



# WHAT IS LIBERTY?

*Liberty is not just the absence of restrictions, but also responsibility, creativity, and the search for meaning. Why it can be intimidating and how to learn to make the most of it. The psychology of negative and positive freedom.*

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Psychological concepts of freedom are frequently studied topics in contemporary humanistic, existential, and social-cognitive psychology. Leading theorists such as Erich Fromm, Viktor Frankl, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, Albert Bandura, Irvin Yalom, Carl Rogers, and Barry Schwartz view freedom not as an abstract philosophical category, but as a dynamic dialectical process of personality development that includes both liberation from external constraints and the active self-realization of inner potential.

The phenomenon of freedom is widely studied in contemporary humanistic, existential, and social-cognitive psychology. In the context of socio-psychological analysis, this concept emerges as a complex phenomenon shaped by historical, economic, and cultural conditions.

The liberation from traditional «primary bonds» (religious dogmas, social roles) in modern society leads to a paradoxical situation in which individuals are granted negative freedom and face existential isolation, powerlessness, and the necessity of constructing their own lives independently. Life under such conditions is so unbearable that it demands a shift toward positive freedom, which is realized through creativity, love, the pursuit of meaning, and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs.

Freedom becomes both a source of anxiety and an opportunity for a life of freedom, self-determination, and the search for meaning.

## The Contradictions in Contemporary Concepts of Freedom

The central issue in psychological concepts of freedom is the contradiction between gaining formal independence and an increasing psychological burden.

Erich Fromm, in his work «Escape from Freedom»<sup>1</sup> shows that modern man, having broken free from the shackles of the Middle Ages, has become an “economic atom” who feels deeply isolated and anxious.

<sup>1</sup> Fromm, E. Escape from Freedom / Translated from English by M. Yakovlev. Kharkiv: Family Leisure Club, 2024. 288 pp.

Negative freedom, in and of itself, does not provide a purpose for existence; rather, it only intensifies the sense of powerlessness in the face of market forces and mass culture, leading to coping mechanisms such as authoritarianism, destructiveness, and blind conformity. In everyday life, this might mean living in an apartment building and not knowing a single neighbor, having no social connections, even though you share the same space, face common issues with utility services, and deal with aggressive neighbors.

The cognitive and existential barriers of the modern world compound the problem. Barry Schwartz describes the «paradox of choice»<sup>2</sup>, like when having too many options leads to decision paralysis, decision fatigue, and constant regret over missed opportunities.

Irvin Yalom identifies existential isolation and the fear of «groundlessness» as inseparable consequences of freedom as the authorship of one's own life<sup>3</sup>. Psychological trauma further undermines a person's sense of agency, fostering an external locus of control, reducing self-efficacy, and provoking defensive distortions of reality.



THUS, FREEDOM BECOMES NOT ONLY AN OPPORTUNITY BUT ALSO A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO MENTAL HEALTH.

In Erich Fromm's socio-psychological analysis, the burden of freedom and isolation are viewed as the central contradiction of human existence in the modern world. Fromm's central thesis is that while the development of civilization has brought humans independence and rationality, it has also made them isolated, powerless, and filled with anxiety. Fromm compares humanity's process of liberation to a child's individuation. As a person gradually breaks free from «primary ties» — such as traditional social roles, religion, and nature — they come to recognize themselves as a distinct and separate individual.

This awareness of one's own individuality gives rise to a sense of existential loneliness, which Fromm considers an unbearable condition that demands a solution. And in most cases, the solution to this problem leads to the concept of «freedom from», which is a negative freedom — it means liberation from external constraints, political oppression, or rigid social conventions — but leaves the individual as an «economic atom», dependent on market forces and lacking a sense of belonging.

In modern capitalism, individuals often feel small and insignificant, a feeling that is exacerbated by political propaganda and popular culture. Alienation becomes a key consequence when a person finds themselves in a situation of profound conflict: they have gained independence, yet at the same time feel isolated, powerless, and filled with anxiety.

