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**Political Freedom in a Pluralistic Democracy: the Compatibility of
Positive Liberty and Negative Liberty**

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To my mother, Anna, Laura, and Marianna

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Preface

This thesis is in part the product of my personal experience in Italy and in the United States. I am Italian and I am a woman and these are my only identities. I also have some inherited identities which shape who I am by virtue of my education but of which I am not truly aware. I know, for example, that part of my family is of Jewish origins but I understand that, because some of its members died in Germany during World War II, this is something that has never really been talked about in my family. In Italy nobody has ever placed any emphasis on the fact that I look different from my Italian peers simply because there is no emphasis to be placed. I have grown up surrounded with love, affection, and friendship from every person. What my mother and the people I have grown up with have done for me is incredible. It really is. Sometimes I wish I could bring other people throughout a journey of my life simply so that they could truly understand my life. The fact that my skin is darker than that of all the people I have grown up with does not mean anything to me or to them. What matters is our character, our thoughts, and our feelings for one another. That is all that is important to us. Yet, when I came to the United States, due to the fact that my father is African-American, people did not accept me simply as I am: Italian. Despite the fact that I have never lived with my father, I have no contact with him and despite the fact that he does not mean anything to me, people expected me to have an identity that I do not have. People's expectations should certainly not have been a matter of concern for me and in fact

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they were not. Yet, not having found myself in a similar situation before, I felt isolated, estranged, and I could not understand the reality in which I was living because I did not feel accepted. As strange as it may seem to many people, I had never found myself in a situation where I was not accepted by every person for who I am. At first, I did not know what was happening. I then attempted to understand the reality that was surrounding me by studying it. I also sought to make myself known to people so that they could understand me and so that I could comprehend them better. As if there was some essential or monistic self to whom everyone needed to conform, I realized that the real problem I was facing was the fact that people did not see me simply as I am: Italian. Despite these difficulties, I have always asserted my identity. This experience has made me understand even more deeply than before how valuable my identity is to me. Starting from considerations about my own situation, in this essay I have explored the meaning of political freedom and unfreedom in a society where people have multiple identities.

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I. Introduction

This essay is a political and philosophical inquiry into the meanings of political freedom in modern pluralistic states. Its scope is to investigate whether Isaiah Berlin's conception of "positive liberty" and "negative liberty" as two "irreconcilable" ideas -of which "negative liberty" represents a "truer" and "more humane ideal"- is applicable to modern pluralistic societies.¹ Berlin asserts that a person is 'negatively' free to the extent that he has a space where he can act without external impediments.² By contrast, in his view, a person is 'positively' free to the degree that he is able to accomplish the objectives most valuable to him. Political freedom defined as 'negative liberty' substantially pertains to one's secured private sphere whereas political freedom in its 'positive' dimension fundamentally deals with the public realm. Berlin regards 'positive' and 'negative' liberty as two antithetical *concepts* because he assumes that the private and the public spheres can be divided.³ This essay challenges the assumption that the private and the public realms can be separated in modern societies and argues that 'positive' liberty and 'negative' liberty are in fact two complementary *aspects* of political freedom because people have multiple identities. By stating that people have multiple identities I mean to say that people are workers, parents, relatives, members of a team, of political groups and so on and so forth. People have multiple identities because their identity is shaped by their interaction with other people. More precisely, the identity of a person often expands from an individual to a collective dimension such that institutions, social arrangements, and other people are inextricable components of the identity of a person. Very rarely in modern

¹ Berlin, 1969:171

² Berlin, 1969:169

³ In this essay the terms "liberty" and "freedom" are used interchangeably

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societies do people live in complete isolation. The fact that the identity of a person is not defined solely by his individual actions but also by the activities that he performs with other people implies that discussions of political freedom must focus on the interaction and interdependence of citizens rather than on the actions of the individual citizen. In other words, discussions of political freedom must acknowledge that men do not solely compete and cooperate with one another on an individual basis, but also on a collective one; namely, as members of gender, religious, political groups –in general, identity groups.

