

The paradox of non-interference

The concept of non-interference, often associated with negative liberty, can result in an interference with the rights and freedoms of non-dominant groups, specifically in the context of religious freedom, reproductive freedom, and the broader concept of foreclosure. My aim is first to define these three ideas and second to explore how they intersect (or possibly conflict). Particularly, I would like to focus on how the concepts of religious freedoms can harm non-dominant religious communities. Drawing from Barnor Hesse's "Escaping Liberty", I aspire to build a theoretical framework to understand the paradox of non-interference and its consequences for different groups within society.

I will begin by defining the key terms of this analysis. First, we encounter the concept of *non-interference*. In essence, non-interference signifies the absence of deliberate intervention by external agents within an area in which an individual could exercise their autonomy. When external parties prevent me from attaining my goals, this limits my political freedom. Second, we define two spheres of freedom. Religious freedom is thought of as a fundamental human right encompassing the liberty to observe one's religious beliefs without coercion or discrimination. This embodies the essence of negative liberty, where the absence of external constraints allows the individual the autonomy to follow their faith unimpeded. In parallel, reproductive freedom refers to the autonomy that individuals possess to make informed and unconstrained decisions regarding their reproductive health, including the right to choose or refuse contraception, abortion access, and comprehensive reproductive healthcare. It aligns with the principles of non-coercion through the assurance that individuals have the freedom to make these decisions without undue external influence. Lastly, I will delve into the idea of foreclosure, as articulated by Barnor Hesse in "Escaping

Liberty”. Hesse’s work delves into the notion that dominant discourse and power structures can ‘close off’ possibilities for non-dominant groups to fully articulate their experiences within the broader sociopolitical landscape. Foreclosure is a process in which certain narratives are rendered inaccessible, thus preventing a comprehensive understanding of the intersections of race and power. Within the framework of religious freedom, it brings attention to how certain dominant religions potentially infringe upon the religious freedoms of minority groups. Similarly, foreclosure relates to reproductive freedom in the sense that societal norms disproportionately impact non-dominant communities. Overall, Hesse’s concept of foreclosure provides a lens through which we can scrutinize how religious and reproductive freedoms intersect with broader societal structures.

Now, the question stands: why is it important to explore the intersection between these ideas? First and foremost, these three areas involve fundamental aspects of individual rights and liberties. As long as we are participating in society, which we are unable to *not* do, we are at the mercy of those who define these liberties. To ensure that we can exercise our rights without undue interference, we must delve into how these domains interact and (as we have seen) collide. In doing so, we can understand the ways in which systematic inequalities and dominant ideologies may limit the full realization of these liberties, particularly among marginalized communities. Second, and very closely related, is the idea of social justice. Reproductive freedom and foreclosure are intertwined with issues of social justice and equity. It is crucial to shed light on the disparities and discrimination faced by marginalized communities, as being able to hold a deeper understanding of how certain policies disproportionately affect communities is essential to recognizing systemic structures that create barriers for marginalized groups. Finally, I would like to delve into the idea of

philosophical inquiry. Exploring the intersection between these ideas allows us to raise questions about the limits of individual freedom, the role of government in regulating personal decisions, and the ethical considerations surrounding religious beliefs in pluralistic societies. Philosophical exploration contributes to fostering a more nuanced and informed public discourse on these issues, where we will be able to consider the multifaceted dimensions of these debates through the appreciation of diverse perspectives within our society.

Hesse's "Escaping Liberty" is our first introduction to this paradox of non-interference. It revolves around a fundamental tension within the realm of individual rights and freedoms. It emerges when the principle of non-interference is applied universally without consideration of the broader context of systematic inequalities and power dynamics. This, then, leads to interference and limitations on the rights and freedoms of marginalized groups. The paradox lies in the fact that the protection of individual liberties (which is often the liberties of dominant groups) can involuntarily perpetuate the systematic injustices faced by non-dominant groups. While non-interference aims to ensure that individuals are free to exercise their rights without external coercion, it fails to account for the structural barriers and societal imbalances present in our societies that restrict the freedoms of marginalized communities. Further, this paradox challenges the assumption that non-interference universally guarantees liberty, thus emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between individual choices and societal structures. It raises the question of whether a blanket application of non-interference truly upholds the principles of liberty and freedom.

Hesse's notion of foreclosure and black fugitive thought offers a critical perspective on how non-interference can be selective. Certain groups are able to enjoy the full extent of their rights while others face obstacles. The availability of these liberties to certain groups may directly result in the denial of those same liberties to other groups.

The conflicts between religious and reproductive freedom, emerge as a primary example of this paradox of non-interference, particularly when considering the diverse array of religious perspectives that depart from the dominant Christian viewpoint. In the past decade, various religious groups have invoked religious freedom as a primary element in challenging abortion bans, a departure of the standard Christian use of these same freedoms to embed abortion bans into our society. Understanding these alternate, non-Christian perspectives provides crucial insight into our paradox. I will be outlining various religious perspectives on reproductive freedom.

First, the Christian church, which is often perceived as the dominant (majority) group, has been at the forefront of invoking religious freedom in debates surrounding abortion. Much of the Christian belief revolves around the sanctity of life and the idea that life begins at conception; thus, abortion bans are the result of religious belief as well as a way to ensure religious freedom for this specific demographic. This perspective highlights the main paradox of a conflict between the religious freedom of Christian groups and the reproductive freedom of individuals who hold different beliefs about abortion rights.

The Episcopal Church provides an alternative religious perspective that closely aligns with reproductive freedom. Their stance, as articulated through official church reports, expresses a deep conviction in the importance of acknowledging the individual responsibility to reach informed decisions about abortion. More specifically, the church

explicitly states that abortions are acceptable under certain circumstances, such as when the health of the mother is threatened seriously. This underscores the complexity of the intersection between religious and reproductive freedoms, demonstrating that there can be varying interpretations and applications of freedom.

Moreover, when policies prohibiting abortion are influenced by specific religious beliefs, concerns about the separation of church and state emerge. These laws mechanically privilege certain religious perspectives over others, thus imposing particular religious values on a diverse society that does not necessarily follow those same values. In the context of Hesse's work, the conflicts among these various religious groups demonstrate how non-interference can perpetuate the dominance of certain perspectives at the expense of others. For instance, when considering the Christian Church's views on the sanctity of life and their subsequent political movements to ban abortions in light of these views, Hesse's perspective highlights the consequences of this dominant religious viewpoint. This perspective can interfere with the freedom of individuals who hold different beliefs, such as the Episcopal Church, which challenges the dominant narrative and is directly affected by the laws implemented based on the beliefs of the dominant group. This emphasizes the need for careful consideration of the implementation of religious beliefs into a supposed secular civilization, especially reflecting upon the ways that religious and reproductive freedoms intersect within the legal and ethical frameworks of American society.

The paradox of non-interference, as explored through the lens of religious freedom, reproductive freedom, and foreclosure, underscores the conflicts that can arise between individual liberties and governmental institutions. My aim was to challenge the notion that non-interference universally guarantees freedom, rather it often perpetuates systemic

inequalities through the limitation of freedoms for non-dominant groups. Through my analysis of varying religious viewpoints, I was able to highlight the idea that non-interference can selectively privilege dominant viewpoints by imposing specific religious values on a society. Overall, delving into this paradox of non-interference is a critical endeavor for challenging the complexities of individual freedom within the broader context of power dynamics, allowing us to strive for a more equitable community in which the rights of all individuals are equally protected.

References

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