Fromm distinguishes between two aspects of freedom that are critical to understanding personal self-determination.

- **«Freedom from»** (negative freedom) is freedom from external constraints, which in and of itself does not give a person a sense of purpose and typically leads to alienation.
- **«Freedom to»** (positive freedom) is the ability of an individual to realize their intellectual, emotional, and sensory potential through spontaneous activity, creative work, and love.



The psychological nature of **the burden of freedom** lies in the fact that the process of liberating humanity from «traditional shackles» leads to an awareness of one's own isolation, which gives rise to existential loneliness. When the state of isolation becomes unbearable, an individual tries to give up their freedom in exchange for an illusory sense of security.

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz, B. *The Paradox of Choice: Why "More" Means "Less"* / Translated from English by O. Astashova. Kyiv: Nash Format, 2020. 240 pp.

<sup>3</sup> I. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy\** (translated from English). Kyiv: Rostyslav Burlaka Publishing House, 2026. 656 p.

## Mechanisms for Escaping the Burden of Freedom

Fromm identifies three main mechanisms of such escape, which are unconscious strategies that people resort to overcoming the unbearable feelings of isolation and powerlessness that arise as a result of gaining **individual freedom**.

1 **Authoritarianism** is considered **the first** and most **primitive** escape mechanism. This mechanism involves relinquishing the independence of one's «self» and attempting to merge with an external figure or entity to find the strength the individual lacks.

The first form of escape characteristic of authoritarianism is the masochistic tendency — the desire to submit to the authority of others, becoming passive, compliant, and obedient. An individual seeks a «higher power» (a leader, an ideology, an abstract order, or God) to escape the discomfort of personal responsibility for their life.

It is precisely this personal vulnerability that “cults”, exploit, because as soon as a person joins them, they shower them with care, show interest, and create a seemingly “safe environment”, but after a while, they begin to pressure the person with strict rules, obligations, and observance of “fasts”, and then even restrict their social contacts. Thus, the individual agrees to voluntarily give up their freedom in exchange for a sense of belonging to a group, a false sense of security, and the near-total loss of their own agency.

The birth of a child can also be a manifestation of authoritarianism, which later manifests itself in excessive control, constant instructions, double standards, and the suppression of free will.

The mirror image of this is sadistic tendencies, which, on the contrary, are aimed at dominating, controlling, and humiliating others. A sadist seeks to gain power by making other people part of his system. However, a sadist is just as unfree as a masochist, since his role is compulsive and dependent on the object of his control.

These two forms of freedom escaping share a common trait: overcoming the unbearable feeling of loneliness and helplessness. This represents an attempt to bridge the gap between the self and the world by relinquishing one's own identity. Thus, authoritarian behavior reflects the inner weakness of the individual self, which is incapable of standing on its own. As a result, the individual escapes from a negative state that has failed to provide meaning by submitting to new forms of domination.

2 **Destructiveness** serves as a second mechanism of escape; it is an attempt to overcome powerlessness by destroying the external world, which is perceived as a threat. Unlike sadism, which seeks to control its object, destructiveness aims to destroy it so that the world ceases to be a threat. The level of destructiveness in an individual is proportional to the extent to which their inner potential remains unrealized.

Destructiveness is the result of a «life un-lived», in which a person's creative potential goes unrealized and life energy is transformed into destructive energy; this mechanism is particularly dangerous because it turns the potential for growth into a destructive force that undermines both personal and social well-being.

At this point, Fromm typically cites the example of one infamous «Austrian painter» who failed to realize his creative potential and compensated for that failure with rage — rage that engulfed Europe in fire during the last century. Our own time continues to produce similar “unrecognized creators” who, unable to fulfill themselves through creative work, instead transform the world into a field of “red poppies” driven by a fragile sense of self and psychological insecurity.

