

# Introduction to Politics

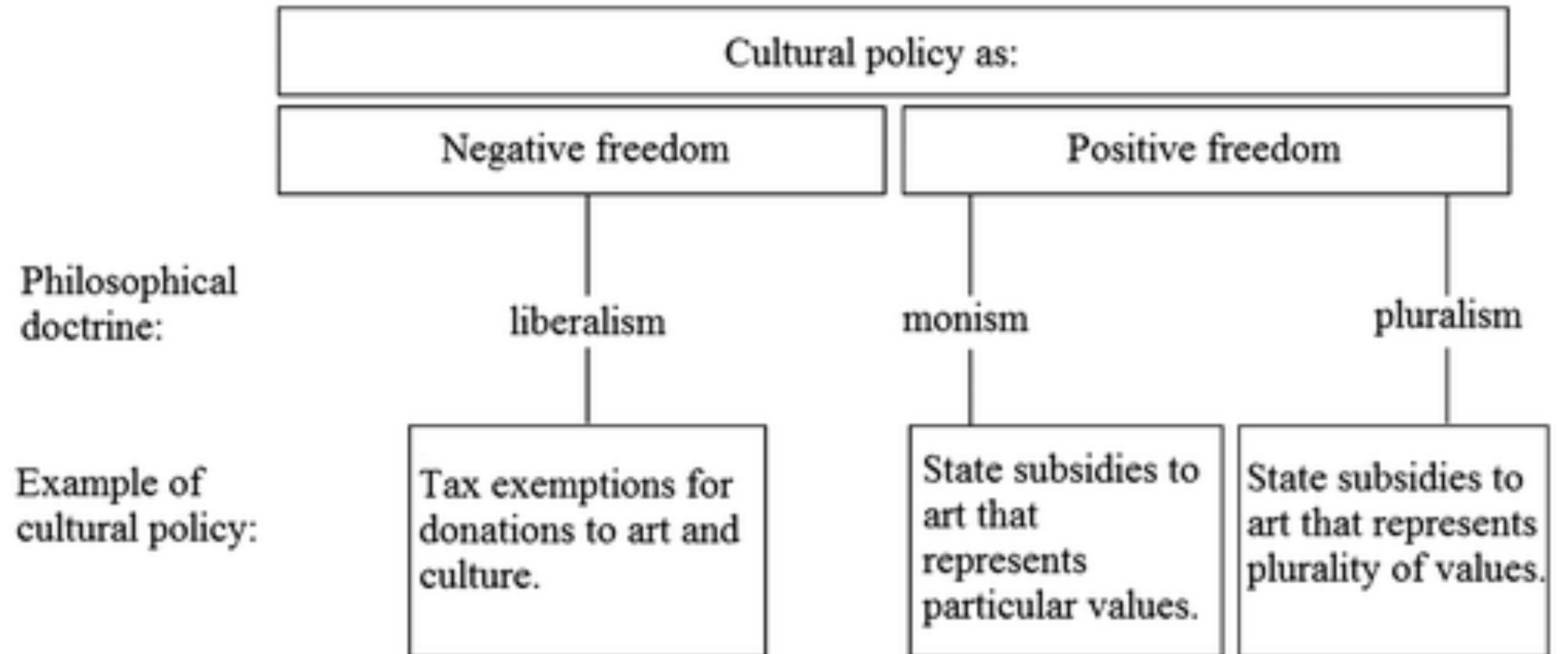
Liberty

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.

# Introduction to Politics

**Equality**

**Dr Aakansha Natani**

# Equality

## Meaning and Interpretation

- Equality is a highly complex concept, there being as many forms of equality as there are ways of comparing the conditions of human existence. For instance, it is possible to talk about moral equality, legal equality, political equality, social equality, sexual equality, racial equality and so forth.
- The goal of egalitarians is to establish the legal, political or social conditions in which people will be able to enjoy equally worthwhile and satisfying lives.
- Equality, in other words, is not about blanket uniformity, but rather is about ‘levelling’ those conditions of social existence which are thought to be crucial to human well-being.



