

Introduction

*L*iberty, independence, freedom—we hear these words frequently from earliest childhood, spoken often with great seriousness and intonation. Being without restraint indeed strikes a unique, almost ineffable impression on the mind. Like a free-fall, liberty can feel like an intoxicating rush. Doing exactly what one wants, and not having to obey rules about what to think, what to do, what to say, where to go, what to wear—these are the things that humans innately seek. The release from a dreary obligation creates an extraordinary moment, most potent while still in the full memory of what has transpired. Whether it is travelling on a journey, learning a new language, moving into a new home, or becoming the owner of a business—whatever the level of complexity—the casting off of shackles can be exhilarating. For young people about to enter adulthood, the mind reels at the tremendous possibilities that independence finally bestows. Truly, the struggle for freedom involves all ages and backgrounds. Social leaders and government officials frequently claim that ‘liberty’ is the most precious harvest of democratic participation. Yet the word ‘liberty’ and its synonyms, when given fullest expression, are proud, bold, defiant; they imply an attitude that devalues, even discards, fellowship and mutualism as a means of fulfilment. Nonetheless, the exercise of independence does not have to be selfish, if one uses it only to attain control over life. Once ability and strength are allied with compassion, then the ideal of love can be developed.

Love—a word that can also conjure up great emotion, but one that quite frankly wavers when confronted with ‘emancipation’ and ‘free choice’. Love invariably involves being dependent to some extent on someone else, and that creates a challenge to the concept of independence. However, no matter how much one has basked in the glory of cutting bindings from oneself, the shadow of emotional desire, of affection, can never be left behind. Western cultures have repeatedly made it clear that, we cannot experience total fulfilment in life unless there is also love. In a modern world that promotes and rewards autonomy, freedom can come cheaply, yet love then comes at a premium, because the bold concept of independence comes at the risk of injury to the most crucial dynamic in a relationship, the spirit of cooperation.

Today, society makes onerous demands on people, where there is a cost not only to individual well-being, but to social stability as well. To counteract the anxious tidal forces brought on by independent minds each pulling their own way, companionship is more necessary than ever. The solidity of two people in a deep affectionate embrace can overcome all waves of change. But love cannot flourish where people press for self-determination; it is hard to strike a balance since, compared to love, the costs of independence are relatively inexpensive, and the returns are immediate.

Are love and independence implacable foes?

From the dream-like world of childhood, autonomy rises up as one of our great primary visions. Love is usually taken for granted, unless it is withheld by guardians, relatives and others in one’s social circle. It occurs naturally, as simple a concept as independence, but always strongly prone to subjective emotional forces. Quite in contrast, independence revolves around material questions and factors, which appear in various guises at different psychological phases. The desire for freedom grows out of the failure to satisfy basic personal needs. We would not need to discuss the concept of independence, if we could always find easy success in our

endeavours. When we say, one has obtained 'freedom' from something, that something must have made significant impositions on one's time, resources, intellect and emotions. The sequence of liberation is often the same: The first freedom is from the household of childhood, the second from school and teachers, the third is from an occupation, the fourth is from community and institutions. Thus, autonomy is a relative concept, entangled in context, dependent on other questions that are pertinent, such as happiness, security, friendship, mature love, self-respect, equality, comfort, and accomplishment. Love, on the other hand, stands alone, being contingent on the interaction between only two people.

It does not take long before the maturing individual discovers that life always demands a combination of freedom and service. A key question is often asked: How much freedom can an individual give up, and still be 'free'? It is not only a case of striking a balance between the two, but using each wisely. Everyone wants to be free to *choose* their own destiny, but the life one freely chooses might not be free of constraint. A person might choose to work in service to someone else, leaving hardly any time for self-directed activities. The choice of becoming a servant was entirely his, but after this free exercise of choice, the rest of life is largely given over to the decisions of his superior. This individual is indeed 'free', if by this decision he is able to avoid worry, self-doubt and conceit. He might be able to achieve all the respect and appreciation he wants in this lifestyle, in spite of the criticisms and ridicule of others about his 'despised' state. Hence, one can be truly free, and still sacrifice for another, if that is his choice. The *context* of the situation must, therefore, always be borne in mind.

However, there is no guarantee that the individual will develop the concept of 'liberty' or 'love' as an integrated whole. Instead, human beings tend to focus their attention on *results*, such as contentment, more than *methods*, such as democracy, equality, culture, solidarity, marriage, or free enterprise. Consequently, when asked

directly, 'What is the most important goal in life?', the consensus is overwhelming: *Happiness*. Nevertheless, the young person might only have a hazy conception as to how to achieve this goal, and only with age does he or she develop the knowledge to understand the method to deliver the result. Thus, in a survey of young people, 'happiness' was put ahead of 'freedom' or 'love', but in a survey consisting mostly of adults, 'family' was put first, then 'freedom'.¹ For adults, freedom is *not* the end result in life, but only a *means* to achieve something that is highly important, that of family. However, we cannot easily separate happiness, family, love, and freedom, as they are all interrelated concepts. Clearly, each component has its own rewards, but freedom and family can also be methods to fulfill the other two (love and happiness). Accordingly, if we are properly to examine the issue of independence, we must recognise that most people see it as being of secondary importance, perhaps only a means to an end. Love is a more complex issue to resolve, being found in many different situations, and so resists easy prioritisation.