3 **Automaton conformity** is the ultimate form of escape from freedom and the most prevalent mechanism in modern democracies. The individual becomes a «social chameleon», completely internalizing societal expectations and thereby losing their genuine identity. People mistakenly perceive culturally imposed ideas as their own, and this creates an illusion of security, because if I am like everyone else, I am not alone; I am part of the pride; I am among «my own». However, the price is the loss of one's own identity — that very «uniqueness» that defines a person.

Most people mistakenly believe that their thoughts and decisions are original, even though in reality they are merely a reflection of widely accepted conventions, education, or advertising.

In such circumstances, **positive freedom** serves as an antidote; that is, the only healthy way forward is the realization of the self through **spontaneous activity, work, and love**, which allows the individual to unite with the world without losing their integrity.

## Freedom and Isolation as the Fundamental «Givens» of Human Existence

In the context of existential psychology, Fromm's concepts are complemented by the views of [Irvin Yalom](#), who views freedom and isolation as two of the four «fundamental givens» of existence.

For Yalom, freedom is the need to be the sole author of one's own life, which evokes a fear of «groundlessness». Existential isolation refers not simply to being alone, but to an unbridgeable existential gap between oneself and all other beings in the universe. Even in the most intimate relationships, one remains fundamentally alone. Individuals often attempt to defend against this isolation through fusion or merging with another person or a group, which echoes Fromm's mechanisms of escape.

[Viktor Frankl](#) contrasts the «escape from freedom», with the will to meaning, arguing that even under severely constrained conditions, a person self-determines through the choice of their attitude toward the situation<sup>4</sup>.

Desi and Ryan's Theory of Self-Determination<sup>5</sup> argues that the frustration of the need for autonomy leads to alienation and a decline in well-being, which is consistent with Fromm's views on the consequences of fleeing from freedom.

Barry Schwartz, in the context of the «paradox of choice» adds that today's abundance of options can lead to «decision paralysis», which is a modern manifestation of the anxiety of freedom. Thus, Fromm's mechanisms of escape demonstrate that without the development of an inner capacity for self-determination and creative work, people are prone to trading their freedom for an illusory sense of security in the embrace of conformism or authoritarianism.

## How to Overcome Contradictions, or the Path to «Positive» Freedom

The only constructive way to resolve the conflict between individual independence and a sense of alienation is «freedom to» (positive freedom).

**While «freedom from» merely liberates a person from external constraints, «freedom to» entails the full realization of one's potential through creative work and love.**

An example of such freedom can be found in artists who, despite difficult circumstances, continue to create works of art that inspire others. To some extent, this could also include scientists who, despite a mountain of problems, remain in academia in pursuit of discoveries. Creativity as a path to self-realization presupposes that true freedom is not a static state; it requires the individual to actively engage and utilize their intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities.

Positive freedom is realized through work, which is an act of creative self-expression rather than merely a means of survival, for such work fosters genuine self-respect and allows a person to feel in control of their own life. Spontaneity is the ability to act in accordance with the inner impulses of one's own «self», rather than under the pressure of social expectations. People today often substitute genuine activity with surrogates (alcohol, entertainment, consumerism) because they feel a «hunger for life» stemming from their inability to be creative.

**Love**, as a means of overcoming isolation, acts as a force that unites the individual with the world without undermining their autonomy. It does not break down the boundaries of the self; on the contrary, it helps make them more transparent and flexible, allowing a person to feel a deep connection with others and with the surrounding reality, while remaining whole and autonomous.

It is in wholeness that love finds its true expression — not when people «dissolve» into one another, not when they complement each other, but precisely when they become equal partners in their relationship, sharing their lives. Because love based on other motives is a form of fleeing freedom in exchange for security, material comforts, or the fear of being alone, which is one of the main reasons people form relationships today.

