

¿Qué tipo de libertad queremos?

06.10.2023

Von

Michael Kranawetvogl

¿Qué tipo de libertad queremos?

Esta contribución está escrita en inglés y será ofrecida en lengua castellana una vez que sea posible traducirlo. De momento quedará disponible en inglés en esta plataforma para los lectores que dominen esta lengua o quieran leerlo con la ayuda de una traducción automática.

What is the freedom we want?

Contents

Freedom. A philosophical question?

Paradigms of freedom as emerging in present

Do we really care about freedom?

The right of freedom

Freedom, self sufficiency, self-administration

Freedom does not exist

Freedom of choice

“World Freedom Organization” versus free local initiative

Freedom for the free social sphere

Rights and liberties

Freedom of the Western World?

Steiner’s Philosophy of Freedom. Freedom as a personal experience

Questions of actuality and future

Freedom. A philosophical question?

Freedom is a word that is all around us. In our days, and especially in the last two years, the call for freedom has become frequent again. However, what do we mean by this big little word?

In 1809, Schelling wrote *The Philosophy of Freedom* (Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom), based on theological ground questions, and in 1884, Rudolf Steiner published his homonymous work, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, based on a comprehensive analysis of human thinking, feeling and willing, describing how these faculties of the soul interact, and in which way they should do so for a human deed to be called truly free.

Do we have a culture of philosophical and spiritual education that is able to produce in the young generation some approximate understanding of the human being, including a real sensation of its value, dignity and freedom? Have we learnt and are we able to “describe” for ourselves what freedom is or means to us? Beyond what is said in text books, glossaries of philosophical concepts, etc.? Do we allow ourselves to feel some enthusiasm about human freedom?

The Covid crisis, with worldwide lockdowns and restrictions of civil rights on a scale never seen before in human history, seemed to be calling out for us to reflect upon questions such as: what is human freedom? And, what is the freedom we want? So at this point of history mankind’s evolution there is an opportunity for these questions to arise and to seek clarification as our consciousness rises to meet them.

Paradigms of freedom as emerging in present

With this article, I don’t pretend to treat all concepts of freedom that exist in the history of philosophy, nor am I concerned with lists of freedom rights enshrined in constitutions around the world, and neither do I analyse the constitutional movements that fought for the inclusion of liberty in national constitutions. My only intention is to observe certain phenomena that seem to be more prevalent lately. These phenomena, which I suggest to understand as symptoms or indicators of the state of mind of society, suggest many people are making attempts to explore for themselves answers to the question of what freedom means to them, to what extent they are ready to fight for it, or looking for some ideology to connect with in order to understand what is happening to them.

During the last three years I have observed, in a wide variety of social contexts, and from individuals grounded in a variety of ideologies, indications of a growing awareness of the need to question the fundamental concept of freedom, its purpose, its extent and its limits. This piece is my attempt to make sense and order of my observations. The phenomena I have observed seem to me indications of important and necessary changes happening at this time. Their magnitude and recursive nature justify an attempt to identify their most essential aspects and to propose a structure of meaning that would frame them.

Do we really care about freedom?

Freedom, on the one side, can be seen as the ultimate aim of the individual and as one of the highest social ideals (next to equality and fraternity); on the other hand, the concept of freedom easily

transforms itself into an empty phrase, an idle question, which through complacency no longer sparks fervent enthusiasm as it did in other times, in other individuals and social groups.

How many times have we heard “my freedom ends when others' freedom begins”?—a formula that everyone can be content with for the rest of their lives. And how surprised can we be when someone else comes to a quite different, if not opposite, conclusion? For example the grateful surprise was mine when I read the same statement seen from the other side, by Antonio García Trevijano a free-thinking legal scholar, lawyer and public notary: “My freedom does not end when the freedom of the other begins; rather it begins with the freedom of the other. I can only be free with the freedom of others. I cannot be free if you aren't.” This example teaches us that our understanding of things (even concepts that are as central as human freedom) can be dulled by traditional phrases and habits of thought. We must be vigilant to avoid choosing only the most comfortable meaning.