To understand with greater clarity how does the fact that in modern societies people have multiple identities affects political freedom we need to examine how membership in identity groups impacts the internal or moral sphere of a person. We can argue that the fact that the interaction of a person with other people informs the identity of a citizen has two implications for the moral sphere of a person. One implication is that a person cannot often enjoy the ‘negative liberty’ to choose his own ends unless he has the ‘positive liberty’ to exercise control over his life and to express the identity most valuable to him. A person needs to exercise self-mastery in order to enjoy his ‘negative freedom’ because moral obstacles prevent him from displaying his chosen identities. This inability to express one’s chosen identities is consequent to an ongoing rivalry among the cultural, moral, and linguistic standards that characterize the different identity groups. Individuals see a violation of their ability to express the cultural, moral, and religious traits specific to their identity groups as an infringement on their freedom. People establish these codes in part for fear that other people may limit their own ability to display the characteristics - cultural, linguistic, and religious, for example- specific to their identity groups. People limit the liberty of other agents to display their identities by seeking devices to impose on

them the moral and behavioral characteristic of their own identity group. This attempt generates feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem in the affected individuals and undermines their ability to act as they desire. A single person alone cannot liberate himself from these moral impediments. His inability may be a consequence of the fact that he is not aware of these impediments. Alternatively, the incapacity of this person to eliminate these moral barriers may be due to lack of alternatives. For example, a person may have to conform to the characteristics of other groups because he depends on the people who establish these codes for survival. But if this person collaborates with other people who face similar difficulties -namely, he becomes part of an identity group- he can acquire the capacities to overcome these difficulties, such as a greater self-confidence.

Having argued, therefore, that people have multiple and collective identities and that identity groups have different degree of powers, we can reconsider Berlin's analysis of political freedom. We can say that people's ability to act is not solely limited by legal and human external impediments, as Berlin maintained, but also by moral obstacles.⁴ A second consequence of the fact that people have multiple identities is that a person needs the 'negative liberty' to make decisions in order to be able to understand what are the identities or aspects of some identities that are important to him. Only when he gains this understanding can this person enjoy the 'positive freedom' to accomplish the goals that are truly most worthwhile to him. The reason why having the ability to explore a variety of identities and opportunities is essential to be free is that a person may otherwise act simply under moral and physical compulsion from his identity groups. To be more specific we can say that identity groups often offer to people the means to achieve only a single or a

⁴ Berlin, 1969:161-178

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restricted number of identities or to display only some pre-established characteristics of a particular identity. Identity groups induce their members to accept only the identities that are considered right by the group –which is to say by the most powerful elements in a group- by demeaning the cultural, religious, or moral characteristics specific to other identity groups as shameful or less important for the identity of a person. In short, by undermining those aspects of a person’s identity that they do not regard as ‘true’, identity groups become oppressive because they force people to adopt only the identities that the group repute acceptable. Thus identity groups render their members unfree to embrace other identities. To state the same matter using different words, we can say that identity groups constrain the ‘positive freedom’ of a person to accomplish, or to be, what he deems most valuable by forcing him to embrace a single identity only. To avoid this situation, people must be guaranteed the ‘negative liberty’ to choose among alternative identities.

Identity groups, therefore, can liberate people when they enable them to overcome moral obstacles by offering them the opportunity to display their inner and most true identities (in this case, identity groups enhance the ‘negative liberty’ of a person by promoting his ‘positive liberty’). By contrast, identity groups become oppressive when they enforce upon people a single identity and prevent them from embracing other identities that are valuable to them. In light of these considerations, this essay suggests that both ‘positive liberty’ and ‘negative liberty’ are valuable in themselves. Furthermore, this essay argues that one dimension of liberty is not sufficient to guarantee political freedom without the other because people have multiple identities. In confining political freedom to either of its dimensions, Berlin fails to recognize precisely the fact that individuals have multiple identities, which render them interdependent in the political spheres. To safeguard

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the political freedom of people with multiple identities the private and the public spheres cannot be separated.