A fulfilling relationship is one based on mutual trust, sincere respect, and the preservation of each person's individuality. This is not a merging of two «selves» into one, but a harmonious coexistence in which each person remains true to themselves while being enriched by the presence of the other. Such love does not require sacrificing one's freedom or losing oneself in a partner; on the contrary, it creates a space in which both partners can grow without losing their own uniqueness and inner freedom. It allows a person to emerge from «existential loneliness» without becoming dependent; rather than filling an inner void at the expense of another, productive

<sup>4</sup> Frankl, V. \*Saying "Yes" to Life: A Psychologist in a Concentration Camp\* / Translated from German by O. Zamoyska. Kharkiv: Family Leisure Club, 2024. 160 pp..

<sup>5</sup> Ryan R. M., Deci E. L. Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness. New York: Guilford Publishing, 2017. 756 p.

love creates the conditions for a genuine encounter between two free beings. As a result, a person overcomes the feeling of isolation from the world, feels like part of a larger whole, yet retains their independence, self-sufficiency, and the right to their own inner world.

**It is precisely in this balance between unity and autonomy that love realizes its highest and healthiest potential.**

Positive freedom, as viewed through the lens of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, identifies three paths to meaning:

- through creativity (work),
- experience (love for another person)
- change in attitude toward suffering.

Frankl emphasizes self-transcendence, that is, the human capacity to forget oneself in the service of a cause or another person, which constitutes the essence of positive freedom. In turn, Carl Rogers describes the «fully functioning person», who is open to experience, lives in the present moment, and realizes their potential through creativity. **For Rogers, freedom is the result of congruence — the alignment of a person's true self with their experiences.**

On the other hand, self-determination theory states that satisfying the innate needs for autonomy (being the initiator of one's actions) and relatedness (feeling connected to and cared for by others) is fundamental to well-being. This reflects Fromm's balance between individuality and unity through love.

Irvin Yalom views freedom as «the authorship of one's own life», arguing that meaning is created through engagement in creative activities and deep human relationships, which allows a person to «immerse themselves in the flow of life». Thus, positive freedom through creativity and love, as defined by Fromm, is a state in which the individual overcomes the anxiety of loneliness not by renouncing oneself (as in escape mechanisms), but through active and conscious union with the world, which makes it possible to be free and, at the same time, not lonely.

Within the framework of logotherapy, as described by Viktor Frankl, the will to meaning is viewed as the fundamental driving force of human existence, which fundamentally distinguishes this approach from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis («the will to pleasure») and Alfred Adler's individual psychology («the will to power»).

## Frankl's Logotherapy as a Concept for the Search for Meaning

Frankl argued that the desire to find and realize a specific meaning in one's life is a primary human motive, rather than merely a secondary rationalization of instinctual drives.

The fundamental tenets of the concept of the will to meaning within the framework of logotherapy, known as the «Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy», are based on three fundamental principles:

- freedom of will;
- the meaning of life;
- the will to meaning.

Free will is the idea that a person is not entirely determined by biological, psychological, or social conditions, as they always retain the freedom to take a particular stance regarding these circumstances. Life has meaning under any circumstances, even the most tragic ones, and this meaning is unique for each individual.

The will to meaning is a person's innate desire to live out their values and find a sense of purpose, which is the key to mental health. The ways of realizing the will to meaning allow a person to actualize their will to meaning and discover it in three basic ways: creative values, through creating something valuable, performing work, or carrying out an action; experiential values, through experiencing something (for example, the beauty of nature or art) or encountering someone through love; attitudinal values, which represent the highest expression of the will to meaning and consist in choosing one's own stance toward unavoidable suffering.

Frankl emphasized that suffering becomes meaningful only when it is unavoidable, and that a person transforms personal tragedy into a human triumph through «tragic optimism».

When the will to meaning remains unfulfilled, a state arises that Frankl called the «existential vacuum». This phenomenon manifests itself as a feeling of emptiness, boredom, and meaninglessness.

In contemporary culture, the absence of meaning is often compensated for through hedonism, materialism, alcohol or drug addiction, as well as manifestations of destructiveness. This usually happens when a person has a stable job, an active social life, perhaps even a family, and the same routine plays out day after day. In such circumstances, sooner or later an «existential vacuum» sets in, reflected in thoughts like «nothing is happening» and «everything is the same as always», with the question «What's the point of all this anyway?» serving as a litmus test — a question that breeds apathy and boredom.

