Part 1B Paper 7:  
Political Philosophy / Liberty  
1. Positive and negative liberty  

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Overview of the lectures

1. Negative and positive liberty
2. The paradox of positive liberty, the problem with negative liberty
3. Autonomy
4. Paternalism
Readings

• Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entries.
Questions

• What is negative liberty?
• What is positive liberty?
• Is the distinction between negative and positive liberty meaningful?
Summary

1. Negative and positive liberty
2. Constraints
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation
4. Constraints on two dimensions
5. Cohen on Wolff on liberty
6. Closing comments
Summary

1. Negative and positive liberty
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1. Negative and positive liberty

Negative Liberty

“What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?” [Berlin]
1. Negative and positive liberty

Positive Liberty

“What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that” [Berlin]
1. Negative and positive liberty

Beliefs +
Desires
= Decisions
1. Negative and positive liberty

Beliefs +
Desires
= Decisions

Acts
1. Negative and positive liberty

Beliefs + Desires = Decisions

Acts

Outcomes
1. Negative and positive liberty

\[ \text{Beliefs} + \text{Desires} = \text{Decisions} \]

\[ \text{Acts} \rightarrow \text{Outcomes} \]

Constraints
1. Negative and positive liberty

Beliefs + Desires = Decisions

Acts

Outcomes

Positive liberty

Constraints

Negative Liberty
1. Negative and positive liberty

Beliefs + Desires = Decisions

Acts

Outcomes

Constraints

Negative / positive Liberty
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2. Constraints

Negative liberty
• A constraint is interference in your actions

Positive liberty
• A constraint is a frustration of your actions

E.g. Not going to Cambridge because someone lied about you vs. not going because you don’t have the grades
2. Constraints

Negative liberty
• A constraint is something external to the agent

Positive liberty
• A constraint can be something internal
2. Constraints

Negative liberty
• A constraint is the presence of something

Positive liberty
• A constraint can be the absence of something
2. Constraints

Negative liberty
- A constraint is social in nature

Positive liberty
- A constraint can be a natural phenomena
2. Constraints

Negative liberty
• A constraint must be intentional

Positive liberty
• A constraint can be accidental
2. Constraints

Metaphor of the doors

- Positive freedom is about how many doors are open to you.
- Negative freedom is about whether they are locked.
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3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

- MacCallum, 1967, p.314
  “Such freedom is thus always of something (an agent or agents), from something, to do, not do, become, or not become something; it is a triadic relation.”

  “x is (is not) free from y to do (not do, become, not become) z”.

- X = agents
- Y = constraints
- Z = actions/ outcomes
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

Beliefs + Desires = Decisions

Act → Outcomes

Constraints
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

**Diagram:**
- Agent
- Beliefs + Desires = Decisions
- Acts
- Constraints
- Outcomes
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

Beliefs + Desires = Decisions
Acts

Outcomes

Agent

Constraints
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

\[ \text{Beliefs} \, + \, \text{Desires} \, = \, \text{Decisions} \]

\[ \text{Acts} \]

\[ \text{Outcomes} \]

\[ \text{Constraints} \]
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

• Positive freedom: “A homeless person is NOT free to go to the movies.”

• Negative freedom: “A homeless person IS free to go to the movies.”
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

Is a homeless person free to go to the movies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive liberty</th>
<th>Negative liberty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Homeless person</td>
<td>Homeless person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraint</strong></td>
<td>No money</td>
<td>None (no dress code)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/ outcome</strong></td>
<td>Seeing a movie</td>
<td>Seeing a movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Not free</strong></td>
<td><strong>Free</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

- Positive freedom: “A woman who is convinced by custom to adhere to a strict dress code is NOT free to choose otherwise.”

- Negative freedom: “A woman who is convinced by custom to adhere to a strict dress code IS free to choose otherwise.”
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

Is an indoctrinated woman free to dress as she pleases?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive liberty</th>
<th>Negative liberty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Higher/ true version of the woman</td>
<td>Ordinary notion of the woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraint</strong></td>
<td>Religious upbringing</td>
<td>Religious upbringing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/ outcome</strong></td>
<td>Wearing revealing clothes</td>
<td>Wearing revealing clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/ outcome</strong></td>
<td><strong>Not free</strong></td>
<td><strong>Free</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

• Positive freedom: “A man in a wheelchair is NOT free to play football for England.”

• Negative freedom: “A man in a wheelchair IS free to participate in trials for the England football team.”
3. Liberty as a triadic formulation

What is a man in a wheelchair free to do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Positive liberty</th>
<th>Negative liberty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Man in a wheelchair</td>
<td>Man in a wheelchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constraint</strong></td>
<td>Wheelchair</td>
<td>Wheelchair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/ outcome</strong></td>
<td>Play for England</td>
<td>Try out for England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not free</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

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4. Constraints on two dimensions

Any factor that makes you less likely to undertake your action e.g. a lack of natural talent

Intentional actions of other agents that physically prevent your action e.g. locking you in a room

[Carter, Ian, SEP]
4. Constraints on two dimensions

Source

Type

Narrow

Broad

-ve +ve

Intentional actions of other agents that physically prevent your action e.g. locking you in a room.

Any factor that makes you less likely to undertake your action e.g. a lack of natural talent.

[Carter, Ian, SEP]
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5. Cohen on Wolff on liberty

• Wolff:
  – Freedom = real possibility
  – Liberty = permissibility

• Cohen:
  – “...why should we care about (what Wolff calls) liberty when it isn’t matched by (what Wolff calls) freedom?” [p.190]

• Surely what we care about is the real possibility of achieving our desires.
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• You can think of your own taxonomy for different interpretations of liberty.
• Does it really matter what taxonomy we choose?
6. Closing comments

- Example: Guns N’ Roses
- 1990 ‘Appetite for Destruction’ lineup: Axl Rose, Slash, Izzy Stradlin, Duff McKagen, Steven Adler, Matt Sorum
- 1998 ‘Chinese Democracy’ lineup: Axl Rose, Robin Finck, Tommy Stinson, John Freese, Paul Tobias, Dizzy Reed, Chris Pitman
- 2004 Velvet Revolver ‘Contraband’ lineup: Slash, Duff McKagen, Matt Sorum, Dave Cushner