By arguing the compatibility of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ liberty, I do not mean to say that these concepts do not characterize two different ways of understanding political freedom. I disagree with Gerald MacCallum who maintains in his paper “Negative and Positive Freedom” that we cannot usefully distinguish between these two dimensions of freedom and that they form a single triadic notion, which includes the identity of the agent.⁵ As Dietz observes, MacCallum’s analysis is nevertheless based on a distinction between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ liberty with emphasis placed on the identity of the agent.⁶ MacCallum’s assertion that an agent is always free from something to do something is not precise because a person can indeed be simply ‘negatively free’ and live in isolation without doing anything; or else, a person can be merely ‘positively free’ and allow his objectives to dominate his actions. History has presented to us numerous examples of attempts to create societies that are politically free solely in a ‘positive’ sense or exclusively free in a ‘negative’ way. Communist governments have often believed in the sole enjoyment of ‘positive liberty’ in society; by contrast, capitalist governments have been strong advocates of ‘negatively free’ individuals. Although I disagree with MacCallum’s dismissal of Berlin’s identification of two separate ways of understanding political freedom, I find MacCallum’s triadic concept important because it brings to our attention the fact that in order to fully discuss political freedom it is necessary to clarify what counts as obstacles, what are the actions to be pursued, and who are the agents. My essay will focus on these three elements, as it proposes a reconsideration of Berlin’s essay

⁵ MacCallum, 1967

⁶ Dietz, 1972: 3

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on liberty. By taking into account what are the actions that one seeks to do, what are the obstacles that one encounters, and who are the agents, my essay reaches the conclusion that it is desirable that political freedom be both 'positive' and 'negative'. With the phrase "political freedom" I define the type of liberty that a person has relative to the other citizens and the state: it can have a solely 'positive' dimension, or an exclusively 'negative' facet, or else it can have both dimensions, as this essay maintains. This essay suggests that while Berlin's essay on liberty is important because it invites reflection on two different ways in which liberty has been understood throughout history, it is also unnecessarily compartmentalized and misleading.

While I was reflecting about Berlin's conception of liberty I came across a debate between Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King Jr. This debate constituted a starting point to reflect on the reasons why both 'positive liberty' and 'negative liberty' need to be constitutive elements of political freedom in modern pluralistic societies. Throughout my essay I use King's and Carmichael's books to articulate my analysis.

The debate between King and Carmichael occurred in June 1966 during the James Meredith March through Mississippi. At the March, Carmichael, the newly-elected chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), invited the participants to embrace the slogan "Black Power." Upon reaching Greenwood, King, who was the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), asked Carmichael to clarify the meaning of the phrase. Carmichael explained that "Black Power" was a demand that black people return to the ghetto and organize black communities. "Black Power," he explained, was also a call to take control over institutions and organizations located in black communities and to teach these communities to become

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economically, socially, and politically self-sufficient. Lastly, “Black Power” was an exhortation to gain greater political leverage by electing black representatives who would be truly responsive to the needs of the black community.⁷ The goal of Black Power advocates was to establish a society in which each ethnic group pursued its own exclusive interests through independent political, social, and economic organizing. Upon hearing Carmichael’s slogan, King expressed a strong disagreement with Carmichael’s ideas and attempted to convince Carmichael to continue supporting the slogan “Freedom Now;” namely, the pursuit of civil rights and of an integrated society. Carmichael, however, dismissed King’s efforts and deemed integration an “insidious subterfuge” because it induced blacks to accept the historical perspective, culture, language, and moral values of the white society.⁸ Despite Carmichael’s attempts to bring King to his side, King opposed “Black Power” because it “would confuse our allies, [and] isolate the Negro community.” King saw the isolation of the black community as problematic because “few ideas are more unrealistic... [Than] the belief that there can be a separate black road to power and fulfillment...there is no salvation for the Negro through isolation.”⁹ King and Carmichael were unable to reach a mutual understanding. From what had been a largely unified civil rights movement emerged as separate and distinct campaign, no longer focused on civil rights but pursuing power, “Black Power”.