The right to freedom

First of all, I would like to point out one aspect of freedom which is essential in our democratic consciousness: our modern non-confessional societies, with the core and fundamental right of religious freedom and free thought and speech, also allows us to freely express all kinds of moral, legal and spiritual concerns. However the question is whether these are full-heartedly welcome by the state who laid down these civil rights for us. The normal “democratic” situation is that critical voices and ethical concerns be accepted as some type of private opinion (maybe erroneous, exaggerated, of unilateral ideology, romantic thinking, utopic idealization, etc.) that should not further disturb practical political business.

In this sense we have adapted the bad habit of living in a cloud of free but ever “subjective” thoughts of independent bodies or individuals that in the end remain irrelevant for any political decision. This makes moral and religious freedom an illusion as far as it is considered a force unwanted to intervene in questions of public concern.

In our western democratic society, ethical concerns can be freely expressed “by definition” but do not have practical consequences; in fact they can be reduced any time to what now is called “ethical subjectivism. On the other side, scientific facts are considered objective and have a binding effect for political decisions, although a free scientific debate is often unwanted. Are we aware of this dichotomous reality, and do we want this reality in which public opinion is built between credit and discredit, and where the conditions for building our own personal responsible judgment are very complex and challenging? After all, we are responsible of understanding the serious things happening in the world. Here, “free formation of opinion” is under danger of delegating thoughts to other authorities that will take objective science-based decisions, or denying the value of any authority's point of view because of its unavoidable “ethical subjectivism”. If we reduce truth to a common “factual truth”, there is little chance and sense in the exchange of thoughts about a certain matter; if truth is something subjective, it does not even make sense to start exchanging thoughts. If we literally forget that thoughts are free and that they are ours and that we are responsible for them, we don't give any value to them; only if we can do value them can we also give value to ourselves, and to others in whom we trust that, independent of whether their judgments are right or wrong, “subjective” or “objective”, they have made the effort to explore truth. This means giving freedom to the other, to understand truth as something that needs to be constructed by everyone, and freedom as something that has to be discovered through one's own effort. I believe this is the case in both the personal encounter and in the whole democratic culture. If we do not have that type of essential experience of free thinking (as opposed, for example, to the right of freedom

of thought), we can make many reflections on the nature of freedom; the proposal of this text is to start from one's own self-questioning.

Freedom, self sufficiency, self-administration

Given these circumstances, it is understandable that many people in our times interpret freedom in a way that emphasizes their personal sense of autonomy. Mistrust of the public/political realm drives a concern for self-sufficiency and personal survival as defining properties of freedom.

In other periods of counterculture movements such as those in the sixties and seventies of the last century, people strived to create communities far away from centers of power. Similarly, in our time, many people perceive the "system" as adverse, something to distance oneself from. Resistance to dictatorial state power seems futile, and removing oneself physically from the reach of regulation and control is impossible, so another response arises: an inner emigration. Such people are typically seeking the appropriate external environment for their inner values. Where does the value of a free inner space reside? What are its characteristics? And, do freedom and autonomy exist within society, or do they need their own realm outside society?

One lesson we can learn from people that are active in the recurrent waves of the dropout movement is to acknowledge their will to build up their own freedom instead of demanding it from others. The fact that they are able to construct their own conditions and environment for their "private" freedom in self-sufficiency points to still another approach: self administered communities that give themselves a social mission, be it in small local agricultural initiatives of direct consuming, regional systems of local interchange of goods and services, local currencies, or even free schools, self governed by parents and teachers. These free initiatives, which are more or less benevolently tolerated by the state, are big challenges in our times, because they require creativity, phantasy, initiative, engagement, commitment, continuity, idealism, sense of community, and much more. At the same time they give options for dropout movements to become more than a protest movement. Freedom, in this type of initiative, turns into self-responsibility and the need to learn how to navigate a wide variety of novel experiences on the way towards its realization.