Logotherapy aims to overcome this existential vacuum by helping patients recognize their responsibility for finding meaning, which serves as «medicine for the soul» in times of spiritual (noetic) crisis. Freedom of choice lies between stimulus and response; within this space reside our freedom to choose, our identity, our thoughts, and the various ways in which we express ourselves.

This principle radically distinguishes the logotherapeutic approach from **behaviorism**, which views the individual as a product of the environment. In logotherapy, freedom is inextricably linked to responsibility toward life, since a person is a **self-determined being** who decides for themselves «who they are», despite external limitations; thus, according to Frankl, the will to meaning is not merely a psychological need but an existential challenge, the acceptance of which allows a person to realize their true autonomy.

Within logotherapy, the freedom to choose one's attitude is regarded as «the last of human freedoms», one that cannot be taken away even under the most dehumanizing conditions. Although a person is not always free from external circumstances, they always retain the freedom to choose their own path in response to those circumstances.

According to Frankl, key aspects of freedom of attitude include the space between stimulus and response; the fundamental idea is that there is always a certain temporal and psychological space between an external stimulus and our response, and it is within this space that our strength and freedom to choose lie. Attitudinal values are one of the three pathways to discovering the meaning of life, becoming especially important when the first two (creative values and experiential values) are inaccessible due to unavoidable suffering.

Frankl emphasized that meaning can be found even in situations of hopeless suffering, transforming personal tragedy into a human achievement through a courageous stance. Tragic optimism is the ability to maintain hope and belief in meaning in the face of the «tragic triad»: pain, guilt, and death. Attitudinal freedom allows a person to say «Yes» to life despite everything.

Now we all find ourselves in a state of war, constantly hanging by a thread between life and death, while on the other side, we are under pressure from economic and political transformations. And precisely in such circumstances, some people begin to transform into something greater than they are; some start writing a dissertation, some create works of art, some start a family, some open a business they have long dreamed of, because it is through **the act of creation** that we find meaning in life.

In the broader context of the psychology of freedom, Frankl's views have the following characteristics:

- opposition to determinism, unlike behaviorism or classical psychoanalysis, since a person is not merely a product of biological drives or the environment;
- In logotherapy, freedom of attitude is inextricably linked to responsibility toward life; self-transcendence is true freedom of choice in one's attitude and is realized by going beyond the limits of one's own «self» for the sake of another person or a cause;
- The difference from other existentialists lies in the freedom of attitude and the possibility of finding an objective meaning that exists outside the individual.

**Thus, the freedom of attitudinal choice is a mechanism through which a person realizes their agency even when they are unable to change the situation.**

## Responsibility toward life as a necessary condition for freedom

Within logotherapy, responsibility toward life is viewed as a fundamental characteristic of human existence and an essential corollary of freedom. A person is not merely a being who asks about the meaning of life; on the contrary, a person is the one to whom life poses the question, and that person's answer lies in accepting responsibility for their own existence.

The key aspects of this concept include freedom and responsibility as two sides of the same coin, whereby freedom without responsibility risks turning into lawlessness. If freedom is the ability to choose, then responsibility is the duty to bring that chosen meaning to life. A person is viewed as a self-determined being capable of distancing themselves from biological and social conditions to decide who they want to be.

In this context, responsibility means «responding appropriately» to the challenges posed by each specific life situation. The highest expression of responsibility arises when a person is confronted with the «tragic triad» (**pain, guilt, death**). Even when external freedom is completely restricted, an individual is responsible for choosing how to respond to suffering.

This principle of «the last of the human freedoms» allows personal tragedy to be transformed into human achievement through tragic optimism. Frankl summarizes this with the thesis: «When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves».

Many psychological symptoms and destructive behaviors stem from «unfulfilled responsibilities» toward life; therefore, therapy is structured to help individuals recognize their responsibility for finding meaning in three areas: creativity, experience (love), and their attitude toward suffering.