What lay behind the disagreement between King and Carmichael were two substantially contrasting understandings of liberty. Carmichael’s advocacy for “Black Power” conveys a yearning for greater ‘positive liberty’. By contrast, the ideas behind

⁷ Carmichael, 1971: 39-43

⁸ Good in Carson ed. 2003: 505

⁹ King (1967) in Washington Ed.1986: 585

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King's slogan "freedom now" tend to suggest a desire for greater 'negative liberty'. More precisely, King sought to create the conditions necessary for a black and for a white person to choose the identities they wished to display; by contrast, the objective of Carmichael was to create the conditions necessary to allow black and white people to embrace the identity most worthwhile to them. Yet, the writings of King and Carmichael suggest that a person cannot be 'positively' free in modern societies unless he has some degree of 'negative' freedom and vice versa, that a person cannot be 'negatively' free unless he is also 'positively' free precisely because people have multiple identities.

Part Two of this essay proceeds with a fuller explanation of the meaning of 'positive' and 'negative' liberty and their relation to the public and private spheres. Part Three analyses the limitations of 'negative liberty' and the value of 'positive liberty'. Part Four exposes the limitations of 'positive liberty' and the importance of 'negative liberty'. The Fifth section concludes this essay.

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II. 'Negative' and 'Positive' Liberty: Nature and Scope

Isaiah Berlin first distinguished between 'positive' and 'negative' liberty in his speech to the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1958. He later expanded the speech in the book *Four Essays on Liberty*.¹⁰

In Berlin's words, a person is 'negatively' free "to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with [his] activity."¹¹ Behind Berlin's understanding of political freedom in this 'negative' dimension lays the idea that man is independent from the political system in which he lives. Accordingly, Berlin saw the role of the state as that of securing the liberties of the individual to act as he wishes. Implicit in Berlin's notion of 'negative liberty' is the idea that people and the government are the only obstacles to the activity of a person; namely, a person lacks political freedom solely if he is enslaved or coerced by other human beings (including the government). Berlin did not regard material or moral obstacles as a hindrance to liberty in this 'negative sense'. Accordingly, Berlin asserted that mere incapacity to do something is not an indication of lack of 'negative liberty' regardless of the reasons behind this incapacity. For example, Berlin would not have considered a blind person who is unable to read as being unfree because such inability was the result of a physical condition, not of an external impediment. 'Negative liberty', therefore, consists substantially in having the opportunity to assert my will, if I so desire and if my capacities allow me to do so without any external human intrusion. Due to the fact that Berlin only saw external obstacles as an impediment to political freedom in its 'negative' facet, he regarded opportunities as the only means to expand 'negative liberty': the greater the opportunities available to a person the greater his political freedom.

¹⁰ Berlin uses the term "political freedom" and "political liberty" interchangeably

¹¹ Berlin, 1969:169

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Charles Taylor is correct in observing that Berlin's notion of 'negative liberty' operates on two levels.¹² One level consists in having a space where a person actually acts. Liberty in this sense is both an "opportunity" and an "exercise" concept.¹³ That freedom has both an 'opportunity' and an 'exercise' concept means that a person has both the *possibility* to act and that he actually *does act*. A second level of 'negative liberty' consists in simply having the opportunity to act. 'Negative liberty' in this sense is exclusively an "opportunity" concept.¹⁴ These two levels of 'negative liberty' can be further illustrated using the notions of liberty articulated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Benjamin Constant, and John Stuart Mill, which Berlin uses to illustrate the meaning of 'negative liberty'.¹⁵

Hobbes' view in the *Leviathan* that limiting fighting among subjects is essential to secure the liberty of the subjects conveys the 'negative' dimension of his understanding of freedom.¹⁶ Such idea was motivated by a belief that human beings constantly compete for the same ends and that such competition generates enmity and violence among them. By demanding that all subjects submit themselves to the absolute authority of a single ruler or "assembly of men," Hobbes attempted to limit the interference of the subjects with one another.¹⁷ Subjects authorized the ruler to perform any action intended to protect the peace of the commonwealth and of the subjects against outside threats. Indeed, to enjoy liberty

¹² Taylor (1979) in Ryan 1979

¹³ Taylor (1979) in Ryan 1979:175-193

¹⁴ Taylor (1979) in Ryan 1979:175-193. In the fourth section on "negative liberty" I will reflect again on these two aspects of 'negative liberty' and argue that they are both essential to ensure political freedom in a pluralistic society.

