

# CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR THE EXERCISE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

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## Introduction

The role of truth in the curriculum and in the method of instruction invariably touches on the issue of academic freedom, which is considered a highly significant issue in the whole philosophy of education. The issue of academic freedom, however, revolves around some knotty problems of which this paper primarily attempts to tackle. It also attempts to (1) determine the scope of academic freedom and its role in the academe; and (2) determine the conditions necessary for the exercise of academic freedom.

## Academic Freedom Defined

Academic freedom is usually considered or discussed within the area of teaching and learning. Academic freedom, therefore, is an attribute or right of schools, colleges, and universities in their different structures, organizations and objectives.

The desire of few teachers and learners to search for truth started the first universities during the Renaissance. The gradual development of these early universities was due to academic freedom. If these few teachers and students were interfered with by civic or religious authorities in their search for truth, they would just disband and meet again when there would be an opportunity. This disbanding to avoid censoring was possible because they had then no buildings, no laboratories, no board of trustees, no vested interests of any form, except the interest to search for truth.

In the history of higher learning, perhaps the German universities were among the first that were given full academic freedom by the State.

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Universities adopted the principle of freedom among various degrees of limitations. Perhaps the latest stage of the growth and development of the concept of academic freedom came at the advent of scientific investigations. New discoveries in the various areas of science - natural, biological, and social - are continually giving nourishment and strength to academic freedom. All educational institutions now are enjoying freedom in various degrees of limitations depending upon the controlling vested interest. Schools, colleges and universities which are controlled by a church enjoy less academic freedom than those that are not so controlled.

Academic freedom has been defined in different ways, accordingly:

- liberty to teach, study through the medium of research, and publish opinions and findings without coercion or censorship through the state or any of its units of authority, such as school boards;
- the right of teachers, especially at high school and college levels, to "teach the truth as they see it," without interference from lay boards, governmental authorities, or pressure groups;
- freedom of speech of the press and in those fields of study in which one is especially competent;
- the right to interpret facts without coercion.

According to Bertrand Russel, liberty or freedom has the following meanings:

First, in Rome, during the last days of the Republic and the early days of Empire, freedom meant the right of the powerful senators to plunder provisions for their private profit. Second, the freedom of a nation from foreign domination. Third, the freedom of the individual citizen to pursue his legitimate avocation. And finally, the right of the individual to freedom of religion, of the press, of speech, and freedom from arbitrary arrest.

### **Limited or Conditioned Academic Freedom**

Perhaps it is safe to say that in all educational institutions, there are those who believe that academic freedom should have some measures of limitations. The following quotations express such limitations:

1. No one can or should do whatever he wishes to do without regard to circumstances and conditions. We are thus faced with the problems of determining a standard on the basis of which we can decide in practical situations the degree of freedom that is most desirable<sup>1</sup>
2. Academic freedom as it is generally understood by people outside the universities is a much more limiting concept. Judging from public statements made by those who are hostile toward the freedom enjoyed by the colleges and universities, many people are willing to grant freedom to those who have mild things to say, but not to anyone who holds beliefs contrary to the current orthodoxy in political, economic, religious, or social affairs<sup>2</sup>.

From these quotations, one can see a dominant and common reason for a limited academic freedom: the protection of the existing social order from destruction. To accomplish this protection, any new belief, theory, opinion considered contrary to those accepted by the people, like heresy, atheism, communism and the like, should not be tolerated, much less given freedom.

The belief that academic freedom should be limited or conditioned for the protection of the present social order – standards, government, education, religious, industries, etc. – assumes two presumptions, namely; (1) that new belief, idea, opinion, and the like which are contrary to the existing standards, government, religious, etc., are dangerous and destructive to the present social order, (2) that the present social order is the best that could be achieved, that is, it is perfect. These two presumptions need careful examination.

1. The first presumption raises the following questions: Who is competent to predict that a new idea which does not agree with the accepted idea is destructive to the social order? What are the criteria for prediction? History tells us that there were in the past new ideas and inventions that were considered destructive to the existing social order. Let us mention a few –

*In the field of morals and religion – the teachings of Jesus, Mohammed, and Guatama; the reformation; and the emancipation of the slaves. In political-philosophy – the concept of democracy. In the field of science – all scientific discoveries and inventions: lightning rod, steamboat, railroad, automobile, etc. These were considered the works of the devil. In almost all the areas of human activities, new idea, opinion, technique, etc. have been violently opposed. This is especially true in religion and morality. Today, these ideas and inventions are considered beneficial to the social order.*

2. The second presumption raises the following questions: Is the present social order the best that could be achieved so that it is necessary that it should be protected, that it should not be changed? Who is competent to judge that the present social order is the best that we could achieve? The following quotation from Jose Rizal is pertinent to the point --

*For the liberal Spaniards, the ethical condition of the people remains the same, that is, the native Filipinos have not advanced; for the friars and their followers, the people have been redeemed from savagery, that is, they progressed; for many Filipinos, however, ethics spirit, and customs have decayed, as decay all good qualities of the people that fail into savagery, that is, they have retrograded?*<sup>3</sup>

Students of history know well that when an individual or group of individuals begin to think, imagine and wish something new there is always something undesirable or disturbing in the existing ways of life. This is true in all areas of human activities – religion, education, government, economics, etc. This historical fact means that a new idea appearing in the horizon of the social order is a sign of the presence of something disturbing the complacency of the social order. Social complacency means social stagnancy.