**Responsibility toward life is not a burden, but a tool for liberation. It allows a person to avoid being a passive victim of circumstances and to remain an active agent capable of saying «YES» to life through a conscious choice of goals and values.**

## Tragic Optimism as the Key to Growth in Extreme Conditions

Within logotherapy, tragic optimism is defined as a person's ability to remain focused on positive possibilities and to maintain faith in the meaning of life, despite the «tragic triad» of human existence. This concept is central to understanding how a person can not only survive but also find growth even in extreme conditions.

The psychological essence of tragic optimism is not a naïve denial of reality or «rose-colored glasses» but a conscious choice based on the conviction that life never ceases to have meaning under any circumstances, even the most terrible ones. Tragic optimism allows the individual to transform personal tragedy into human triumph or achievement, where suffering becomes meaningful only when it is unavoidable, and the person adopts a courageous attitude toward it.

“ THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE ONE'S ATTITUDE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF OPTIMISM IS REALIZED THROUGH «THE LAST OF THE HUMAN FREEDOMS», THAT IS, THE CAPACITY TO CHOOSE ONE'S OWN ATTITUDE TOWARD CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED.

Between an external stimulus and a person's response, there is always a space in which our power lies to choose a reaction that corresponds to our dignity. Attitudinal values constitute one of the three avenues to discovering meaning when creative or experiential values are unavailable. It is through attitudinal values that a person can exercise self-determination by choosing how to bear their burden.

The primary motivational force in human beings is the will to meaning rather than the will to pleasure or the will to power. Tragic optimism serves as an antidote to helplessness and the existential void, as it calls upon the individual to transcend the self in the service of a cause or in love for another person (self-transcendence).

## Autonomy as a Basic Human Need

Within the framework of a systematic analysis of the psychology of freedom, autonomy (volitional participation) is viewed not merely as the absence of external pressure, but as a fundamental human need essential for mental health and self-actualization. Autonomy is at the heart of the «Theory of Self-Determination» and intersects with humanistic and existential approaches to understanding human nature.

In Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is defined as the need to experience oneself as the initiator of one's own actions, where volitional functioning does not imply complete independence from others or isolation, but rather refers to the experience of acting in accordance with one's own interests and integrated values.

According to this theory, it is claimed that **personal well-being** stands on three pillars:

- autonomy,
- competence (a sense of effectiveness)
- relatedness (sense of connection with others).

Meeting these needs is essential for optimal functioning. When the need for autonomy is met, a person experiences psychological freedom and inner will, which significantly increases their productivity and happiness.

**Competence** is viewed as a fundamental need that gives a person a sense of effectiveness, the ability to influence the world, and to achieve desired results. Along with autonomy and relatedness, competence is one of the essential components of existence for optimal personal development and mental health.

In Self-Determination Theory, competence is an innate tendency toward mastery and the overcoming of challenges; it is not merely the possession of skills, but an internal sense of confidence in one's capacity to interact effectively with the environment, as competence functions as a persistent drive for learning, where a person is naturally drawn toward understanding, predicting, and effectively solving problems. Positive feedback boosts intrinsic motivation because it satisfies the need for competence; however, it is important for it to be informative rather than controlling or comparative.

The development of competence begins in the family, where a person is allowed to express themselves through drawings posted on the refrigerator, singing songs with their parents, receiving praise for their achievements and encouragement during setbacks, and through their active involvement in family life and their significant role within it. Next comes school, which should foster a safe environment for ideas, for self-expression, and for the development of both the intellectual and value-based aspects of the individual, as well as lay the foundation for the development of identity. Higher education institutions play a leading role in helping individuals acquire the professional competencies that will later serve as the foundation for their professional and creative fulfilment; it is here that people first experience their connection not to general competencies, but specifically to «narrow» and specialized ones, through which they gain recognition.