"Freedom does not exist"

As I said before, I don't mean to talk too theoretically about different concepts of freedom in our times, but rather about the way people express their understanding of freedom today, across all kinds of social groups. Some friends and colleagues of mine maintain a strictly Marxist point of view: the principle of historic materialism, where the idea of human freedom has no place.

I am everything but Marxist or communist, but I do have a deep admiration for Marx's attempt to expose how material circumstances determine and condition brutally the lives and fate of humans. And people in my near environment maintain a true interest in Marxist thoughts, people with a true and honourable concern for social questions, and also with a high degree of social commitment. The other day, one of these colleagues mentioned that ideas such as freedom have no reality, and that the only things that matter are the real conditions of life, that need to be changed. In Engels' "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific", we find: "The ultimate causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in the heads of men, not in their better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in the changes in the conditions of [economic] production ...". In this way of thinking, the material conditions of production

determine what we think in social, political and spiritual life. It is not the consciousness of man that determines their being, but conversely their social being that determines their consciousness.

Asked how it is possible that there are people that bear the ideal of human freedom and the individual in their heart and are fighting for it with all their might, the answer is the same that I remember from student times and lively discussions with Marxist agitation groups: there are exceptions to the conditions of production, where people, by birth and privilege, are set free from working, and so have time to invent all kinds of ideas, among them their beloved idea of freedom.

The “abolition of religion as illusionary happiness of the people” postulated by Marx finds a continuation in modern Marxist thinking in a way that ideas and ideals such as human freedom, dignity and fraternity only exist to distract from the real circumstances that need to be changed. The question here can be: what gives us the right to assume that ideas that always have occupied peoples’ minds have less reality than any object of the outer world of senses?

Freedom of choice

After all the fore-mentioned interpretations of freedom as they make themselves valid and felt in these times, another and possibly central aspect is the freedom of choice between yes or no.

Freedom of choice became especially pertinent when it came to the decision on whether to get the Covid vaccine or not. In this respect, a previous variant of the idea of free choice, referring to freely choosing any out of many possible treatments or therapies, was downgraded in the public mind, by restricting public discussion to the question of Yes or No to the vaccine.

This has created division all over society, and this division has been felt sharply in groups of friends and in families. We might allow freedom to the thoughts of others because we do not really care about what they think, or we might accept them reluctantly, with clenched teeth. However, we can give real freedom to the other by acknowledging that truth can be seen from this side or the other, and from even more than two sides.

But beyond all of this, the point is that the freedom to choose only between two options that someone has imposed upon us has nothing to do with freedom. As soon as we decide between Yes or No, Here or There, we are caught in the trap of our own dual and dialectic reasoning, so hard to eradicate from our modern habits of thought. For example, any referendum which offers only two different options, sacrifices a whole lot of nuances in between, where democratic discussion can take place and where we can evaluate for ourselves: Yes, under which conditions, and No, at what cost? What if, instead of choosing existing, given and already pre-thought options, we conceive freedom as the ability to maintain a dynamic equilibrium between two opposites that needs to be adapted to changing conditions and insights?

Sticking to the idea of freedom as an ever present freedom of choice in any life situation implies the danger of forgetting about the essence of freedom, which is quite opposite to freedom of choice: the will to create something new, something that was not there before, and that could only be born from or by ourselves, a new thought, independent of conventions, norms, traditions and routines of the past.

“World Freedom Organization” versus free local initiative

Needless to say, in the last years the growing interference of politics and big business in professions of the free cultural sphere has affected the lives of almost everyone. A prime example of this interference has been in the field of health, and the role of medical professionals. Therefore it is important to give serious and thorough consideration to the nature of the doctor-patient relationship, and acknowledge that its optimum benefit is only possible when there is free and mutual trust. It is possible to have trust in the individual. Can we afford to have trust in the family doctor, in his/her commitment, professionalism and ethics, without need for the self-imposed authority of great global world organisations whose members are no representatives of freedom? On the contrary, their interest in political power, in combination with economic interests, cannot be overseen. Surely, freedom has to exist throughout the whole cultural life.

