

Introduction to Politics

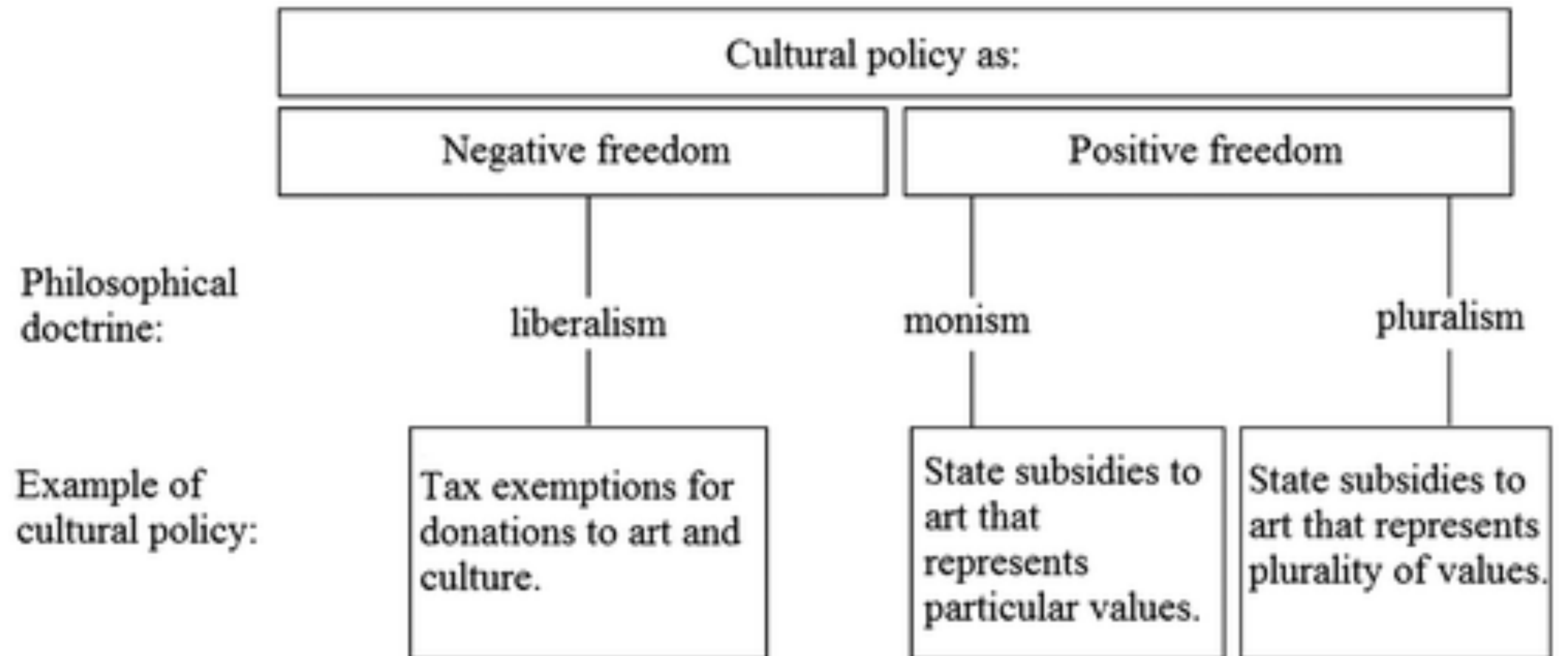
Liberty

Dr Aakansha Natani

Liberty

Meaning and Interpretation

- the notion of choice,
- the absence of constraints to make and exercise such a choice,
- the existence conditions that enable you to actuate the choice.



Liberty

Meaning and Interpretation

- For **Hobbes**, “a free man, is he, that in those things, which he by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to.” Fear and necessity, for Hobbes, are the motivating factors in human nature that impel them towards liberty.
- As a natural right, liberty is a universal right. It is a right held equally by all in the state of nature. It is also a right that is bestowed by nature along with the right to life and property. As a natural right, liberty precedes civil and political society in **Locke’s** thought. The contract of civil society is drawn to preserve natural rights, including liberty. The Lockean individual is guided by the faculty of reason in the exercise of freedom in conditions that are alterable. So, the Lockean individual will not seek the freedom to want to fly like a bird but will seek the freedom to be heard even if in a minority.

Liberty

Meaning and Interpretation

- **Rousseau** argues ‘Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.’ His conception of liberty liberates human beings from the hierarchical and unjust inequality of society. People are liberated only through obedience to law as Law is equated with the expression of the general will of the whole community.
- The liberty not to have one’s individual opinion suppressed by collective decisions of society and state is at the core of **J. S. Mill’s** understanding of liberty. Mill discusses liberty under three aspects—liberty of thought and discussion, principle of individuality, and limits of authority over an individual’s action.

Liberty

Two Concepts of Liberty- Isaiah Berlin

- **Negative liberty** rests on two main axioms-

(*a*) Each one knows one's own interest best. This is based on the assumption of the individual as a rational agent with a capacity to deliberate and make an informed choice.

(*b*) The state has a limited role to play. This follows from the earlier axiom: with the individual agency foregrounded, the state cannot decide ends and purposes for the individual.

- For Berlin, negative liberty as freedom is the opportunity to act, not action itself. As 'opportunity concept of freedom' it focuses on the availability rather than exercise of opportunity.

Liberty

Two Concepts of Liberty- Isaiah Berlin

The concept of **positive liberty** proceeds with the idea that each self has a higher self and a lower self. The higher self, the rational self, should attain mastery over the lower self for an individual or a people to be liberated in the understanding of positive liberty.

Positive liberty is the *freedom to* do. It is what can be called the ‘exercise concept of freedom’. It is exercising and availing of the opportunities while negative freedom is just having opportunities.

Unlike negative liberty, positive liberty is open to the idea of directing the individual either by law or an elite. As long as the law directs the individual towards rational ends, it liberates rather than oppresses the individual’s personality. Positive liberty also includes the idea of collective control over common life.

Maintaining a pollution-free environment is a collective effort for the common benefit. While this may allow a certain degree of coercion, it is usually justified by the larger good involved.

Many liberals, including Berlin, have suggested that the positive concept of liberty carries with it a danger of authoritarianism.