¹⁵ See: Berlin, 1969: 174-175 for an analysis of Mill's notion of 'negative liberty'. Berlin observes that both the notion of 'positive liberty' and the idea of 'negative liberty' are present in Mill's and Locke's writings.

¹⁶ Hobbes, 1991:129-137

¹⁷ Hobbes, 1991: 109

under this form of government people needed to sacrifice some of their desires, wants, and wishes. Hobbes, however, regarded this price as worth paying because only then men could avoid the “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” life to which they would be confined if they were to live outside the Commonwealth.¹⁸ In Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, the ‘negative dimension’ of *natural* liberty (the liberty that a man has in the state of nature) consists in living under no control but that of the law of nature.¹⁹ By contrast, the ‘negative dimension’ of Locke’s understanding of *political* freedom (the liberty that a man acquires when he joins civil society) emerges from the idea that the enjoyment of liberty necessitates standing legal rules that secure the rights of each individual to act as he pleases (i.e. his natural rights) and that correspondingly compel each person to respect the identical freedom of other people. To state the same idea differently, for Locke freedom lies in doing what civil law does not prohibit. Like Locke, Benjamin Constant’s understanding of liberty displays ‘negative’ elements.²⁰ This ‘negative dimension’ of political freedom is conveyed by Constant’s definition of the “liberty of the moderns” as the area in which an individual has the freedom to own property and where he has the rights to express himself, to act, and to associate with other people without external impediments.²¹ For Constant, such freedom always exists within the limits established by laws. Laws, however, require a formal adherence and not a moral one because the purpose of laws is to prevent people from interfering with one another and not, as we will see in the case of ‘positive liberty’, to elevate people morally to allow them to pursue ‘higher’ desires. Concerned about the safeguard of those activities that affected only the agent

¹⁸ Hobbes, 1991: 76

¹⁹ Locke, 1690

²⁰ Constant, 1988

²¹ Constant, 1988: 310-311

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(‘self-regarding matters’), John Stuart Mill conceptualized an idea of liberty that limited the encroachment of public opinion and of the government on the individual.²² This ‘negative’ definition of liberty is similar to Constant’s in that a provision is made for a considerably large space of private freedom. This space allows “liberty of thought and feeling,” “liberty of opinion,” “liberty of press and association”, and the “liberty to plan our life.”²³ Because he sought to guarantee large areas of non-interference, Mill restricted to preventing harm to others the range of cases in which coercively restricting the actions of another individual is permissible.

Despite having divergent views on the extent of private liberty, Berlin concurred with the English and French philosophers that liberty lies in the presence of private spaces, where no individual can restrict the actions of another person. All of them also agreed that the least the government interferes with the activity of a person the greater the political freedom present in society. Berlin also agreed with Constant, Mill, and Hobbes that areas where people can act as they wish should be protected through standing laws and rights.²⁴ To draw a comparison, however, one can say that for Hobbes and for Locke a ‘negatively’ free individual is a person who simply exists in a space, in which he can *potentially* act as he pleases. For Constant and for Mill, instead, a person is free only if performing at least a certain number of specified actions, such as thinking, for example. To return to Taylor’s classification, we can say that Berlin’s notion of ‘negative freedom’, therefore, encompasses two traditions of ‘negative liberty’. One tradition (Hobbes, Locke) associates ‘negative liberty’ with the ability to do what the law does not forbid. Liberty in this sense

²² John Stuart Mill (1975)

²³ Mill, 1975:26

²⁴ Berlin (1969) in Goodin ed. 1997: 412

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is a mere 'opportunity' concept. The liberty sought after by a monk who dedicates his life to meditation belongs to this tradition. The monk is concerned about eliminating his passions and desires in order to achieve a certain level and type of spirituality. The monk's concern about cutting ties with the external world –not with performing a particular action– makes freedom in this sense an expression of 'negative liberty' as a mere 'opportunity concept'. Another tradition (Constant, Mill) accepts this understanding of 'negative liberty' but attaches a sense of purpose to 'negative liberty': one must perform a specified range of actions to be considered free. This tradition attaches an 'exercise' dimension to the 'opportunity' aspect of 'negative' liberty, to use Taylor's terminology.