It is remarkable that these world organizations also develop models in which they explain how freedom works and will work in the future. The WEF promotes the universal basic income as “liberty’s main prerequisite” and a means to give young people the “freedom to experiment with different careers”, and relates universal basic income to “our understanding of what it means to be free” (WEF, A ‘simple policy’ to make a universal basic income a reality, Nov 3, 2016). The promise of all this is that universal basic income will allow everyone to be a free actor in a free world, to make dreams come true, deploy all kinds of artistic and creative potentials in the individual, and allow free self-realisation and self-fulfillment. Again, we have a high-level institution (in this case not official nor democratically elected), which tells us what our freedom can be. It does not grant freedom as official declarations do, but promises it as a self-proclaimed authority. Not as the highest good of man, but as the promise of paradise on earth. Are we happy with the highest entities caring so much for our freedom? Are we still able to have our own visions?

In this actual moment of history, the production of text-books and educational material hasten to include content that is aligned with the global goals of Agenda 2030. However, when it comes to questions of how to design, finance and manage local and regional initiatives for energy supply, food production, and local currencies, to give some examples, it will be hard to find official text books that provide ideas, best practices, or recommendations in these matters.

Freedom for the free social sphere

The ‘free’ choice of Yes or No, to be (vaccinated) or not to be (vaccinated), leads us away from the core question, about the freedom of doctors and medical personal. Not the freedom to recommend the vaccine or not recommend it; not the freedom of the patients to receive the shot or not; I am talking about the freedom that everyone can exert who is an active professional in the field. To what extent, if any, are professional expertise and authority freely expressed? Should every doctor (but also every teacher, judge, journalist, etc.) have to defend the point that he or she has the professional autonomy to say what is right for the patient? Do they have the right and obligation to speak out in full freedom whatever they have to say, for example and above all on the risks involved in the vaccines and regarding statistics that evidence severe side effects?

If at this point, society consents that doctors, judges, writers, philosophers, teachers, or anyone belonging to the sphere of intellectual/spiritual work, have no freedom to say what they have to say, be it in just and necessary defense of their patients and students, or be it “only” for the freedom of their clients, readers and followers, we may as well forget about freedom and everything that has been said about it in the history of mankind. Art and thought have to be free, and for everyone active in any of the cultural/spiritual spheres. No fear is justified, no appeal is necessary and no suppressive measure need

be taken against doctors or teachers that, feeling responsible for the people they are there for, communicate statements that do not align with mainstream thought. Should we not assume that medical professionals do what they feel is necessary according to their code of ethics and professional conduct and according to their state of knowledge and science? The value of science is that it is free and has always contributed to the evolution of society. Where there is no free debate in a scientific community, there is no real science.

If we do not defend the freedom of doctors, teachers and artists as the freedom of the other (as an individual good that also has its superior value in a broad social context), our freedom, too, will be gone tomorrow, no matter in which way we have interpreted it for ourselves. In order for freedom to exist and become fruitful as a social reality, the only prerequisite is trust in the human being and its nature as a free being. There is no need to fear that freedom would denaturalize into anarchic chaos, nor in the reductionism that places the human being in a mechanical context where it has to function as someone supposes it should. Trust in the human being does not mean trusting in it as a reliably functioning machine; neither is there any need to fear that anarchical tendencies have to be supervised. I am proposing a trust in the deep spiritual nature of the human being, including its unquestionable freedom, understood as something everyone can feel and observe as a reality in themselves, and not as a definition taken out of a book.

