

Define the difference between negative and positive freedom, outline the implications of the state in each

In his "Two Concepts of Liberty", Isaiah Berlin distinguished between two theories of liberty; Negative and Positive freedom.

The *negative* view advocates freedom with regard to independence of an individual from interference by other persons, institutions or governments, and fundamentally the absence of external restrictions or constraints upon the individual. Berlin argued that "I [he] am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others", it thus follows that mere incapacity to attain a goal is not lack of political freedom. If freedom refers in some way, to the absence of external constraints upon the individual, a commitment to liberty implies that definite limits be placed upon both law and Government. Negative Freedom, therefore implies that Government should similarly be restricted to a 'minimal' role, amounting in practice to little more than the maintenance of domestic order and personal security. For this reason, advocates of negative freedom have usually supported minimal state intervention and sympathised with laissez-faire capitalism. This is not to say, however, that state intervention in the form of economic management or social welfare can never be justified, but only that it cannot be justified in terms of freedom.

On the other hand in the *positive* view, freedom entails what an individual is actually able to do or to be. Positive freedom is the "*freedom which consists in being one's own master*" or of being an "*instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will*". Self mastery requires that the individual is able to develop skills and talents, broadens his or her understanding, and gain fulfilment. Berlin believes that this conception of positive freedom is synonymous with knowing what is rationally or ideally best to do or what is necessary. This idea is then connected with that of a rational "*higher self*", which has the task of controlling and disciplining the lower or irrational self or the "*passions*". This higher or "*real*" self is then associated with "*something wider than the individual...as a 'social whole' of which the individual is an element or aspect...*" this entity is then identified as being the '*true*' self which, by imposing its collective, or '*organic*', single will upon its noncompliant '*members*', achieves its own, and therefore their '*higher*' freedom. When the political state is seen to embody such a higher rationality, it can justify coercing others for their own sake, arguing that this will make them do what they would have otherwise chosen for themselves had they been fully rational. It is often seen as the antithesis of negative freedom in that, instead of justifying the contraction of state power; it is more commonly linked to welfarism and state intervention. The notion of positive freedom therefore encompasses a broad range of theories and principles, whose political implications are diverse and sometimes contradictory. In effect, freedom may be positive in that it stands for effective power, self-realisation, self-mastery or autonomy, or moral or 'inner' freedom.

Accordingly, positive freedom can lead to totalitarian or coercive regimes, so democratic states should be concerned with negative freedom. *Negative freedom* (the lack of coercion), rather than *positive freedom* (self-mastery or self-determination).