Whether simply as an 'opportunity' or as an 'opportunity' and an 'exercise concept', political freedom in its 'negative' dimension as described by these thinkers is nevertheless concerned about establishing boundaries between the activity of the government and other people and the personal space of a person. It is a search for individuality in both cases. For this reason, determining who controls the government, whether a single man (as in a Monarchy) or many men including myself (as in a Democracy), is not a matter of concern for liberty in this sense. The government that is most conducive to 'negative' liberty is the one that interferes least with the lives of a person. Accordingly, limited or even libertarian forms of government best serve freedom in a 'negative' facet insofar as these forms of government tend to interfere little with the activity of an individual. An important assumption behind political freedom in this 'negative' sense is that people have private or *individual* identities and that the aim of each person is creating a niche for himself in society.

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Central to the notion of ‘positive liberty’ is the idea that people have two ‘selves’: a viler one, which they seek to dominate; a nobler one that they strive to develop. It is possible to argue that ‘positive liberty’ focuses on the question, “What is my true nature?” or “What is the ‘self’ that is most beneficial for me?” or “What is my position in society?” Such ‘positive liberty’ stems from the understanding that history is transitory and capable of being changed to suit the needs of a person. This realization underpins the search of a ‘positively’ free person to achieve those objectives and life-style most valuable to him by gaining control over less important pursuits and internal feelings. The control that a ‘positively free’ citizen seeks over his less important pursuits and sentiments can be fundamentally regarded as a desire to use his rational part to dominate and to direct his emotional one. Because a ‘positively free’ person is interested in reaching the objectives most worthwhile to him, the government and other people are pivotal to enlarge the freedom of this person by providing to him the means to accomplish his goals. Accordingly, political freedom defined in its ‘positive’ sense is entirely a collective or public notion.

Although ‘negative liberty’ can either be a pure ‘opportunity’ concept or be both an ‘opportunity’ and an ‘exercise’ concept, ‘positive liberty’ is essentially an “exercise” notion. ‘Positive liberty’ can only operate on an ‘exercise level’ because such liberty consists in concretely *achieving* those goals that we cherish. More specifically, the ‘exercise’ aspect of ‘positive’ liberty arises from the fact that ‘positive liberty’ consists in *the ability* to impose one’s ‘dominant self’ over one’s ‘lower self’ or ‘nature’, which is to say in “self-mastery”, as Berlin observed in his speech to the American Political Science

Association.²⁵ Berlin described the ‘dominant self’ as that part which a person identifies as the “true self”; that ‘self’ that people commonly recognize as “something wider than the individual, as a social ‘whole’ of which the individual is an aspect.”²⁶ It is through the process of identifying one’s higher purpose with the higher ideal of other people that a person acquires a public or collective identity. Such identification is often motivated by the realization that resources are scarce and that men are interdependent. When such identification occurs, the body politic can become essential to further political freedom in this ‘positive’ dimension. The body politic may become the one entity that determines which aspects of the ‘self’ ought to be regarded as righteous and which ones should be considered base. By imposing its ‘collective’ or ‘organic’ single will upon a person, this ‘true’ or ‘higher’ self achieves its own freedom, which is to say the ‘positive’ freedom of the person himself. Communitarian forms of government best promote ‘positive’ liberty in this sense because they allow the higher rational end of the citizen to coincide with that of society as a whole. This is to say that in communitarian society what is best for the citizen is often thought to be best for society as a whole and vice versa. Thus, the free citizen does not feel subjected to a will different from his own but rather to the personification of his own will. The identification of a person with others can be both beneficial and harmful for political freedom, as I will discuss in the upcoming sections.