Rights and liberties

The experience of governmental pressure and restriction of civil rights made in the last three years has brought with itself a far higher level of awareness of civil and human rights. What I have perceived in online discussion forums, social media and conferences, is a growing interest, awareness and responsibility regarding legal questions. Whereas before matters pertaining to such things as the contents of laws and constitutions, to the relation of positive law to natural law, and to the differences between laws and regulations, were considered as exclusively the domain of experts, these are increasingly seen as the concerns of “normal people”. It is only natural that the given circumstances provoked that arising of consciousness. I am reminded of the situation of the working class at the beginning of the last century, when the study of Marx’s economic science became more widespread.

A great part of the ongoing movement arising against new governmental pressure and restriction of civil rights in the last two and a half years, which seemed untouchable before, is nourished by people that have a high level of legal awareness of right and wrong. They know exactly what their civil rights are, and have the sure sense that these are an essential part of general human rights.

In the last few years, more than before, I read and heard core contents of legal texts cited, commented and put up for public discussion, such as fundamental pieces of the Spanish Constitution pertaining to “the free development of the personality” and “fundamental rights and liberties” (Part I, Fundamental Rights and Duties, Section 10). I was struck by one statement that was made at a demonstration, claiming that no State or Constitution “needs to tell me that I am free, because I know quite well what I want/have to do”. Such statements, although they might only be voiced by a minority, go beyond the discussion of guarantees such as those of free speech and press on a legal level. Some new awareness can be observed in these examples, which also go beyond the philosophy of the aforementioned Natural Law, because there is no attempt to connect with, or seek justification from, some natural/moral principle or highest possible level of right and law. The attempt here is to connect with one’s Self and with one’s own freedom as the highest good, with the readiness of knowing and the willingness to fight for one’s

own inner conviction. A self-affirmation that to me seems typical of the struggle of consciousness in the modern human being.

Freedom of the Western World?

In our western society, it is easy to use freedom as a phrase that always sounds good, but what is behind it? In a recent declaration, the World Economic Forum (WEF) welcomes the existence and function of free and independent bodies that have their own ethical principles of what can be done or not in genetic manipulation and programming, or any other technological innovations such as brain implants and other “advances” in neurotechnology that are promoted by the very same WEF. (WEF, “Augmented tech can change the way we live, but only with the right support and vision”, Aug 16, 2022).

This is one example of deceitful rhetoric in which the concept of freedom is used in a hypocritical way. The WEF’s promotion of the independent work of bio-ethic experts is in plain contradiction to what the WEF pursued and promoted at the Event 201 in 2019, recommending highly efficient algorithms that scan the whole web for “disinformation”, that is, suspicious and unwanted information spread by independent scientists, professionals, experts, investigative journalists etc. Why is the free work of those intellectual workers not given the same importance, value and dignity as of those whose independent cooperation is so positively valued?

Under these circumstances and in this context, we can ask ourselves: In western civilization, where have all the flags of freedom gone, along with the mainstream political voices who flew those banners? A few years ago, western politicians would take any opportunity to crow loftily about the inherent freedom of the western “democratic” system. In 2015, after the terrorist attacks on the office of satiric magazine Charlie Hebdo, the streets in Paris were full of people declaiming the fundamental rectitude and necessity of freedom (in the sense of press freedom, and in the sense of the great social ideas that were born in France: freedom, equality, fraternity). In that moment, many western politicians spoke up in defense of the high values of freedom and democracy of the western world, even though this meant defending free speech as the right to offend religious sentiments.

In our present of 2022/23, the phrase of western freedom, with the synonyms of “Free World” or “Free Western World”, has been revived and is heading towards a status similar to the one it had in times of Cold War. In his speech before the US Congress in 22th of December 2022, Ukrainian president Zelensky addressed “all those who value freedom and justice, who cherish it as strongly as we Ukrainians” and added: “We stand, we fight and we will win. Because we are united. Ukraine, America and the entire free world.” In an earlier speech to the Ukrainian people, 8th of May 2022, Zelensky expressed his gratefulness for western support, stating that Ukraine was “already a full-fledged part of the free world and a united Europe”. The old rhetoric of Cold War was extremely felt when Zelensky mentioned that “it is clear to the whole free world that Ukraine is the party of good in this war. And Russia will lose, because evil always loses.”