Concepts relating to affection usually arise from a realisation of the coldness and sterility of autonomy. Love develops as needs become complex, as the individual becomes vulnerable and understands he cannot go it alone. One has no problem accepting the advantages of affection, but one must initially determine the costs linked to independence. Ideally, there would be little or no cost, but this is highly unusual. More likely, love takes a significant portion of one's freedom. Yet, we should also see that a loss of freedom due to other reasons can be compensated for by love. People sometimes do so successfully, but as love is the superior dynamic, it does not work the other way around, that is, freedom cannot make up for a deficiency of affection. People living in countries disrupted by dehumanising systems of government, or by the violence of war experience less freedom, and so are more likely to desire companionship as compensation. Perhaps this is the reason

why people in some areas of the world are more strongly in favour of marriage than in other areas.²

More than just temporary affection is needed, however, for the individual to feel *fulfilled*. The affection must last a lifetime, and indeed, from the individual's perspective, it must be *eternal*. There is no doubt that, as all things pass in this world, and in order for love to be transcendent, it must be *different* in substantive ways from all other artefacts of existence. This means that two people must *intend* that the mutually respectful attachment between them will always endure, even though the possibility always remains. In other words, a husband and wife must have *absolute* faith that their love for one another will never end, no matter what circumstances appertain. If there is even the slightest doubt that the consideration will end, then it is *not* true love. Such statements appear harsh, but, as the objective person understands, we have no control over the rules of the real world, we can only observe and respect them.

Thus, the basis of love is the desire for an exceptional friendship. Friendships are formed naturally and easily, often without much thought behind the process. Note the causal sequence: There must be a friendship before there can be love, but love does not necessarily arise from a friendship. The relationship which is uppermost in the minds of everyone is the unique bond, a genuinely mature union that can only exist between a man and a woman. True love, which is to say lasting love, can mutually occur between any two people, but it is most keenly felt and most extensive when it is between a man and woman, because each possesses what the other desires in order to be complete and perfect.

We should not underestimate the power of this relationship. Despite the rush of mundane business, in the midst of all the commotion and clatter of worldly matters, the allure of the opposite sex never seems to falter. Hence, no matter where a man or woman finds himself or herself, even in isolation, even where the sexes are in a great imbalance and a mate can be found only with difficulty,

the conception faithfully, perhaps irrationally, lives on. With growing maturity, one realises the uniqueness of a male-female friendship, and one understands that it can transcend all common or conventional facets of life. Work, school, the neighbourhood, relatives, obligations to company, family, state, and church, can all be places where this relationship begins, but *genuine intimate friendship* will always outgrow the place where it began. Nothing can ultimately keep it from growing, and nothing can ever ruin it. The only end to the true love between a man and woman must come from the inside, not the outside. And, of course, if a supposedly true love relationship ends, then it was not true love to begin with. The test of a friendship is its ability to resist to threats and stresses; it must be profound and long-lasting.

Where do we find true friendship? We find it through observing behaviour which will lead to mutual respect; without respect there is no trust, and therefore no exchange of knowledge, resources, and validation. *Respect* is ultimately built on the belief that the other person has *control over his or her life*, derived from rational, thoughtful behaviour, and allied with compassion and concern. Further, one can learn from the other how to be in control, because respect breeds a desire to imitate the best characteristics of the other. Respect is a highly significant fundamental concept where the binding effects act in a recursive fashion. Hence, if a wife says 'my husband does not listen to me', we can gather much from this simple statement. We know that she and he are both not in control; she is not, because the husband does not respect her, and he is not, because she has not at least learned from her husband how to be in control. Conscious regulation of various areas is essential, and this ability is manifested in one's traits.

Clearly, in searching out friendship, there are many personal characteristics that emerge from one's background and personality, literally hundreds of details relating to emotions, intellect, physique, career, education, and habits can be subsumed into catego-

ries. We can fortunately say that aspects exist which are universally attractive, and that are objectively superior to other attributes. These traits are called *virtues*—a word derived from the Latin *virtus* meaning *strength*—because they bestow power on the individual who possesses them. The virtuous person is worthy of esteem, and it can come from his own family, friends, or even further afield. The virtues are described using many different terms, often depending on whether the discourse is considered religious or secular. They can, however, be distilled to seven essential concepts (although these are not exhaustive descriptions):

❖ Purity: clarity of mind and healthiness of body; a resolve not to have one's intellect dulled by status pursuits, servitude to trends, or toxic ideas, or to have one's physical strength impaired by over-indulgence in food, drink, or harmful substances.

❖ Objectivity: honesty; sincerity; a good faith investigation of a situation, and consideration of all the relevant facts.

❖ Perfectability: a need to eliminate all ignorance, all ugliness in character, and all wastefulness; a search for understanding; a desire to practise correctness in all situations; a strong desire for self-improvement.

❖ Caution (reservation, scepticism): a desire to carefully study and test all things, especially before a large investment of resources is made, so as to prevent neglect, exploitation or destruction.

❖ Devotion: the desire and discipline to hold on to what is good and to shun what is bad; a genuine preparation to make sacrifices and to renounce personal aims when necessary.

❖ Empathy: a habitual action where the individual puts himself in the place of others who might be affected by his behaviour, in order to vicariously experience their thoughts and feelings.

❖ Integrity: the ability to look at oneself as a complete individual, with a stable, integrated persona; the desire to maximise one's reputation, and the desire to see all the other virtues maximised and existing simultaneously.