

Why we Love Liberty and Freedom but Dislike Responsibility

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(first edition)

Version 1.10-web (en) from 1st October 2026

This paper has shown that, for a statistical majority of people, the feeling of *responsibility* cannot evoke positive emotions, but rather is bound to evoke negative emotions.

In contrast, the feeling of *liberty and of freedom* is simultaneously accompanied by the activation of the physiological reward system and triggers positive emotions in a statistical majority of people. That is why the feeling of *liberty and of freedom* impresses and inspires a statistical majority of people and can even give rise to a more or less strong psychological dependence.

It is precisely this connection that has proved to be the psychological reason for the ‘love’ of a statistical majority of people for *liberty* and for *freedom* and their ‘aversion’ to *responsibility*.

This paper may be of interest to readers who are interested in questions of psychology, sociology and their connection to the functioning of the physiological reward system.

This (first) edition (Version 1.10 (en)) was published on 1st October 2026 , German National Library, <https://d-nb.info/1420967452/>

The manuscript of the first chapter of this work was written on 5th February 2026.

The first edition in German (Version 1.10 (de)) was published at 1st October 2026 , German National Library, <https://d-nb.info/1420969498/>

The first edition in Russian (Version 1.10 (ru)) was published at 1st October 2026 , German National Library, <https://d-nb.info/1420968351/>

Everyone has no doubt noticed that the feeling of *responsibility* tends to evoke negative rather than positive emotions: if I am responsible for something, I must or have to do this and that. In contrast, the feeling of *liberty* and of *freedom* generally evokes positive emotions: I don't have to do anything, but can do whatever I want (within the scope of a particular freedom). That is why the feeling of *liberty* and of *freedom* impresses people and even inspires them. Why is that the case? What are the reasons for this emotionally different perception of *responsibility* and of *freedom* (of *liberty*)? It is precisely this question that we would like to answer here.

Let us first consider the concept of *responsibility*¹.

Principally, *responsibility* can only arise as a result of a choice (decision) made or of an action taken², i.e. *responsibility* can only lie in the future in relation to the choice (decision) made or the action taken. Therefore, in order to grasp the concept of *responsibility*, one must possess the ability to reflect on possible (future) states – in short: the ‘ability to reflect on the future’, which we have termed *risk reflection*; see also [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.4 “Cognising Systems and Causal Thinking”. Without the ability to *risk reflection*, it is simply impossible to reflect on anything that might occur as a result of a particular choice or action.

Therefore, the fundamental ability to understand and comprehend the concept of *responsibility*³ necessarily presupposes that human beings⁴ possess the capacity for *risk reflection*, i.e. for reflecting on a part of possible (future) states that encompass both the world surrounding the human and the human him-/herself, including his or her own finitude as a system; see CHAPTER II, Section 2.3 ‘Risk Reflection’ in [1].

As we noted in [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.4 “Cognising Systems and Causal Thinking”, *the risk reflection* is in turn one of the consequences of “the capacity to distinguish states”. In [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.5 “Causal Relation and Learned Association”, it was established that the “the capacity to distinguish states” is unique to the system of *causal thinking*⁵, because only the system of *causal thinking* is capable of performing the operation of *comparison*.

This gives rise to the following chain of necessary dependencies: the system of *causal thinking*, is the base for “the capacity to distinguish states”, which represents, in turn, the basis for *the risk reflection*; it is thanks to *the risk reflection* that the ability to comprehend the concept of *responsibility* arises.

As already noted in [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.5 “Causal Relationships and Learned Associations”, only humans (more precisely: natural and legal persons) currently possess the

¹ RESPONSIBILITY: ... 2. The necessity, the duty, to be accountable to someone for one's own actions and deeds; *Ozhegov Explanatory Dictionary online*, <https://slovarozhegova.ru/word.php?wordid=19009>; RESPONSIBILITY: A person's ability to govern their actions in accordance with the social, moral and legal norms and rules prevailing in society or the community, as well as with a sense of duty ...; *Pedagogical Dictionary*. — Moscow: Academy. G. M. Kodjaspirova, A. J. Kodjaspirov, 2005, <https://pedagogical.academic.ru>.

² The term ‘*responsibility*’ encompasses two types of responsibility: *responsibility for action* and *responsibility for choice* (for decision-making); see [1], CHAPTER I: THE UNIVERSAL FORM OF BEING, Section 4.2 “Frequently Encountered Categorical Complementarities”, Subsection A1. Unless expressly stated otherwise in the text, the term *responsibility* encompasses both types.

³ RU: понимать и осознавать; DE: verstehen und begreifen

⁴ In the general case – a *quasi-stochastic* system. This term is defined as “all types of stochastic systems that do not possess the ‘Markov property’”, see [1], CHAPTER I: THE UNIVERSAL FORM OF BEING, Section 3.3 “Stochastic and Deterministic Processes”, Def. 11.