This discourse, echoed in western media and positively responded to by the addressed western leaders, suggests the other side is an enemy of freedom. While this can trigger a complex discussion, what is obvious is that the big question of freedom is reduced here to a question of superiority or inferiority of systems. The focus on the external, “democratic” aspect of freedom has certain power to distract from the question of the essential or inner nature of freedom – a question that can only be answered by the individual. From the moment that freedom turns into a personal subject, it loses any dogmatic character.

Let's imagine a hypothetical encounter of two people that tell each other the way they deal with their idea of what freedom is and how they experience themselves as free or non-free beings. If they belong to two different cultures or ideologies, they might turn out fierce defenders, true representatives and faithful followers of their beliefs, religion, traditions and "systems". However, the conversation might also be about questions such as "What can make me feel or perceive myself as a free person? What value do I give to being a free person? Do I have individual moral impulses that I want to see realized in the world? To what extent can I say that my acts are motivated by the love and personal idealism that I wish them to be? Was my action guided by selfish motives, egoistic interests, habits, external norms, my own conviction, or higher ideals?

Such a dialogue from human being to human being leaves the ideological level behind. The observations and evaluations of one's own motivation, consciousness and dignity of thought and action, are beyond right or wrong, right or left; neither can they provoke antipathy and opposition.

The typically mentioned fundamental western values, besides self-determination, liberalism, democracy, and freedom, civil liberties, free markets, also include "individualism". Independently of whether or not these values can be considered genuinely western, it is true to say that they normally do not include a firm explicit commitment with the ideal of the free individual. The free spirit often runs the danger of being downgraded to a free-spirited individual that is suspected of non-conformist behavior. Here again, we have the aforementioned collision between free development and the declaration of the right of free development in western constitutions.

In this context the question may be posed on whether the "free western society" has ever declared a common and committed plea for a culture of freedom in a sense that value is given to the free spirit of the individual? A true plea for the free individual that knows how to direct their acts and thoughts, that develop their own ideas and are able to give meaning to their lives and the lives of others, that become active in their own initiatives? Rather, it is the free spirits themselves, like Hegel (Oldest System Programme), Nietzsche (Twilight of the Idols), Erich Fromm (To have or to be) or Wilhelm von Humboldt (The Limits of State Action) who had to claim an education independent of economic interests, and independent of the state.

Anyway, should education be the task of the state? The state only knows and need not know more, the citizen that receives rights from it and obeys rules, laws, regulations and measures; it cannot and should not teach what the human being is, what is its place and value on Earth and how the individual of our times can find its place and value in modern society.

On the other hand, there is no need to see the free spirit as a danger for state programs and state curriculum standards. On the contrary, the individual, in plain gratitude of developing its free spirit without facing state restrictions, will gladly provide the results of his/her free activity to everybody, while the state itself may calmly expect the fruits and outcome of free individual impulses, no matter if of a moral, social or intellectual nature, will add to society as a whole.

In times when freedom of expression is under severe threat, the subject of human freedom (some call it the "problem" of freedom) can be a subject of renewed interest. While freedom presently has become a concept that is strongly present in ideological comments on war in Ukraine, where freedom is associated with the "free western world", everyone has additional reasons to ask for the meaning and value that is given to freedom in public discourse and in his/her own judgment. Its actual usage as moral political argument that is part of the justification of action of a war party in the context of a war that has far reaching consequences across all the global civilization can serve us as an example of how a central idea in mankind's thinking deserves still deeper discernment.

Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom. Freedom as a personal experience

What I like in Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom is that there, human freedom is described in a way that can be understood and be the subject of experimentation by anyone by means of simple self-observation. In fact, Steiner wrote this book for the general readership; it was not meant for a philosophical elite.