Academic freedom, to be really free, should be free from limiting interest of anybody or any institution. A Freudian psychologist should be free to discuss psychological principles with Freudian coloration. A Filipino historian should be free to discuss history with native or indigenous points of view. A theologian should be free to discuss any subject – theological, scientific, social, arts, music, political, etc. – with the pigments of his theological dogmas, and with his conviction that he is an instrument of God to save the world from the fire of hell. Academic freedom, furthermore, means that anyone has a freedom to question Freudian psychological theory, Philippine historical “facts”, and church theological dogmas. Academic freedom in this arena where mind meets mind, theory meets theory, idea meets idea, etc., like two opposing teams, not like master and slave. There is no freedom in the relationship between the master and the slave.

But why the limitation for protection? Can anyone of these institutions that want to protect the social order, or segments thereof, show conclusively that it has the truth and nothing but the truth? Suppose its beliefs were false, would it not necessarily perpetuate falsehood and therefore its protection itself would be a greater error and more dangerous to the social order? If the beliefs were true, would these beliefs and the social order need protection? History tells us that truth could be temporarily silenced by persecutions, but in the long run, it has always triumphed over falsehood. The generous solicitude of an institution – political,

educational, religious, etc. to protect the social order against so called false, dangerous and subversive ideas, theories and beliefs, is motivated not because of the welfare of the social order but primarily because of its desire to perpetuate its ideas, theories and beliefs, to maintain its vested interest and to enforce its power over the people.

Scientific truth needs no protection. On the contrary, it needs unlimited area of freedom where it can search for the truth into areas yet unknown and unexplored. God's truth needs no protection either, for God Himself is Truth. Jesus said, "...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32)

Truth cannot be legislated by either theocratic, autocratic, or democratic government. It cannot be dictated by tradition nor by wisdom of the past. It is not a monopoly of the majority. More often, it is the discovery of the minority. It can be discovered by individuals or group of individuals who are not enchanted by the sweet music of the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

One who has the truth needs no fear of falsehood. He needs no protection. Only man-made beliefs need protection. When an idea, a belief or theory rides over a stormy sea of controversy, academic freedom is urgently needed like a lifeboat to a sinking ship. The idea of protection does not hold water from the standpoint of either the protector or the protected. The **protector**, because he himself (unless he is bigoted fanatic) is not sure whether he himself has the truth. If he is sure, why is he afraid of discussions? The **protected**, because in blindly following his so-called protector he, like his protector, would be standing on a ground, baseless and insecure. The so-called protection is a camouflaged denial of academic freedom. Mention should be made that those who are within the protecting wall believe that they have all the freedom they want. Surely they have freedom. But their freedom is just like the freedom of a canary in a cage. The canary is free to sing but it sings only for the pleasure of the master.

The observations above convince one of the fallacies of limited academic freedom. Limited or conditioned academic freedom arrests progress of the human race. It benefits only a group of individuals who have untenable dogmas and doctrines or ideologies which they want to perpetuate in order to hoodwink or deceive the people; who have vested interest which they want to keep; and who have the power which they want to extend to the whole world to the end that they would be the sole political, economic, educational and religious sovereign over the whole race.

## Unlimited Academic Freedom

It would be more logical and beneficial to all to have an unlimited academic freedom in all areas of human life activities. Let us now consider, first, the opinions of those who believe in unlimited or unconditioned academic freedom; and second, the justifications to such freedom. The following quotations are pertinent to the point.

1. Educational institutions exist not only for the teaching of familiar facts, but also for extending the boundaries of knowledge and developing the power to think. These latter purposes will not be served if teachers who are honestly and loyally carrying their explorations and discussions beyond the mere orthodox opinions of the moment are harried back into timorous common places by inquisitors who either ignorantly or cynically blanket them with subversives.<sup>4</sup>

2. It is the responsibility of educators as the special trustees of intellectual freedom to resist any encroachment on their independence with all the vigor at their command.<sup>5</sup>

3. The independence of each college and university would be threatened if governmental agencies of any sort started inquiries into the nature of the instruction that was given.<sup>6</sup>

4. No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, and the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference shall forever be allowed. No religious test shall be required for the exercise of civil or political rights.