# Equality

## Formal Equality

The most obvious, and perhaps most important, manifestation of formal equality is the principle of legal equality, or ‘equality before the law’. This holds that the law should treat each person as an individual, showing no regard to their social background, religion, race, colour, gender and so forth. Justice, in this sense, should be ‘blind’ to all factors other than those relevant to the case before the court, notably the evidence presented.

Formal equality implies that, by virtue of their common humanity, each person is entitled to be treated equally by the rules of social practice. As such, it is a procedural rule which grants each person equal freedom to act however they may choose and to make of their lives whatever they are capable of doing, without regard to the opportunities, resources or wealth they start with.

The principle of formal equality is, however, essentially negative: it is very largely confined to the task of eradicating special privileges.

# Equality

## Equality of Opportunity

Formal equality pays attention to the status people enjoy either as human beings or in the eyes of the law; it does not address their ‘opportunities’, the circumstances in which they live and the chances or prospects available to them. Equality of opportunity is concerned principally with initial conditions, with the starting point of life.

In effect, the principle of equal opportunities comes down to ‘an equal opportunity to become unequal’. This is because the concept distinguishes between two forms of equality, one acceptable, the other unacceptable. Natural inequality, arising from personal talents, skills, hard work and so on, is considered to be either inevitable or morally ‘right’; in Margaret Thatcher’s words there is a ‘right to be unequal’. However, inequalities that are bred by social circumstances, such as poverty, homelessness or unemployment, are morally ‘wrong’, because they allow some to start the race of life halfway down the running track while other competitors may not even have arrived at the stadium.

Equal opportunities means, put simply, the removal of obstacles that stand in the way of personal development and self-realization, a right that should surely be enjoyed by all citizens. The principle of equal opportunities leads to reverse or ‘positive’ discrimination.

# Equality

## Equality of Outcome

Whereas equal opportunities requires that significant steps are taken towards achieving greater social and economic equality, far more dramatic changes are necessary if ‘outcomes’ are to be equalised.

This is a goal which uncovers a fundamental ideological divide. Socialists, communists and some anarchists regard a high level of social equality as a fundamental goal, while conservatives and liberals believe it to be immoral or unnatural.

A concern with ‘outcomes’ rather than ‘opportunities’ shifts attention away from the starting point of life to its end results, from chances to rewards.

Critics, however, point out that the pursuit of equality of outcome leads to stagnation, injustice and, ultimately, tyranny. They argue that the drive for equality of outcome is carried out at the expense of individual liberty. Also, as Aristotle argued, injustice arises not only when equals are treated unequally, but also when unequals are treated equally.



# Equality

## Equality of what?

**Equality of Welfare-** According to the classical utilitarian thinking, as espoused by Jeremy Bentham, welfare refers to the happiness which is understood as the net balance of pleasure over pain that the individual experiences. A society that believes in distributing welfare equally will not worry much about how much resources individuals get, but whether or not these resources are instrumental in securing for each individual a level of satisfaction or happiness equal to everyone else. Under such a scheme, it is imperative that we fulfil everyone's welfare equally irrespective of the inequality entailed in the distribution of resources.

**Equality of Resource-** This view of equality or 'resource egalitarianism' is most expressly identified with the views of John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin and Eric Rakowski. Equality of resources holds that a distributional scheme treats people as equals 'when it distributes or transfers the resources.

# Equality

## Equality of what?

**Equality of Capabilities-** The economist Amartya Sen pioneers the idea that distributional equality should concern itself with equalizing people's capabilities, instead of emphasizing on resources or incomes.

Sen proposes the notion of well-being understood in terms of *function*. Reading is a function vital to leading a valuable life. However, Sen does not argue that social policy should be concerned with function. Social policy, according to Sen, should instead focus on *capabilities*. A capability is the ability to achieve a certain sort of function. For example, literacy is a capability, while reading is a function.

In a society where people are illiterate, a state should actively promote people's ability to read, i.e. literacy. Whereas a resource egalitarian may insist that resources such as books and educational services may be provided for in regions that are deficient in literacy, the capability advocate would argue that more than a provision of external means what matters is the capability—an internal ability—of the target population to read and write.

Social policy must be attuned to facts of human diversity and it is essential that policy makers amass as much information as possible before they design suitable policies to equalize people's capabilities.