What Steiner does is offer a complete set of human factors that influence our free or unfree acts – starting with our thinking, feeling and willing, as well as other factors such as social norms, restrictions and conventions. When he says that “the free spirit ... makes a unique and unprecedented decision. It cares neither about what others have done in the same situation nor about what they have ordained for the same case. It has purely ideal motivations”, this can serve as a reference and starting point for self-observation with respect to everything that conditions our thoughts, decisions and deeds.

How is the free “and unprecedented decision” compatible with the generality of state law or moral laws? Somewhat surprisingly, Steiner does not see the free spirit in opposition to those. All of them have their source in what in some moment other human beings created from their own free intuition. The creators of laws and designers of moral principles are human beings as you and I, “and only he becomes unfree who forgets this source and either turns laws into supra-human commandments or objective moral concepts of duty... [And] in turn, he who does not overlook that origin but seeks it in man, will recognize it as a part of the same world of ideas from which he draws his own moral intuitions.”

In this sense and in conclusion, everything we call law, be it civic, moral or scientific, needs to undergo a shared revision in a world of common interchangeable concepts, ideas and ideals. This is a process we see confirmed in the natural and necessary processes of changes to paradigms in science, evolution of thought in culture and knowledge, and amendments of constitutions and laws.

However Steiner goes much further than the classical conflict between freedom and law. On the highest level of free will, he says, the human being is able to leave behind all types of inner and outer conditioning factors, be it one's own “characterological disposition” and previous personal experiences, or any kind of external moral principles or laws. The free person “sees” and takes into account all external factors, laws and principles, and will decide for itself whether it will follow them or not, and, in the latter case follow its own moral intuition. “The action, therefore, is neither a merely stereotyped one which follows the rules of a moral code, nor is it automatically performed in response to an external impulse. Rather it is determined solely through its spiritual content” – a content which consists of the sum of concepts, ideas and ideals a person has formed within itself in its own individual manner, and from which it will find its own moral action that applies in each particular case.

Finally, putting the idea of freedom in a social context, Steiner's central point was that the individual cannot only insist on his/her own freedom, but needs to naturally develop some attitude towards the freedom of fellow human beings. Steiner then came to the formulation of the fundamental maxim of the free individual: “to live in love for one's own action, and to let live in the understanding of the other's will.” Obviously, the question “What is the freedom we want?” needs to include consideration for the freedom of the other. On this point begins a consideration that many of us feel stronger than ever in the present time: that respect for freedom of the other demands that he/she will also respect mine. How can

I trust in the absence of aberration and manipulation in the other's words? Can I learn to accurately perceive the other's intentions and be able to respond adequately? Again, this leads us to the need to ask questions of ourselves, which make sense if we do not expect the answer to come from a standby consultant.

Questions of actuality and future

The paradigms of freedom I have mentioned in this article are not those that are found in bestsellers, or voiced by influencers and expert thinkers, but are widely emerging in peoples' minds as an empirically traceable phenomenon of our times. All of these questions refer to a distinct actuality. However, focusing on just one of them in isolation can only be unilateral, and may distract us from asking what is the real essence of freedom in ourselves and society.

The reason I have cited Rudolf Steiner's *The Philosophy of Freedom* is because that work is not pure theory. If it was, it would be just another definition or paradigm of human freedom, and would be contradictory to the idea and experience of freedom in itself. It was only intended, and can only be taken as, an invitation to self-observation, which goes beyond what we are normally doing with our ordinary consciousness in everyday life, but which also is accessible to everyone. Self-observation can be uncomfortable because it requires our questioning the responsibility we want to assume for our thoughts and intentions – something we need not do if we consider our thoughts as a result of biochemical processes in our brain. In this sense, we are our own and the most proximal starting point for the question of freedom.

The changing of paradigms of human freedom and the unfolding of consciousness will inevitably continue, and the question of freedom can be expected to be increasingly important to us, depending of course on the extent to which we want to be wakeful to its ardent urgency.

There are a lot of freedoms and we are told myriad tales of what freedom is. What is the freedom we want?

