

# WHO HAS MADE THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO THE EXPANSION OF HUMAN FREEDOM IN HISTORY?

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**Abstract:** Freedom is one of the core values of human society, which has been deeply reflected in different forms in different historical periods. The progress of human civilization is closely related to the development of freedom. Freedom includes not only political freedom, economic freedom and spiritual freedom, but also the harmonious coexistence and development of man and nature, man and man, and man and himself. The expansion of freedom is not only the result of social development, but also promotes the progress of civilization at all levels of human society. As Engels said: "All cultural progress is a step towards freedom." This paper will discuss several historical figures who have far-reaching influence on the expansion of human freedom, and analyze their contributions to promoting human freedom and how these contributions formed modern society.

**Keywords:** Human liberty; Cultural advancement; Influential individuals; Societal transformation; Multidimensional freedom

## 1 INTRODUCTION

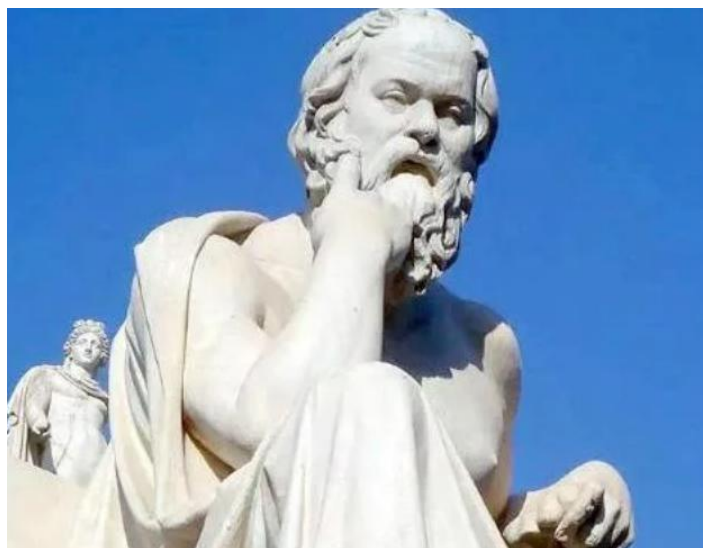
Freedom is not an abstract concept, but the core goal of human pursuit of happiness and dignity. From ancient philosophers to modern political leaders, freedom is regarded as a symbol of the progress of human society, both in the ideological field and in practical actions[1]. Freedom is not only a state of avoiding external oppression, but also a multidimensional realization of individuality, social justice and ecological harmony. As a symbol of civilization and progress, freedom has been promoted by many thinkers, revolutionaries and social movements, and has become the common goal of mankind under the background of globalization. Freedom has different meanings in different social and historical periods, but no matter how its form changes, its core is to protect personal dignity and development opportunities, and promote social justice and harmony on this basis.

## 2 FREEDOM AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A BALANCED APPROACH

The realization of freedom does not mean that individuals can do whatever they want. True freedom must be balanced within the framework of social responsibility and justice. In the process of expanding freedom, everyone should be responsible not only for his own interests and rights, but also for others, society and future generations. For example, in the practice of economic freedom, individuals and enterprises should pay attention to social interests rather than pure economic interests, and avoid realizing short-term personal interests through environmental pollution and waste of resources. The realization of freedom must be closely combined with social sustainable development, ecological protection and fairness and justice. Only under this balance can freedom not be extreme or selfish. Many great thinkers and leaders in human history have made important contributions to the expansion of freedom[2,3].

## 3 SOCRATES AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FREEDOM

Socrates is an ancient Greek philosopher and is known as one of the founders of western philosophy. His thoughts not only had a far-reaching impact on the development of western philosophy, but also provided a solid theoretical basis for later generations' freedom and moral concepts[4,5]. Socrates' view of freedom of thought is of special historical significance. He emphasized "knowing yourself" and advocated realizing personal ideological independence and moral autonomy through rational reflection. This thought not only had a far-reaching influence in ancient Greek society at that time, but also provided valuable enlightenment for the combination of individual freedom and social justice in the later civilization process.



**Figure 1** Sculpture of Socrates

### 3.1 The Socratic Method: Freedom Through Self-Examination

The concept of freedom plays an important role in Socrates' philosophical system. Freedom is not a blind resistance to the outside world, but a personal choice based on reason and moral judgment. Socrates encouraged students to reflect on themselves through interactive teaching method, and tried to help students get rid of seemingly blind follow-up and realize freedom of thought. He advocates that human beings should get rid of ignorance and prejudice and seek truth, and the process of seeking this truth itself is the embodiment of freedom[6].

The core concept of Socrates' view of freedom is "knowing yourself". This is not only a philosophical proposition, but also an attitude towards life. Socrates tried to encourage students to realize their ignorance and pursue the truth through self-exploration through his own question-and-answer dialogue method. In this process, freedom is not only a rebellion against the outside world, but also a profound reflection on self, which requires individuals to achieve a certain degree of moral and rational consciousness[7].

Through Socrates' "know yourself", people began to understand that freedom is not disorderly indulgence, but independent choice under rational and moral constraints. This thought provided a theoretical basis for the later western liberalism theory and influenced Plato, Aristotle and other philosophical concepts.

