack political liberty or freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings. Mere incapacity to attain a goal is not lack of political freedom.” [1].

Berlin uses positive freedom as “freedom to --to lead one prescribed form of life,” or more explicitly “I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer--deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them [1]”.

Berlin’s uses these distinctions more on a political than a personal way, though both are interrelated. I will simplify them for the purpose of this discussion as follows; exclusively negative freedom, also called freedom-from, is to

understand freedom as total absence of limitation, not only coercion, but also incapacities. This means I can change my sex, mutilate myself, and even take my life, at will, provided I do not interfere with other's similar freedom. John Stuart Mill is the great advocate of this type of freedom "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way [2]".

Freedom-for will be to use the capacities, talents, one's is endowed with to attain one's perfection. Berlin is sceptical of this type of freedom because he is aware that the type of perfection can be determined by others, specially by "a tribe, a race, a church, a state, the great society of the living and the dead and the yet unborn. This entity is then identified as being the 'true' self which, by imposing its collective, or 'organic', single will upon its recalcitrant 'members', achieves its own, and therefore their 'higher' freedom" [1].

It is common to present reality as a duality and fall into the either-or fallacy. It is either black or white? No! It can be pink, green or marron. It can also be both and become grey. In this case freedom is a power, and it has a purpose. Anything that prevents the attainment of its purpose, should be avoided. In our case is not either freedom-from or freedom-for. Both were in tandem, one needs the other, freedom-from is needed for freedom-for.

To clarify the intertwining of both elements of freedom, we can use the example of field, a farmland. If we understand freedom as mere freedom-from, we will have to leave it without planting anything, because in the moment we plant maize, we cannot plant wheat or sorghum. We are limiting the freedom, because in the moment we plant one crop we cannot simultaneously plant others. Now freedom-for will be to maximise production, so one season we plant maize, get the reward of it, next season we can plant wheat and the following sorghum. This is freedom-for a purpose, and positive, because it brings results. The negative understanding of freedom is empty, it will only produce weeds the wind or birds might bring. In humans, it will only bring whatever the wind of the changing passions and whims suggest.

If one understands freedom in the negative way, marriage will bring extra commitments. The spouse needs and wishes, the children, the in-laws and all the physical, social, and economic new obligations. Also, one will have to leave or change old routines one had as a single person. All these are factual realities of marriage. But it might be that being single one's life becomes empty, as an uncultivated field.

Freedom-for one has an aim that self-directs passions and controls whims to its achievement. The important issue is to decide for a developing personal aim in life. The decision of the aim, in a free society is decided by each person, in

tyrannic societies it might be decided by those in power.

The distinction between negative and positive freedom, freedom-from and freedom-for is useful if not taken as opposite but as complementary. Each decision for something implies the renunciation of other alternatives, each freedom-for requires freedom-for. One ship cannot be at the same time at port and moving to a different port. You cannot have the cake and enjoy it. You cannot do what you were doing when you were single and enjoy the benefits of married life. "Every decision is an exchange of some freedoms for others" [3].

We have achieved the first point, freedom-for is a personal decision, which will require to have freedom-from any constrain to achieve the end. A second issue to discuss is how to measure the degree of freedom attained to see whether marriage makes the spouses increase or decrease their freedom. While the first aspect is logical, this one is value based, and therefore will depend on what one understands what one's purpose in life is.

As Berlin says what makes one increase or decrease in freedom in its roots depends on how we understand what the human nature is. "This judgment in turn depends on how we determine good and evil, that is to say, on our moral, religious, intellectual, economic, and aesthetic values, which are, in their turn, bound up with our conception of man, and of the basic demands of his nature [1]".

In most traditions, humans have been considered different from animals in that they are composed of mater, the body, and spiritual and therefore perpetual soul [4]. The DNA analysis says that our closest relatives are the chimpanzees [5]. The soul will be what makes humans different from the animals, which is manifested in the abstract power of the intelligence and power of free decision or will. There is a more detailed consideration of the human ontological constitution dividing it in three distinctive levels, the body, the soul and the spirit, a triadic structure, not based on the Bible, but on philosophical anthropology [6].

