



Freedom and choice are central to people's happiness: Weber

By H. Kaji and J. Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Eric Thomas Weber believes that having choice in life is central in one's "happiness."

"Without freedom and choice, people are not the authors of their own lives," Weber, an assistant professor of public policy leadership at the University of Mississippi, told the Mehr News Agency.



Following is Weber's full text of the interview:

The focus of my discipline is on the real-life applications of moral

and political philosophy to the problems of public policy and leadership. Since my teenage years, I have thought a great deal about how to live the best life. I have been fortunate to have great freedom in choosing between many paths. I had to think hard about which path would be the best life for me. Questions and theories about the good life were the central matters that lead me to study my discipline.

I was blessed with great freedom to choose from many paths in life. In my studies, the fact that many people lack the freedom I have enjoyed has troubled me. The good life ought not to be for the few. Choice in life is so central for people's happiness. Without freedom and choice, people are not the authors of their own lives. They endure the decisions that others make for them. Under the Taliban in Afghanistan, for example, women had so much less freedom than my daughter will for seeking her happiness. In the United States, however, children who attend failing schools have far fewer options in life than I have had. These similar limits on the options people have in life deeply affect their happiness.

Freedom in life to pursue happiness begins with liberty in education, another central theme of my research. Traditional approaches to education were authoritative and instructed students on both the means to achieve ends as well as what goals to pursue. My philosophical hero, John Dewey, was a key figure in introducing the importance of individuals' interests in inquiry, the connection between a student's personality and the subject matter in which he or she excels. Dewey was vital, therefore, in introducing freedom into education, which itself connects to the issue of how to organize society such that individuals can pursue the best lives for themselves. So, when I study John Dewey's works, I remain profoundly interested in the question of how to live well in community.

I understand that some countries have sought to ban western philosophy from university curricula. I am saddened by this fact, given that Plato showed the world that the greatest philosophy and search for the good life always arise through conversation. I hope in the future that communication between western and scholars of these countries will only increase so that both may benefit from each others' insights into the best ways to pursue the good life.

Eric Thomas Weber is assistant professor of public policy leadership at the University of Mississippi, USA. He has published in human studies, review of policy research, Skepsis, William James Studies, Contemporary Pragmatism, and Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society. He is the author of Rawls, Dewey, and Constructivism (Continuum, 2010). His second book, Morality, Leadership, and Public Policy, will be published in the future.