

The background is an impressionistic painting of a seascape. It features a bright, hazy sky with soft, blended colors of white, yellow, and light blue. Below the sky, there are dark, swirling shapes representing waves or clouds. In the lower right, there are faint, sketchy outlines of what might be ships or structures on the water. The overall style is painterly and atmospheric.

Liberalism

Introduction to Political Theory
Department of Political Economy
King's College London

The background is a soft-focus, impressionistic painting of a seascape. It features a ship on the horizon, with a warm, hazy sky in shades of orange, yellow, and pink. The water is depicted with soft, blended colors, creating a dreamlike atmosphere.

I. Political Theory and Political Ideologies

II. Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

III. Negative vs. Positive Liberty

Political Theory and Political Ideologies

“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.”

John Maynard Keynes

Political Theory and Political Ideologies

Political ideologies are *traditions of thinking* and *networks of ideas and vocabularies* that *evolve over time*

While diverse, usually a set of *core ideas* that important thinkers and actors have emphasized



Political Theory and Political Ideologies

Liberalism: Personal Liberty

Republicanism: Political Freedom

Socialism: Equality

Conservatism: Tradition

Political Theory and Political Ideologies

Collectors vs. Pirates

Collectors: Understand these ideas as they have evolved through time

Pirates: Raid these traditions for ideas that could be put to use today

CONSERVATISM



PAST IT!

LIBERALISM



IT!!

SOCIALISM



BEYOND IT!

Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

Three Tenets of Liberalism:

1. Pluralism
2. Liberty
3. Rights



Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

Empirical Starting Point

Modern societies are characterized by persistent, ineradicable disagreement about politics

Both about *what ends* political activity should realize and *what means* are permissible

Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

Stronger vs. Weaker Version

Weaker: Could, in principle, be one set of true political values, but inaccessible given human fallibility

Stronger: Values themselves tragically conflict and there is no possible integration (Berlin's view)

Pluralism, Liberty, Rights



Given pluralism, the state ought not enforce any uniform moral or political creed

Rather, political arrangements should prioritize *liberty*, which enables everyone to pursue *their own chosen ends*



Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

Some challenges regarding liberty:

Should there be some additional principle of *equal distribution* of liberty?

What if there is disagreement about the value of liberty versus, say, equality?

How to define the relevant sort of freedom and so harmful constraints?

Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

Rights as primary institutional medium for realizing liberty

Given its unique status, *the state* is the primary standing threat to liberty (although there can be other threats as well)

Unique status: Monopoly on the use of violence to coerce



Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

“For...the liberal tradition..., no society is free unless it is governed by at any rate two interrelated principles: first, that no power, but only rights, can be regarded as absolute, so that all men, whatever power governs them, have an absolute right to refuse to behave inhumanly; and, second, that there are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable.”

pg. 221

Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

A faint background image of a man in a suit, possibly a lawyer or politician, standing with his arms crossed. Above him, the word "LIBERALISM" is written in large, bold, capital letters. The image is in grayscale and has a slightly grainy texture.

Institutional focus on *courts* and the *rule of law*

Democratic self-government as a *necessary evil*

Market society as protecting pluralism and private liberty

Pluralism, Liberty, Rights

A faint background image of a man in a suit, standing with his arms crossed. Above him, the word "LIBERALISM" is written in large, bold, capital letters. The image is semi-transparent and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Some challenges regarding rights:

Once we get beyond anodyne generalities, how do we balance different rights against each other?

Should *property* be considered an inviolable right, regardless of extent?



Negative vs. Positive Liberty

Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958)

If liberty is the central concept of liberalism, then a defense of liberalism requires both a) *a definition of liberty* and b) *an account of the political institutional implications of that account*

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faint, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty is visible behind the text. The statue is shown from the waist up, holding a torch in its right hand and a tablet in its left. The crown with its spikes is prominent.

Negative Liberty: *Absence of External Constraint*

Positive Liberty: *Presence of Internal Self-Control or Self-Mastery*

(Berlin is *defending* negative liberty and *critiquing* positive liberty)

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing her head, crown, and right arm holding a torch.

The Case for Positive Liberty

Does an *addiction* reduce your freedom?

Having choices only matters if we can view ourselves as *rational agents with self-control*

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

Berlin's Critique of Positive Liberty

The implicit idea of a *divided self* is
politically dangerous

Divided self: higher, rational self and lower,
appetitive self

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

Key political question: *who decides* what counts as an addiction?

Berlin's Pandora Box: Once we accept that *political authority* must help realize *self-control* or *self-mastery*, then it must try to determine your *true* or *genuine* desires

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing its head, crown, and raised right arm holding a torch. The statue is centered and serves as a backdrop for the text.

Berlin's Two Examples

Ideology

Authenticity

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing her head, crown, and upper body. She is holding a torch in her right hand and a tablet in her left. The image is centered and serves as a backdrop for the text.

If who you are is shaped by social power/social relationships, then your desires are not your own

But how to determine your *true* interests?

Orthodox Marxism: Your class interests

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

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Being a master of yourself also could mean *being true to who you are*

And if *who you are* is in part determined by your cultural and social environment, then you could become more free by being forced to be *true to who you really are*

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

Berlin's Alternative

“If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree; and if this area is contracted by other men beyond a certain minimum, I can be described as being coerced, or, it may be, enslaved.”

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

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Ambiguity in Formulation

Is it enough to have the option you *actually desire* available?

Or do you need a *range of genuine options*?

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing its head, crown, and right arm holding a torch.

“The definition of negative liberty as the ability to do what one wishes...will not do. If I find I am able to do little or nothing at all, I need only contract or extinguish my wishes, and I am made free.”

pg. 186

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing its head, crown, and raised right arm holding a torch.

Two Problems:

1. Does Berin's Critique Apply to Negative Liberty?
2. Benevolent Masters

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing its head, crown, and right arm holding a torch.

If it's not enough to just have *whatever option you happen to prefer* unhindered, then how many options do you need? How do you determine that?

Possible to determine without some *positive* ideal of, i.e., well-being or rational agency?

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

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Negative vs. Positive Liberty

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It seems that Berlin's worry about positive liberty also could apply to negative liberty

Berlin admits that: no *logical* connection between positive liberty and things like tyranny and idea of divided self

But historical *tendency* towards such connections

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing her head, crown, and right arm holding a torch.

Negative freedom focuses on the *existence* of options at a point in time

How *secure* do your options need to be *over time*?

What if you have all the necessary options open, but they could be taken away at any moment?

Negative vs. Positive Liberty

A faded, light blue background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing its head, crown, and raised right arm holding a torch.

Berlin does not broach the problem of *who has power over you, even liberty-allowing power*

“Freedom in this sense is not, at any rate logically, connected with democracy or self-government.” pg. 177