⁵ On the terms “*associative system*” and “*causal system*”: see [1], CHAPTER II: THE HUMAN. THE ANIMATE. THE INANIMATE, sections 2.5–2.8. These systems correspond to System 1 and System 2, respectively, as defined by D. Kahneman.

system of *causal thinking*; see also Section 2.8 “The Dynamics of Sociums and the Use of Associative and Causal Systems” in the same work.

To facilitate further reading, we would like to briefly explain the concept of *learned associations* at this point.

In humans, as in all living beings possessing any kind of nervous system – whether centralised or decentralised – there exists the *associative system* responsible for rapid, spontaneous and intuitive reactions to the current situation without rational deliberation⁵. The *associative system* is automatically activated when a person finds themselves in a situation that is familiar to them, i.e. for which they already have an association stored in their long-term memory. The *associative system* matches the current situation with one that has already been stored, and if they match, the corresponding association stored in long-term memory is used as a guide for action⁶.

Since the *associative system* works with associations that are already stored in long-term memory, insofar as they exist there, the use of the *associative system* saves the individual’s resources, because the *matching operation* and the absence of rational deliberation, i.e. the absence of forming causal chains, require a significantly lower expenditure of resources than the *comparison operation* and forming causal chains through the creation of more abstract models of the current situation⁵. It is precisely this lower resources consumption⁷ that is being rewarded by the physiological reward system; see [2], Chapter 1.

Let us now turn to the concept of *freedom*^{8,9}.

NOTE on the semantic relationship between the notions of ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ for the English edition only: see Attachment #1 on p. 9 below.

It should be noted that *freedom*, as a concept, constitutes a categorial complementarity to the concept of *responsibility*; see [1], CHAPTER I, Section 4.2 “Frequently occurring categorial complementarities”, Subsection A1.

It should also be noted that *freedom of action*, as (already) recognised necessity¹⁰, is based on and makes use of *learned associations*¹¹. *Free will*, on the other hand, is *freedom of choice*¹².

When does a statistical majority of people feel ‘free’ from a psychological point of view? They feel ‘free’ when they do not have to consciously adhere to any norms or rules, i.e. when they do not have to impose rational restrictions on themselves: ‘I must (or must not) do and/or choose

⁶ see [1], CHAPTER II: THE HUMAN. THE ANIMATE. THE INANIMATE, specifically Section 2.5

⁷ The Principle of Least Resources Consumption (the Principle of Most Choice), see [1], CHAPTER II: THE HUMAN. THE ANIMATE. THE INANIMATE, Section 1.2

⁸ FREEDOM: 1. In philosophy: the possibility for a subject to express their will on the basis of becoming aware of the laws governing the development of nature and society. ... 2. The absence of constraints and restrictions that bind the socio-political life and actions of a particular class, of society as a whole or of its members. ... 3. In general – the absence of any restrictions or limitations in a matter ...; *Ozhegov Explanatory Dictionary online*, <https://slovarozhegova.ru/word.php?wordid=28134>.

⁹ The concept of *freedom* encompasses two types of freedom: *freedom of choice* and *freedom of action*; see [1], CHAPTER I: THE UNIVERSAL FORM OF BEING, Section 4.2 “Frequently Encountered Categorial Complementarities”, Subsection A1. Unless expressly stated otherwise in the text, the concept of *freedom* encompasses both types.

¹⁰ (Handlungs-)freiheit ist die Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit (according to G. W. F. Hegel).

¹¹ see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.10 and CHAPTER III, Section 3, before Def. 24

¹² see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.2, Def. 18

this or that in order to conform to a certain norm'. Psychologically, a statistical majority of people equate the feeling of *freedom* with *free will*, i.e. with *freedom of choice*.

Rational self-restraint, however, is an exclusive prerogative of the system of *causal thinking*. This means that a statistical majority of people no longer feel 'free' as soon as the system of *causal thinking* is set in motion within them.

This leaves only one possibility in which a statistical majority of people – from a psychological perspective – feel 'free': this occurs only in those situations where they do not use the system of *causal thinking*, but exclusively the system of *learned associations* / *associative reacting*. A typical example of such a situation is routine cycling or driving under normal traffic conditions. In fact, a consistent reduction to a minimum of the constraints and obstacles in the actions of the statistical majority of society's members means that, with rare exceptions, they find themselves in situations with which they are already well acquainted. Indeed, the fewer constraints and obstacles there are, the less a person needs to think rationally (causally) about which constraints and obstacles exist in the situation at hand and how to deal with them.

