Contemporary Theories of Liberty

Lecture 3: Positive Liberty, Part II
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Overview

1. Negative v. positive liberty
2. Positive liberty (I): self-mastery
3. Positive liberty (II.a): self-determination
4. Positive liberty (II.b): self-realisation
5. Criticisms
6. Summing-up
Conceptual criticisms of negative liberty

\[ y: \text{“actual (or probable) external interference by specific agents with x’s opportunities”} \]

- Can freedom be limited by ... 
  1. ... internal, not just external, interference? 
  2. ... lacking certain abilities, not just suffering some interference? 
  3. ... failure to \textbf{exercise} certain abilities, not just denial of opportunities for exercise?
Overview

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2. **Positive liberty (I): self-mastery**

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Self-mastery

‘I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. ... This dominant self is then variously identified with reason, with my “higher nature”, ... my “real, or “ideal”, or “autonomous” self, ... contrasted with irrational impulse, uncontrolled desires ... [T]he real self may be conceived as something wider than the individual ..., as a social “whole” ... a tribe, a race, a Church, a State’

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Self-mastery

Freedom in general
1. $x$, a subject
   is free from
2. $y$, a constraint
to do
3. $z$, some action

Self-mastery
1. $x$, the “real” (individual or collective) self
   is free from
2. $y$, irrational forces (inc. internal obstacles = all desires)
to do
3. $z$, only what reason (or the state) commands
Self-mastery

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‘Once I take this view, I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their “real” selves’

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Self-determination

‘Is freedom not at stake when we find ourselves carried away by a less significant goal to override a highly significant one?’

...our significant purposes can be frustrated by our own desires, and where these are sufficiently based on misappreciation, we consider them as not really ours, and experience them as fetters. A man’s freedom can therefore be hemmed in by internal, motivational obstacles.’

Self-determination

1. First-order desires
   = desires about actions
   ➢ e.g. $D_1$, the desire to smoke

2. Second-order desires
   = desires about (first-order) desires
   ➢ e.g. $D_2$, the desire not to act on $D_1$, the desire to smoke

➢ Either:
   a) **embrace** the first-order desire as ‘authentic’
   ➢ Or:
   b) **reject** it as ‘inauthentic’
Self-determination

Freedom in general

1. \(x\), a subject
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2. \(y\), a constraint
to do
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Self-determination

1. \(x\), an individual
   is free from
2. \(y\), inauthentic forces (inc. internal obstacles = some [inauthentic] desires)
to
3. \(z\), pursue one’s other (authentic) desires
Positive liberty

Self-mastery

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Self-realisation

Self-realisation

= develop and deploy certain powers

Formal

e.g. thin powers for autonomy

Substantive

e.g. thick powers for eudaimonia
‘negative theories can rely simply on an opportunity-concept, where being free is a matter of ... what is open to us to do, whether or not we do anything to exercise these options. ... [Whereas] self-realization ... cannot rely simply on an opportunity-concept. We can’t say that someone is free ... if he is totally unrealized, ... [e.g.] paralysed by the fear of breaking with some norm which he has internalized but which does not authentically reflect him ... [S]ome degree of exercise is necessary ... [H]aving the opportunity involves removing the internal barriers; ... [H]aving the opportunity to be free requires that I already be exercising freedom.’

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Freedom

- Freedom as a ‘triadic’ relation (McCallum):
  \[ x \text{ is (not) free from } y \text{ to (not) do/become } z \]

- Freedom as a quadratic relation:
  \[ x \text{ is (not) free from } y \text{ in/through doing } z^* \text{ to (not) do } z \]

\[ z^* = \text{e.g. removing internal barriers (Taylor)} \]
Self-realisation

Freedom in general
1. \textit{x}, a subject
   \textit{is free from}
2. \textit{y}, a constraint
   \textit{to do}
3. \textit{z}, some action

Self-realisation
1. \textit{x}, an individual
   \textit{is free from}
2. \textit{y}, inauthentic forces (inc. some desires)
   \textit{in or through}
3. \textit{z*}, exercising some ability (e.g. overcoming inauthentic desires)
   \textit{to}
4. \textit{z}, pursue one’s other (authentic) desires
Self-determination

1. x, an individual
   is free from

2. y, inauthentic forces (inc. internal obstacles = some inauthentic desires)

   to

3. z, pursue one’s other (authentic) desires

Self-realisation

1. x, an individual
   is free from

2. y, inauthentic forces (inc. some desires)

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Criticisms

1. **Conceptual**
   - Moral-psychological concept, not socio-political

2. **Political**
   - “Forced to be free”
Self-mastery

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1. **x**, a subject
   - is free from

2. **y**, a constraint
to do

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Self-mastery

1. **x**, the “real” (individual or collective) self
   - is free from

2. **y**, irrational forces (inc. internal obstacles = all desires)
to do

3. **z**, only what reason (or the state) commands
The ‘forced to be free’ objection

1. **Rationalism**: positive liberty = following a rational plan

2. **Monism**: one plan fits all

3. **Elitism**: some have superior knowledge of the plan

4. **Coercion**: experts may force non-experts to follow the plan

∴ 5. Someone subject to force may remain (positively) free
The ‘forced to be free’ objection

1. **Rationalism**: positive liberty = following a rational plan
   - **Formalism**: positive liberty = how one acts (i.e. deliberating for oneself), ≠ what one does (e.g. following someone else’s plan)

2. **Monism**: one plan fits all
   - **Pluralism**: different paths for different individuals

3. **Elitism**: some have superior knowledge of the plan
   - **Deliberation**: plans not pre-set; emerge through deliberation

4. **Coercion**: experts may force non-experts to follow the plan
   - **Self-determination**: determination of the self by that self

5. someone subject to force may remain (positively) free
‘[If] the man with a highly distorted view of his fundamental purpose [e.g. a serial killer] ... overcome[s] his last remaining compunction against [killing] ..., would we consider him freer ...? Hardly .... [I]t makes a difference to the degree of freedom not only whether one of my basic purposes is frustrated by my own desires but also whether I have grievously misidentified this purpose ... The only way to avoid this would be to hold that there is no such thing as getting it wrong, that your basic purpose is just what you feel it to be. But there is such a thing as getting it wrong’

— Taylor
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Bibliography


- Charles Taylor, ‘What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty?’, in various, e.g. Miller (ed.), The Liberty Reader (Edinburgh, 2006)


Summing-up

What is positive liberty?
- Self-mastery, self-determination, self-realisation?

Inability v. interference
- Can negative liberty recognise poverty as unfreedom?

Opportunity v. exercise
- From (a) ‘triadic’ (x is free from y to do z) …
- … to (b) ‘quadratic’ (x is free from y in/through z*-ing to do z)
Conceptual criticisms of negative liberty

\textbf{y}: “actual (or probable) external interference by specific agents with x’s opportunities”

- Can freedom be limited by …
  1. … internal, not just external, interference?
  2. … lacking certain abilities, not just suffering some interference?
  3. … failure to exercise certain abilities, not just denial of opportunities for their exercise?
  4. … possible, not just actual/probable, interference?