According to the proposal of the transcendental anthropology proposed by L. Polo the human ontological structure has three levels, natural or animal, the essential or human, and the personal, or spiritual. The body and its physical and psychological aspects are like those of the most developed mammals. Any behaviour that can be found both in animals and human belongs to this level, be it merely physiological or psychological. The second level comprises the intelligence and the will, that are common to all humans in greater or less degree and explains the activities humans do which animals do not. One can be a carpenter, a nurse, a professor, and each can be replaced by another carpenter, nurse, or professor if they use their human powers in the

same way as the previous ones. The final level is the spirit or personal level, which is unique for each human, what makes each unrepeatable, the source of personal decision, and therefore responsibilities. The personal level is what one is, while one has greater or lower intelligence, will power, or body characteristics. This triadic structure is more powerful than the dualistic one in explain, love, happiness, and freedom [7]. Here we are interested in the three levels of freedom.

There are three levels of freedom which correspond to each level. The physical freedom, the human freedom, and the personal freedom. We speak of free animals, when they are in the wild, as differentiating them from those kept in zoos, farms or as pets in homes. We can deprive this freedom to humans by incarcerating them or preventing them access to different countries or locations. Freedom at this level improves by increasing one's well-being both physical -health, movement, sex- and elemental psychological aspects, for example freedoms from want and from fear of the famous speech Four Freedoms by the United States of America Franklin Roosevelt's [8].

The human or essential freedom pertains to the human common powers, the intelligence and will power. Here the social freedoms are important. With respect to the intellectual flourishing the freedom of information, education, religion, participation is paramount. The intelligence is freer when it is developed by learning and giving it the tools to seek the truth understating each science. In Roosevelt's speech this will be the public recognitions of the freedoms of speech and of worship. With respect to the will freedom grows by increasing self-control, which is attained by the traditional virtues, prudence, justice, grit, and moderation.

Freedom at the personal or spiritual level is not something that one has, it is what one is. "The act of being is unique and unrepeatable and constitutes what he [Polo] calls more technically, each individual human spirit, also called its personal level" [9]. There is no human if one cannot take decisions if one is not free. If one removes the capacity of taking radical decisions, we transform a human being into an animal subject to its feelings, or to a robot subject to its programmed activities. Man is free by nature. This is the ultimate foundation of the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" [10]. The second sentence of the same article expresses what is going to make humans better "and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Because the spirit is expansive, unlike matter, which is limited and measurable, what makes one better at this level, the highest, is the spirit of brotherhood. Brotherhood is to consider others more than friends, which is fraternal love, a desire the good of the brothers. The more

we help others the freer we are. What more than giving life to others ? educate them, in their human life of love, which cannot be done better than in the family, or in total service to others, being single or married. Most people will be better off marrying to flourish at this level. At this level freedom improves by personal deep relationships with other persons, one to one, either human or divine.

One should pay attention to good marriages, not those that are forced, where at least one of the parties is forced to marry against his or her will. It is good to note that what we see in the press, soap operas and movies, are not the normal, otherwise they will not attract attention. It is also good to notice that a good marriage needs continuous work to keep it vibrant, like, or even more than any worthy business or profession.

It will also be noted that each human decision requires the commitment to make it come to fruit. To give up on any decision is a sign of immaturity, any decision requires the responsibility of its consequences. Irresponsibility in children and insane people is accepted because they do not have self-control, but not in mature human persons.

It is good to examine what freedoms, are traded when tying the knot. In this paper marriage is understood as the ideal of mature woman and man who freely decide to unite themselves for their mutual flourishing and open to life.

At the physical level, traditionally was expressed as common lodging, table, and bed. Which expresses the basic needs of safety and security (lodging), nutrition (table) and procreation (bed). All these can be achieved being single if we limit ourselves to the physical aspect of marriage. Single parents, which seem more common now that in previous generations, are a clear example. Marriage, nevertheless, brings more security, probably better nutrition and more and safer procreation, but it will be difficult to justify the benefits of marriage at this level only. An explanation of the growth of single parenting in western societies could be the increase conception of freedom as freedom-for, individualist, somehow selfish approach to life. As an example, in Kenya single parenting rose from 25.1% in 2009 to 38.2% in 2019 [11].