**Relatedness (the need for connection with others, attachment)** is not merely a social desire or a pleasant optional feature, but a fundamental, innate, and essential condition for psychological well-being, intrinsic motivation, and the holistic, harmonious development of the person. Without fulfilling this need, a person experiences an emotional void, a decline in vitality, and difficulties in realizing their potential.

In self-determination theory, relatedness is defined as one of the three basic psychological needs. It is an innate need to feel a deep and sincere connection with other people, to be the object of care, attention, and support, and to show care and support to those around us. It manifests as a sense of belonging to a community, emotional connectedness, and the presence of lasting, reliable, and stable interpersonal relationships in which a person can be themselves without fear of rejection. Relatedness provides an emotional foundation on which a person can safely and autonomously explore the world, take risks, learn, and develop.

When this need is met in an inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment, a person feels safe, trusted, and motivated to grow. On the contrary, it is quickly undermined by competition, constant criticism, belittlement, emotional rejection, or alienation, leading to a decline in motivation, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness — even among people.

**Intrinsic motivation**, often also referred to as interest, within Self-Determination Theory is regarded as the highest expression of human autonomy and **agency**. It represents the pinnacle of the motivational continuum and reflects a state in which a person acts entirely of their own free will, feeling that they are the author of their own behavior. Intrinsic motivation is defined as engaging in an activity for its own sake — because of the natural satisfaction derived from the process itself, out of curiosity, enthusiasm, or a sense of challenge, rather than for external rewards or to avoid punishment.

Organismic Integration Theory, which is part of Self-Determination Theory, describes a motivational spectrum ranging from complete amotivation (the absence of any intention to act), through various levels of extrinsic motivation, to the highest form of intrinsic motivation. The transition from lower levels of motivation to intrinsic motivation is possible only when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

It is precisely when these three needs are sufficiently supported that intrinsic motivation flourishes, and the person experiences enthusiasm, creativity, and deep satisfaction in activity. If even one of the basic needs is frustrated, intrinsic motivation decreases or disappears entirely.

On the other hand, Carl Rogers approaches this issue by describing the «fully functioning person» as one who has freedom of choice and trusts their own «organismic sense». For him, autonomy is the result of congruence — the alignment between a person’s experience and their self-concept.

**Abraham Maslow** argued that the need for autonomy and self-determination increases as one moves up the hierarchy of needs.

Albert Bandura, through the concept of human agency, describes the mechanisms of autonomy as the capacity to exercise control over one’s own functioning through intentionality, forethought, and self-regulation.

Barry Schwartz warns that an overabundance of choices can lead to «decision paralysis», which effectively limits an individual’s real autonomy. Thus, autonomy as volitional engagement is a basic need that ensures a connection between the inner self and the world; it transforms a person from a reactive being into an active agent capable of self-determination and authentic living.

## Intentionality and Forethought as Fundamental Qualities of the Creative Individual

In Albert Bandura’s social cognitive theory, intentionality and forethought are regarded as two of the four fundamental functions of human agency.

- Intentionality is the formation of specific intentions and plans of action.
- Forethought provides temporal extension: goal setting, anticipation of consequences, and proactive motivation.

They operate in conjunction with **self-reactiveness** and **self-reflectiveness**, where their realization depends on self-efficacy, and a person exercises their freedom by selecting and shaping their environment.

Intentionality and foresight are considered two of the four fundamental functions of human agency, and they play a key role in how a person becomes an active creator of their own life rather than a passive product of external circumstances.

Intentionality is a person’s ability to form clear, specific intentions and action plans, through which they transform abstract desires into purposeful action, allowing the individual to determine exactly what they want to achieve and to develop detailed strategies for realizing those goals.

**Without intentionality, behavior would remain chaotic and reactive.**

Forethought provides a temporal extension of human agency, encompassing the capacity for goal setting, the anticipation of possible consequences of future actions, and the formation of proactive motivation. With forethought, individuals can anticipate the outcomes of their actions, assess risks and opportunities, and motivate themselves even before the action begins. This enables them to act proactively rather than merely react to ongoing events.