When a person relies exclusively on the system of *learned associations* / *associative reacting*, they make choices (decisions) and act in accordance with situations or episodes already stored in their memory as soon as such situations recur in their environment; see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.5 "Causal Relation and Learned Association". Their behaviour is then not guided by a rational (causal) adherence to rules, but by norms (conditioned reflexes¹³) that have already been internalised (mainly during childhood and adolescence) and which are no longer subject to conscious perception.

It is precisely this adherence to preconscious norms (conditioned reflexes) that gives rise to the psychological feeling of 'freedom'¹⁴.

¹³ see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.7 "Conscious Perception and Associative and Causal Systems" and 2.8 "The Dynamics of Sociums and the Use of Associative and Causal Systems"

¹⁴ TERRIBLE! So that means that a human or an animal that has been socialised in an enclosure will feel free even in a cage...

We illustrate this conclusion using the example of the processes of acquiring and applying skills, abilities and knowledge; see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.7 “Conscious perception and associative and causal systems”. We have re-used the table cited there and added the column “It is psychologically perceived by a statistical majority as follows”:

Processes of acquiring and using skills and knowledge	Type of perception	It is psychologically perceived by a statistical majority as follows:
no direct involvement of the unconscious in these processes	unconscious	is not perceived psychologically
Acquiring: - <i>associative system</i>: learned associations; based on associations with situations which the psyche deems as important for the self-preservation of the system - <i>causal system</i>: rational analysis and synthesis	conscious	as compulsion
Using: - <i>associative system</i>: associative reacting on the basis of associations already stored in memory¹⁵	preconscious	as <i>free will</i> => <i>freedom of choice</i>
Using: - <i>causal system</i>: rational analysis and synthesis	conscious	as compulsion

We can thus see that it is solely the use of the associative system – that is, *associative reacting* based on associations already stored in memory – *that* is psychologically perceived by a statistical majority of people as *freedom of choice*.

Only ‘authoritative personalities’ (“leadership personalities”)¹⁶ perceive, from a psychological perspective, also the process of rational cognition as well as rational analysis and synthesis using the *causal system* as *freedom*, because through this cognition, analysis and synthesis they

¹⁵ see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.6 “Associative Reacting or Causal Thinking?”

¹⁶ cf. [1], CHAPTER V: THE THRIFTINESS OF NATURE AND THE STABILITY OF SOCIETY, in particular Chapter 2; “noble men” according to Confucius

gain additional *freedom of action*, for example in the form of a newly learned algorithm for action in a specific situation^{17,18}.

We therefore conclude that the ability to grasp the concept of *responsibility* is inevitably linked to the use of the system of *causal thinking*, whilst the mere use of the system of *learned associations* / *associative reacting* is sufficient for the feeling of *liberty and of freedom*.

Let us now turn to the dopaminergic implications of these conclusions.

As we noted in [2], Chapter 2.3, STM. 5, “there are at least two main reasons why the feeling of ‘freedom’ (‘liberty’) regularly activates the reward system: one main reason is ‘resource-minimising’, the other – ‘anxiety-reducing’ “.

The ‘resource-minimising’ reason is that, as soon as *the associative system* is activated – which is an order of magnitude more economical in terms of resources consumption than *the causal system*¹⁹ – this is accompanied, in a statistical majority of humans and in all animals, by an automatic activation of the physiological reward system and a release of dopamine, as we have established in [2], Chapter 1. In this way, the minimisation of resources consumption is rewarded. If *the associative system* cannot cope with the current situation because it cannot find a situation already stored in memory that corresponds to the current one, and consequently (in humans only) *the causal system* is activated – which consumes an order of magnitude more resources than *the associative system* – the reward system is not activated in a statistical majority of people and, consequently, no dopamine is released.

The ‘anxiety-reducing’ reason lies in the fact that the feeling of ‘freedom’ activates the physiological reward system in order to reinforce such a behavioural pattern that overcomes existential angst in all its forms; see [2], Chapter 2.3 “Liberty”.

Taking into account the above arguments and interrelationships, we conclude that the feeling of *responsibility*, which is inevitably linked to *the causal system*, cannot evoke positive emotions in a statistical majority of people, but rather negative ones.

In contrast, the feeling of *liberty and of freedom*, which is inevitably linked to *the associative system*, goes hand in hand with the activation of the physiological reward system and, consequently, with the release of dopamine²⁰, triggering positive emotions in a statistical majority of people. This is why the feeling of *liberty and of freedom* impresses and inspires a statistical majority of people and can even give rise to a psychological dependence of varying intensity²¹.

