Because it is the season for rebirth and reawakening, I have been thinking about something that Abraham Lincoln once said in a moment of utter despair: "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

I think all of us wonder about how much real freedom we have in our lives. Are we truly free and able to make any choices we desire? Can we act without regard to others? Are we not influenced by events around us, luck and chance, and the limits of our abilities and talents? Of course we are, "No man is an island." We are not herd animals, but we are collective by nature. We need others to be, to think, to survive. The very word civilization comes from the Latin-to live with others, a public life, and an inhabitant of a city.

From my point of view the issue is not "our we controlled by events", but "how much are we controlled by events?" And I think the answer varies with the situation and the individuals involved. I also think that personal freedom, personal autonomy is never an all or nothing affair.

Freedom is not just simply about choices and options. I think it is equally about attitude and perspective. We can not always control the facts of fate, but we have the ability to control our attitude in regard to the facts and events in our lives. In other words, we may not have freedom "from" the conditions in life, but we have the freedom "to" take a stand in regard to the conditions that we face.

Another President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, best articulated the ability to confront the world that is given to us, when he said in his first Inaugural Address that in regard to the Great Depression-"the only thing we have to fear is fear itself!" For Roosevelt, the Depression was unavoidably real, but it was not insurmountable. However, if we feared it, gave in to it, and gave up, we were doomed.

The power of positive thinking can not in itself cure cancer, make us rich and famous, or solve all the problems of the world-but, without it I am convinced our chances are dramatically diminished.

*Al Gini is a professor of business ethics and chair of the department of management at Loyola University Chicago. He is also the co-founder and associate editor of Business Ethics Quarterly, and the author of several books, including My Job, My Self and Seeking the Truth of Things: Confessions of a (catholic) Philosopher.*