Intentionality and forethought are closely interrelated with two other fundamental functions of agency — self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness.

Self-reactiveness is responsible for self-regulation and self-control, while self-reflectiveness refers to the ability to analyze one’s own experience, evaluate one’s actions, and adjust them accordingly. The realization of all these functions largely depends on self-efficacy and an individual’s belief in their own capacity to successfully perform specific actions and achieve desired outcomes.

IT IS PRECISELY A HIGH LEVEL OF SELF-EFFICACY THAT TRANSFORMS THEORETICAL FREEDOM INTO A REAL ABILITY TO ACT.

In theory, a person exercises their freedom and agency through active choice and by changing their environment, where they do not simply adapt to circumstances, but consciously choose which environment to be in and even actively transform it in accordance with their goals.

## The Paradox of Choice as a “Trap” for Freedom

Barry Schwartz’s paradox of choice is regarded as one of the key cognitive barriers of modern times; in a world where individuals are confronted daily with an excessive number of options, ranging from products and services to

career paths and partners, an overabundance of choice, rather than enhancing freedom, imposes a significant psychological burden. It leads to decision paralysis, when a person is completely unable to make a decision; decision fatigue, rapid depletion of psychological resources due to constant comparison, rising opportunity costs, a persistent feeling that another option might have been better, and escalating expectations, where reality almost never matches an idealized conception.

As a result, decision-making styles are clearly divided into maximizers, who strive to find the best possible option and often suffer from intense regret, anxiety, and dissatisfaction, and satisficers, who settle for a «good enough» option and maintain significantly higher levels of satisfaction and psychological well-being.

In a broader philosophical-psychological context, the paradox of choice significantly intensifies what Irvin Yalom called the «burden of authorship» when there is a sense of full responsibility for one's life in the absence of external authorities and ready-made meanings.

This burden is closely intertwined with the escape mechanisms described by Erich Fromm, in which a person, unable to bear freedom and loneliness, flees into authoritarianism, destructiveness, conformism, or symbiotic relationships.

At the same time, cognitive biases act as powerful filters through which reality is perceived. Confirmation bias leads individuals to seek only information that reinforces their existing beliefs. Loss aversion makes them excessively cautious and reluctant to take risks, while stereotyping reduces the world's complexity to rigid categories, limiting their ability to perceive genuine possibilities.

According to contemporary psychological theories, psychological trauma further complicates this picture. It shifts the locus of control from internal to external, undermines self-efficacy, and blurs the boundaries of the self. It also contributes to the emergence of an existential vacuum and to the activation of defensive distortions of reality. As a result, individuals begin to perceive themselves as victims of circumstances, lose confidence in their ability to influence the course of their lives, and often resort to dysfunctional coping strategies.

## Conclusions

The restoration of subjectivity under such conditions requires systematic and profound work on the part of the individual and includes:

- overcoming cognitive barriers,
- gradual strengthening of self-efficacy,
- restoration of volitional engagement,
- gradual recovery of the sense of authorship over one's own life.

**The integration of all these concepts demonstrates that psychological freedom is not simply the absence of external constraints, but rather a complex, dynamic system of interrelated processes and internal resources.**

It includes:

- overcoming the “burden of freedom” and Erich Fromm’s mechanisms of escape,
- the development of Viktor Frankl’s “will to meaning,” “freedom of attitude,” “responsibility,” and “tragic optimism”,
- meeting the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness within the framework of self-determination theory,
- developing intrinsic motivation and full agency, according to Albert Bandura,
- Carl Rogers' unconditional positive regard,
- a conscious engagement with Barry Schwartz’s “paradox of choice,” cognitive biases, and the consequences of psychological trauma.

Only through active self-determination, creativity, productive love, responsibility, and sustained intrinsic motivation is a person capable of transforming existential isolation, anxiety, and choice paralysis into an authentic, meaningful, and genuinely free mode of existence.

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