¹⁷ see [2], Chapter 1 “The physiological reward system and susceptibility to propaganda”

¹⁸ see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.8 ‘The Dynamics of Sociums and the Use of Associative and Causal Systems’: “ ‘causal personalities’ can, but do not necessarily have to have “being-self-identification”: they can instead of “being-self-identification” also have “having-self-identification”, which is most often the case. This depends essentially on the degree of their ethical constraints, i.e., the degree of their non-opportunism, and also on the extent to which they are a ‘leadership personality’.” and

CHAPTER V, Section 1: “There should be as many “petty people” as possible without pronounced ethical and other restrictions (the substrate of society) in order to diversify as much as possible the ‘process of interaction between material and ideal objects’. In this way, nature’s consumption of resources is minimized. Regarding “noble men” – the structural factor of society –, there should be exactly as many as and not more than necessary to maintain a stable existence of society as a system. ... The stratification of a society into the *substrate* (“petty people”) and the *structure factor* (“noble men”) is based on statistical necessity because it is a direct consequence of the Principle of Least Resources Consumption by nature.”

¹⁹ see [1], CHAPTER II, Section 2.5 “Causal Relation and Learned Association”, reference to Daniel Kahneman

²⁰ namely for two independent main reasons – the ‘resource-minimising’ and the ‘anxiety-reducing’

²¹ see details in [2]

It is precisely this connection – setting aside political romanticism and propaganda – that constitutes the psychological reason for the ‘love’ that a statistical majority of people have for *liberty* and for *freedom* and for their aversion to *responsibility*.

Bibliography

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- [2] Igor Furgel *The Role of the Physiological Reward System in Susceptibility to Propaganda and in the Organisation of Society*, version 2.00, 30.08.2026, Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, <https://d-nb.info/1417851619/>

Attachment #1: Note on the Semantic Relationship between the Notions of ‘Liberty’ and ‘Freedom’

For the English edition only.

In English, there are two nouns expressing the abstract notion of *being free*: ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’, whereby, for example, in German and in Russian there is only one single noun for this: ‘Freiheit’ (DE) and ‘свобода’ (RU), respectively.

Therefore, to avoid any misunderstandings that might arise from the use of these two different words in the English edition of this work, I would like to clarify which specific semantic meaning of these nouns is intended and used in this work.

This specific semantic meaning of the words ‘liberty’ and ‘freedom’ is ‘*the state (nature) of being free*’. This specific semantic meaning is common for both words, see [3].

As stated in [3], section “Conclusion”: “Thus, the similarities between the concepts of LIBERTY and FREEDOM are defined as a combination of their core semantic components: *the state (nature) of being free* and *not being under control; privilege and exclusivity*. Furthermore, the concepts of LIBERTY and FREEDOM are united by the peripheral semantic component of *familiarity*.”

The differences between the concepts of LIBERTY and FREEDOM are objectified by the semantic components *acting without the permission of others – being free from something (slavery, dependence, control)*, and this indicates that LIBERTY is a unique phenomenon in its own right; it does not seek to depend on others, whereas FREEDOM, on the contrary, is granted or bestowed, FREEDOM is granted. The concept of LIBERTY has a semantic component of *an image personifying an event*, which places LIBERTY amongst truths and goals to be achieved, whilst *freedom* has semantic components of *the possibility of free expression, the possibility of having a say*, which place it amongst rights and freedoms.”²²

²² The original citation from [3]: “Таким образом, сходства концептов LIBERTY и FREEDOM определяются как комбинация их ядерных семантических компонентов *состояние (естество) быть свободным и не быть под контролем; привилегия и исключительность*. Кроме того, концепты LIBERTY и FREEDOM объединяет периферийный семантический компонент *фамильярность*.”

Различия концептов LIBERTY и FREEDOM объективированы семантическими компонентами *действовать без разрешения других – быть свободным от чего-либо (рабства, зависимости, контроля)*, и это указывает на то, что LIBERTY – уникальное явление само по себе, оно не стремится зависеть от других, а FREEDOM, наоборот, даруется или даётся, FREEDOM предоставляют. Концепт LIBERTY имеет семантический компонент *образ, олицетворяющий событие*, который ставит LIBERTY в ряд истин и целей для достижения, тогда как *freedom* имеет семантические компоненты *возможность свободного выражения, возможность иметь право голоса*, которые ставят его в ряд прав и свобод.”

- [3] Светоносowa Т. А. *Концепты LIBERTY и FREEDOM: схождения и различия*, Филологические науки. Вопросы теории и практики, Москва, 2025, Том 18, Выпуск 2, ISSN 2782-4543 (online), ISSN 1997-2911 (print), <https://philology-journal.ru/article/phil20250113/fulltext>²³

²³ Svetonosowa T. A. *Concepts LIBERTY and FREEDOM: similarities and differences*, Philology. Theory & Practice, Moscow, 2025, Volume 18, Issue 2, ISSN 2782-4543 (online), ISSN 1997-2911 (print), <https://philology-journal.ru/article/phil20250113/fulltext>