

Routledge Lecture in Philosophy: The Open-Doors Model of Freedom

Given by **Professor Philip Pettit**, Princeton University on 30 October 2009, University of Cambridge.

Introduction

Hobbes's on corporal liberty: "a freeman is he that... is not hindered to do what he has a will to" →

1. Being stopped from doing something you do not will or intend to do does not make your choice unfree.
2. Being a freeman requires freedom in all such choices, so that this ceases to be a significant category.

Isaiah Berlin endorses Hobbes as a defender of his 'negative' view of freedom. But he also says: 'The extent of a man's negative freedom is, as it were, a function of what doors, and how many are open to him; upon what prospects they are open; and how open they are'. (4 Essays on Liberty 1969, xlviii; xxxix). This open-doors model undermines Hobbes's claims and supports the republican freedom Hobbes hated.

Berlin's break with Hobbes

Assume that I am able to choose between A and B. (*Abstract from the ability-freedom connection*)

Am I free therefore to choose between A and B? Not according either to Hobbes or Berlin.

In Berlin's words (1969, 122) I may suffer 'the deliberative interference of other human beings'.

You may obstruct or penalize B, or example, or deceive or manipulate me into avoiding B.

Applying Berlin's metaphor: you may lock the B-door, jam it, or conceal its existence from me.

Assuming you do this without my license, you impose your will on me. (*Abstract from this issue too*)

According to Hobbes, this won't really be interference, nor I unfree, if the door I push on is A, not B.

Bramhall: Is someone unfree in a decision to play tennis if, unknown to him, another closes the court door?

Hobbes: 'it is no impediment to him that the door is shut till he have a will to play' (H and B 1999, p.91)

If he does not have a will to play, then he willingly refuses; he may even be responsible (*Frankfurt*).

Berlin's open-doors model expresses a very different view.

It is not enough that the door you push on is open; all the relevant doors must be open.

Berlin offers a semantic argument that this is what the concept of freedom requires us to say.

And he adds a normative argument that there is a special value in keeping even unchosen doors open.

His arguments go against both of Hobbes's claims; but they don't lead him as far as they ought.

Berlin's semantic argument

In a choice between A and B, I can make myself free by adapting my preference to your dispositions.

Suppose you have closed the B door. I can then make myself free by adapting so as to prefer A.

'I need only contract or extinguish my wishes and I am made free' (1969, 139). The prison example.

Call this the self-adaptation argument for the open-doors model.

Berlin's normative argument

To be free is 'to be accorded an area, artificially carved out, if need be, in which one is one's own master; a "negative" area in which a man is not obliged to account for his activities to any man so far as this is compatible with the existence of organized society' (1969, lx). One is a freeman, in this sense.

This attractive ideal presupposes the open-doors model and so argues for it on a normative basis.

Together with the semantic argument, it undermines both elements 1 and 2 in Hobbes's account.

A more formal comment on the difference between Hobbes and Berlin.

You can and will	interfere if I choose A (Int if A)	interfere if I choose B (Int if B)
I actually	1. choose A	2. choose A
I actually	3. choose B	4. choose B

Hobbes thinks that I am free if 2 or 3 obtains; Berlin thinks that no interference must be allowed.

Let 'P' = 'probability'. And take 'Int if A' to mean 'you would interfere were I to choose A'.

Hobbes thinks that freedom is more probable, the lower this sum: $P(A)P(\text{Int if A}) + P(B)P(\text{Int if B})$.

Thus, he holds that if $P(\text{Int if A})$ is high, and not $P(\text{Int if B})$, I will be free if I choose B, & set $P(A)=0$.

Berlin argues that when I choose B, $P(\text{Int if A})$ and $P(\text{Int if B})$ must be each suitably low.

Note that the Hobbesian point of view is still alive in many current discussions.

Taking Berlin's semantic argument further

Is it enough for free choice that every door is actually unlocked, unjammed, and unconcealed? Berlin suggests, yes. He thinks that it is sufficient if every door in my choice is open. But what if this is true only because you like me and are happy to give me my way? What if you have the power of a door-keeper who can turn against me at will and with impunity? What if my ability to choose depends on your 'indulgence' or 'accidental mildness' (Richard Price)?

Republicans like Price would argue that if I depend on your goodwill in this way, I do not count as free. And there is a semantic argument in the spirit of Berlin's that supports Price's claim. Suppose you are not good-willed and are disposed, as a door-keeper, to close the B door against me. Is it enough for my becoming free, as Berlin suggests, that you become good-willed towards me? If so, then I can make myself free by ingratiating myself with you. But that is absurd. It suggests that by toadying and fawning and placating I can liberate myself. As the doors in my choice must each be open, then, so there must be no door-keeper like you in place. This self-ingratiation argument works to the same effect as Berlin's self-adaptation argument.

Taking Berlin's normative argument further

There is a normative argument that also radicalizes Berlin's in support of a republican point of view. Berlin wants to have a range of choices where each citizen/resident is master: subject to no one else's will. But it will not be enough to ensure my non-subjection to the will of another that all doors are open.

If they are open only by grace of your goodwill as a door-keeper, then I will be subject to your will. However goodwilled you are, there is nothing to stop you from acting in a hostile way, should you change. You may not be disposed to impose a specific will, e.g., that I should choose A. You may not interfere. But you will be disposed to impose an unspecific will: the will you would form did your goodwill fail. Thus even though you are goodwilled, I still depend on your will not changing; I am subject to your will. Notice that this will be true, even if you do not want me to be your subject; you may have power, willy nilly. Such a situation is illustrated in Nora's position relative to Thorvald in A Doll's House.

The republican argument would argue for giving each citizen a protected area of choice, like Berlin's. But the protection required will have to provide people with civil, political and socio-economic security. It will have to provide resources that enable each to walk tall, enjoying a respect-commanding status. Legal protection must be reinforced by incorporation in a multi-dimensionally empowering framework.

A more formal comment on the difference between Berlin and republicans.

Berlin thinks that in order to promote my freedom of choice, $P(\text{Int if } A)$ and $P(\text{Int if } B)$ must both be low. But such a probability might be low just because of your actual goodwill towards me. What is needed is that in each case the probability remains low even if you turn hostile. Four probabilities have to be reduced, where 'F' = 'you are friendly', 'H' = 'you are hostile'. They are: $P(\text{Int if } A \ \& \ F)$, $P(\text{Int if } A \ \& \ H)$, $P(\text{Int if } B \ \& \ F)$, $P(\text{Int if } B \ \& \ H)$.

Conclusion

Berlin is poised in an unstable half-way position between Hobbesianism and republicanism. His semantic and normative arguments drive him, understandably, away from Hobbesianism. But taken to their logical conclusion, they ought to drive him into the republican camp. He is something of an anti-Hobbesian, though he fails to recognize this. He ought to go the full monty and join the republican opposition that Hobbes despised.

Lecture sponsored by Routledge