## 4 THE LIMITS OF FREEDOM: CLASSICAL VIRTUE VS. MODERN SUSTAINABILITY

Freedom is an important part of human civilization, which runs through the whole historical process. The thought of freedom in modern society is different from that in ancient times, but the core idea has continued in many ways. Socrates' pursuit of freedom was based on personal reflection and moral judgment, which had a far-reaching impact on later liberalism. Freedom is not unlimited indulgence, but requires individuals to make choices under the guidance of reason and morality. Under the influence of Socrates, later philosophers and politicians gradually realized that freedom is closely related to social responsibility, legal order, ecological sustainability and other issues, not only pursuing individual freedom, but also ignoring the common interests of society.

With the development of history, the concept of freedom is constantly evolving. In modern society, freedom includes not only ideological freedom, but also political freedom, economic freedom and social freedom. For example, both the American War of Independence and the French Revolution were based on individual rights and the pursuit of democratic politics. Behind these revolutions and movements is an extension of Socrates' thought of "knowing yourself". Individuals should not blindly obey external authority, but make their own choices according to rational and moral judgments.

But freedom is not unlimited, and a balance must be found between social and ecological sustainability. For example, economic freedom is an important part of modern society, but it cannot be at the expense of environmental damage. With the development of globalization, global environmental problems and resource depletion are becoming more and more serious. How to ensure the sustainability of the ecological environment while pursuing economic freedom has become an important challenge for modern society. The emergence of this problem reminds us that the realization of freedom must consider the carrying capacity of the ecosystem and the fairness of society.

## 5 FREEDOM ACROSS AGES: FROM PHILOSOPHICAL AUTONOMY TO DIGITAL RESPONSIBILITY

The concept of classical freedom is completely different from the concept of freedom today. Classical freedom is related to human morality and is regarded as the expression of virtue. In Socrates, freedom acts according to morality, morality is knowledge, and knowledge is the result of rational behavior, so freedom is bound by reason and morality. In Plato, virtue means goodness, goodness means ideas, and ideas are not influenced by anything in the world. That is the origin

of the world, and the world is just an advanced and lame counselor. Therefore, freedom is related to goodness as an idea. In Aristotle, freedom is related to the city-state, which is the goodness in the city-state law, an ideal and a virtue. After the Middle Ages, freedom was associated with God's salvation, which was considered as the state after salvation. We have no freedom in the world bound by sin. Only the freedom to do evil, not the freedom to do good. Therefore, individuals must be in the church and within the laws of God's belief in order to have some freedom. He must abide by the laws of God's faith, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and constantly repent, and embark on the road of salvation. Both the freedom of ancient Greece and the freedom of Christianity denied the biological characteristics of human beings, and regulated the logic of human behavior through human moral rationality. Plato's creation of human beings comes from the world of ideas. Because people get drunk, lose their minds and fall into our world. People created by Christian God are created in their own image, not from dust. This kind of creation elevates human noumenon to the world.

Therefore, people's autonomy is emphasized in the concept of classical freedom. Not from the world, he has biological nature, but he has to go beyond biological nature, so people can't act according to biological nature, but should act according to moral nature and rationality.

Therefore, in order to transcend human virtue and biological nature, individual people are more easily controlled by biological nature, so people must belong to a certain group. Therefore, Jesus said, that sheep is very dangerous, so we must abandon 99 sheep and find the one who is alone. This is not only because this sheep can't protect itself from other creatures, but also because this lonely person is more degenerate and easier to forget his moral nature.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The real realization of freedom is not only the liberation of individuals, but also the embodiment of social responsibility. In modern society, especially in the background of informationization and globalization, the realization of freedom is facing more and more challenges. With the rapid development of information technology, personal privacy, data security and network freedom have become new problems. While enjoying the freedom of information, how to protect personal privacy from infringement and how to avoid information abuse and algorithm discrimination has become an important issue to be solved urgently. Socrates' view of freedom can provide us with a framework for thinking-freedom should not only serve the interests of individuals, but also serve the well-being of the whole society.

Freedom and responsibility coexist, and they are inseparable. In the theory of social contract, members of society voluntarily give up part of their personal freedom by reaching a consensus in exchange for social stability and common interests. Freedom is not blind selfishness, but respect for others' freedom and commitment to social responsibility within the framework of rationality and morality. In this context, Socrates' thought provides us with wisdom on how to find a balance between freedom and responsibility[8].

The expansion of freedom is not only the liberation of individuals, but also the embodiment of social fairness. True freedom should be that each individual realizes his own value under the conditions of equality and justice. For example, in education, medical care, employment and other fields, equal opportunities for all are the foundation of freedom. Solving the inequality problems such as poverty, gender and race is an important prerequisite for realizing freedom. Freedom is not isolated, it is closely related to the freedom of others. If some groups cannot enjoy freedom because of social inequality, then this freedom is not real freedom.

From Socrates' philosophy, we can deeply understand that the realization of individual freedom depends not only on individual efforts, but also on social structure, resource allocation and cultural background. The expansion of freedom needs to be accompanied by the promotion of social equity. Only in a fair society can everyone realize his self-worth and enjoy real freedom under equal conditions.

As a great philosopher in ancient Greece, Socrates' concept of freedom has a far-reaching influence on later generations[9]. He not only advocates the freedom of personal thought, but also advocates the independent choice of reason and morality. In Socrates' thought, freedom and responsibility, social justice, ecological sustainability and other issues are closely related, and they complement each other. With the development of society, the connotation of freedom is constantly enriched, from political freedom to economic freedom, and then to social freedom, each form of freedom is closely related to the background of the times and social needs. The realization of freedom is not only the liberation of individuals, but also the common goal of the whole society and all mankind. In the future, we should continue to strive to find a balance between freedom and responsibility, freedom and social justice, so that freedom can be truly realized under the background of globalization and informationization.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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