

LIBERTY: AN INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

The chapter 'Liberty' by V. Sriranjani is a typical work of art that helps the reader envisage a variety of distinctive perceptions of Liberty rather than focussing on a single definition of the concept. The author relates the notion of Liberty to several other allied ideas of political philosophy, such as Freedom and Equality. According to the author, Liberty can be associated with three essential connotations, firstly 'the notion of choice', which typically implies the availability and privilege of choosing between multiple possibilities, secondly the 'absence of constraints' while exercising such a choice, and the execution of the same without fear and external pressure. Thirdly, the existence of conditions that enable people to access these choices. Clearly, the interpretation of the concept of Liberty varies from person to person, given the diversity and versatility of the human persona in the understanding of Liberty, as put forward by prominent political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Rousseau, Bentham, and J.S. Mill. The classification of Liberty into Positive and Negative Liberty helps society assimilate the nature of Liberty and make a key distinction in what Liberty truly is. Negative Liberty assumes each individual to be his own master, who knows what is best for his interests, and any external obligation is seen as a violation and threat to Liberty. In contrast, positive Liberty restricts an individual's freedom to do something for social good. Positive Liberty also may be described as guided freedom focused on the general well-being of the society (Berlin 1969). Furthermore, Gerald MacCallum generalizes Liberty as a tripartite relationship between an agent, certain preventing conditions, and certain doings of the agent (Locke 1988). The author also explores several other philosophical concepts and relates them to Liberty, such as 'Liberty and Equality', 'Liberty and Rights', etc. The author infers that a clear relation cannot be drawn between Liberty and rights because they differ from each other significantly as Liberty cannot be delegated like a right; freedom is not absolute and can have varying degrees however, exercising a right is absolute. The latter part of the chapter talks about evolution of the concept of Liberty in India and Liberty in the Constitution of India.

Throughout the text, different and contrasting ideas and outlooks toward Liberty are put forth by the author and various political philosophers. Such differences in opinion and understanding are bound to take place considering the diverse and heterogeneous nature of our society. It is indeed

imperative that my ideas about Liberty might be significantly different from those of another person. These ideas are not just separate or distinct from one another but often also contrasting and conflicting, as seen in the case where political philosophers J.S. Mill and Bentham expressed their viewpoints on Liberty which were strikingly different from each other. Bentham described Liberty as closely related to the idea of pleasure through a utilitarian approach of 'Greatest happiness of the greatest number'. On the other hand, Mill's views were beyond the utilitarian concept and paid more emphasis to Liberty and freedom of individuality. Such differing opinions make Liberty an individual's perspective with no fixed definition or conviction. This brings us to the question of what Liberty actually means and whether all definitions of Liberty are justified. Bentham's work, which relates Liberty to pleasure, and focuses on pleasure, fostering happiness for the greatest number in society to be Liberty, is baseless and unacceptable to a large extent. This is because when we say 'happiness of the greatest number', there is always a section of society whose rights are unfortunately ignored. The happiness achieved by a large number of people is at the cost of the Liberty of a few individuals who probably had alternate views. This is not a sign of the inclusive society we would like to live in, where the rights and freedom of every individual are equally important. A situation in which one person or even the majority's so-called 'liberal' actions lead to the violation of the rights of another person is not what Liberty is about. Exercising Liberty through actions that may encourage pleasure and happiness of the masses but disregard the views of a minority does less good to the society and instead takes us back to the times of dictatorship, slavery, and bonded labor which cannot be justified at any cost. Such forms of Liberty can only lead to oppression of the weak resulting from suppression of their opinions. This under no circumstances can convince anyone of Liberty.

Similarly, the example given by the author to describe Liberty as the pleasure to indulge in habit forming drugs or rationalizing the Liberty to rape or murder cannot be justified. Before considering such acts as liberal, one needs to assess the social repercussions and the direct implications on the people or the victims of such so-called liberal acts. Another example of Liberty that is very relevant in the present-day context is the frequent strikes by employees of an organization, medicos, teachers, and others. This apparently seems justified to many in the society; in contrast, a sector of society may find it totally baseless. In such situations, the stakeholders' Liberty also needs to be considered. I believe that Liberty to strike does not mean

compromising the work ethics of an organization. Hence, one may emphasize that the prevalent social systems discriminate against the conflicting stands of Liberty. This discriminatory power at the societal level strikes a consistent balance of justifiable Liberty. To conclude, I believe Liberty is freedom with responsibility.

Bibliography

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Locke, John, Two Treatises of Government (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).