No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the Government for redress of grievances.<sup>7</sup>

5. The purpose of a university is to provide advanced instruction in literature, philosophy, the sciences, and arts, and to give professional and technical training. No student shall be denied admission to the university by reason of age, sex, nationality, religious belief, or political affiliation.<sup>8</sup>

The above quotations need no comment. Let us now consider the justifications to the belief in unlimited or unconditioned academic freedom. Mention should be made that while academic freedom strictly and technically refers to the freedom of academic problems, the following justifications include all types of freedom. This inclusion is justified by the fact that ideas, opinions, theories, and the like motivate or affect all the areas of human behaviors.

1. From a theological point of view, it is clear that God Himself gave unlimited freedom to the whole human race. Eve was given freedom to discuss with the serpent the propriety of eating or not the forbidden fruit. Satan was given full freedom to make Job deny God; Jesus was tempted by Satan.

2. From a scientific point of view, unlimited freedom is the most effective motivation for the search of truth. We have already seen that only those men and women who dared to go beyond the limiting boundary of "academic freedom" have discovered the truth that made them free. People, who remained complacent within the iron curtain of tradition and authority, remained unchanged, undeveloped, and unprogressive. If all these people enjoyed the blessings of progress, their "Progress" came to them only as crumbs from a banquet table of the free and progressive people.

3. From a political point of view, only the free people can determine the direction of their life and the goal of their destiny. At present, we can observe the rising tide of national development among the people of Southeast Asia as the iron curtain of any sort – political, church, economic, educational and the like – are colonials. They are not free but are slaves of the colonizing power: political, economic and the like.

4. From the standpoint of philosophy or ethics, limited freedom negates the doctrine of the free will. Morality connotes free will. Free will connotes free choice. A choice dictated by an authority is not free will.

How can a man exercise his free will, if he can not will or choose freely? The lowest and most degrading condition to which a human being could be driven is physical, intellectual and religious slavery. Such a condition destroys the dignity of men. One who denies freedom to his fellowmen negates human rights to freedom and reduces him to the condition and "freedom" of the well-tamed and trained domestic animals. Freedom must be a freedom to define, to free freedom from un-freedom, and freedom to enjoy the freedom to be free.

5. Except in scientific events, social events are the most unpredictable and uncertain. Limited academic freedom is a dangerous thing in the world of uncertainty. Opinions, theories, attitudes, dogmas, and the like are not valid sources of authority, in space and time, to fix the boundary of academic. History tells us that the limitation of freedom has done more evil to social order and more harm to individuals. The colonial people, the slaves, the puppets, the fanatical votaries of ideologies and the like, are tools to their own degradation, and their degradation arrests their social progress, and keeps them under the perpetual control of their master.

6. Limited freedom does not dovetail with the inherent and inalienable rights of men to be free. This fact is recognized by the governments of all the free countries, although in some cases, it is not fully implemented.

### Concluding Statement

The cause of academic freedom, then, is the cause of freedom, and the cause of freedom is the cause of reason. The life of reason is in this natural life, the highest to which all men everywhere may aspire. The life of reason is the final justification for a plea for academic freedom.

In this monumental work, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Surendranath Dasgupta writes a dedication which expresses in a spirit the theme of this paper, as follows:

*The work and ambition of a life-time is herein humbly dedicated with supreme reverence to the great sages of India, who, for the first time in history, formulated the true principles of freedom and devoted themselves to the holy quest of truth and the final assessment and discovery of the ultimate spiritual essence of men through their concrete lives, critical thought, dominant will and self-denial.*<sup>9</sup>

### References

<sup>1</sup> Wyne, J.P. 1954. *Philosophies of Education*. Harper and Row, New York. pp. 167

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, H. 1954. *On Education and Freedom*. Harper and Row, New York. pp. 246



- <sup>3</sup> Rizal, Jose P. *The Philippines: A Century Hence*.
- <sup>4</sup> Speech delivered by Walter. P. Reuther, president of the CIO before the American Association of School Administrators. Atlantic City. New Jersey. Feb. 18, 1983.
- <sup>5</sup> *On Academic Freedom*. 1958. NEA Journal. pp. 153
- <sup>6</sup> Lee, G.C. 1957. *An Introduction to Education in Modern America*. Harcourt Brace and Co., Orlando, FL. pp. 524
- <sup>7</sup> *Constitution of the Philippines*. 1973. Article III, Sections 7 and 8
- <sup>8</sup> U.P. *General Catalog*. 1954-55. U.P. Charter. pp 10
- <sup>9</sup> Dasgupta, Surendranath. 1951. *A History of Indian Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Cambridge University Press. pp. 11