At the essential level, the commitment to take care of each other, the children and the extended families will require to test and increase the virtues of prudence, justice, courage and moderation in a continuous, changing and more demanding environments. Intellectually the opening of new ways of seeing situations and events, different in women and men, in children at different ages, will enrich the experiences and understanding in a way that single people will find difficult to gauge. The need to agree on common policies, will require

growing in emotional intelligence, not only on its theoretical aspect. While this is clear in good marriages, where each spouse wants the mutual flourishing at this level, still it will be difficult to defend the monogamy and permanence of marriage at this level. This is why polygamous marriages and divorce could be justified.

Finally, it is the personal level, the one that can justify the gifts of marriage of unity and indissolubility. The personal level is spiritual, unique, source of the radical free decisions that one takes. Being spiritual can overcome the vagaries of time because it is above time. The personal level is the best explanation of humans being a social/political animal as Aristotle defended. Not as he defended because of achieving our material and social needs, but because the spirit needs other spirits to expand its potentialities. The need to be accepted, appreciated, loved as a unique person, unrepeatable, with intrinsic value, independent of the sex, intelligence of will power, is innate at this level. We are not unique at the physical level, even animals can give us physical pleasures, not at the human level, there are many people who can share the same virtues, skills, and wisdom with us, but none will be replaceable at the personal level. Parents who have lost a child, can tell of the vacuum each leaves, which no other child can fill. This level is the one that justifies the identical worth, rights, and freedom of each of the spouses. Both spouses are constitutionally free. Their union should be free and help to increase the freedom of each other at the three levels. How to do it, is a matter of mutual agreements, which should be well established and decided before committing to each other.

Women and men are physically and psychologically different, and for a purpose, which is the procreation of new life. Each have different ways, therefore, to flourish. A woman normally flourishes by being a good mother, a man by being a good father. For this they need to be good spouses. Understanding freedom as freedom-for, the purpose is to flourish as a person. What is the purpose one has in life. This is determined by my specific endowment. As a woman how can I flourish? Biologically a woman has an instinct to maternity, biological a man is geared to be a protector. Both have a conjugal instinct, which is not only a biological, but specifically human instinct. These does not mean that every woman must be a mother and every man has to be a father, and that not being one is an imperfection, or that there are no exceptions to this instinct both in women and men.

How different societies and times make this possible could be discussed more in detail, this topic is still to discuss whether one is freer by getting married. In the negative sense marrying will diminish freedom because one cannot decide alone, and many of the activities and friends one had will be reduced or given away. In the positive aspect of freedom, the trade will pay off, especially at the personal level, where one will be generous by loving, being loved, not only by the good spouse, but by all the children, relatives, and society in general, as unique and fulfilling one's more deep personal needs.

## References

1. Berlin I (1969) Two Concepts of Liberty, Four Essays on Liberty. Oxford University Press, pp: 118-172.
2. Mill JS (2001) On Liberty. Ontario, Batoche Books Limited.
3. Murphy D (2022) Do guys feel like marriage took away your freedom?. Quora.
4. McCaig A (1931) Thoughts on the Tripartite Theory of Human Nature. The Evangelical Quarterly 3(2): 121-138.
5. Varki A, Altheide TK (2005) Comparing the human and chimpanzee genomes: searching for needles in a haystack. Genome research 15(12): 1746-1758.
6. Polo L (2015) Why a Transcendental Anthropology. South Bend, Leonardo Polo Institute of Philosophy.
7. Branya J (2014) Antropological Foundation of the Levels of Happiness: Robert Spitzer, Abraham Maslow and Leonardo Polo. Miscelanea Poliana, Malaga, Instituto de Estudios Filosóficos Leonardo Polo 46: 2-16.
8. Roosevelt FD (1941) The four Freedoms. American Rhetoric.
9. Branya J (2021) The Moral Chip, Nairobi, Kenya. Strathmore University Press.
10. United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Right.
11. Mbuthia B (2022) President Kenyatta Sounds Alarm Over Increase In Single Parent Families. Citizen Digital.