Berlin’s illustration of ‘positive liberty’ using the notion of liberty elaborated by Jean-Jacque Rousseau conveys the ‘exercise aspect’ of ‘positive liberty’. Berlin asserts that the notion of liberty that Rousseau articulated in *The Social Contract* belongs to the tradition of ‘positive liberty’ because Rousseau argues that freedom lies in ruling and being

²⁵ Berlin, 1969:179

²⁶ Berlin, 1969:179

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ruled according to the ‘common good,’ which is equivalent to saying, in conforming to one’s own ‘general will’.²⁷ This ‘general will’ is not a mere summation of the private wills of the citizens; it is rather the common interest that underlines such wills. By participating in this form of politics, argued Rousseau, each citizen becomes able to preserve his freedom and also acquires a legal right to his property because each citizen rejects his selfish pursuit and none is thus subjected to the will of another person. This political arrangement is necessary because “men reach a point where the obstacles to their preservation in the state of nature prove greater than the strength that each man has to preserve himself in that state.”²⁸ Due to these obstacles, human kind would perish if it did not change its “mode of existence.”²⁹ If we were to use Taylor’s terminology, we could say that once they join the social contract people exercise control over their egoistic nature and thus they acquire the ‘positive freedom’ to enjoy their most worthwhile pursuits, such as their property.

²⁷ Rousseau, 1762

²⁸ Rousseau, 1968: 59

²⁹ *ibidem*

III. Positive Liberty

In Berlin's view the goal of a person who seeks to expand his 'negative liberty' is opposite to the objective of a person who wants to increase his 'positive liberty'. Berlin argues that an individual who attempts to expand his 'negative liberty' seeks to limit the authority of the government over himself, while a person who wants to enlarge his 'positive liberty' yearns for concentrating authority in his own hands.³⁰ In other words, Berlin sees political freedom in a 'positive' sense as antithetical to political liberty in a 'negative' sense because he does not identify any necessary connection between the questions "Who governs me?," which underlines the quest for political freedom in a 'positive sense', and "How far does the government interfere with me?," which is central to a 'negative' notion of liberty.³¹ Implicit in Berlin's view that 'positive' and 'negative' liberty are two opposite dimensions of freedom is the idea that the search for a private sphere where a person acts according to his capacities, which is central to 'negative liberty', is antithetical to the quest for a public sphere in which a person acts to expand his self-mastery, which lies at the core of 'positive liberty'. Between these two dimensions of freedom, Berlin sees political freedom in its 'negative liberty' dimension as superior to political liberty in its 'positive' facet. Berlin asserts the superiority of 'negative liberty' because such liberty recognizes the existence of a plurality of ends in society and protects human capacity to choose among these different ends. By contrast, 'positive liberty' puts into peril human choice by virtue of the fact that it views man not only as a part of the

³⁰ Berlin (1969) in Henry Hardy ed.2002: 212

³¹ Berlin (1969) in Henry Hardy ed.2002: 130-131

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body politic but also as necessarily interdependent on other members of the body politic, both morally and physically.³²

In my view, Berlin's claim concerning the superiority of 'negative freedom' over 'positive freedom' is problematic. In order to understand why Berlin's assertion is troublesome it is fundamental to investigate the nature of 'negative liberty' and to explore how moral problems can hinder the 'negative liberty' of a person and, lastly, to show how 'positive freedom' can enhance 'negative liberty' by helping people to overcome their moral problems.

The assumption that 'negative freedom' is superior to 'positive freedom' or liberty because the former does not undermine human ability to choose among a multiplicity of ends rests on the view that human nature is fundamentally individualistic, solitary, and competitive. This view about the superiority of 'negative liberty' also rests on the assumption that people are conscious of their will and that they have a single and defined identity which they need only to have the opportunity to express. Although the assumption that human beings compete with one another for limited resources is valid, the idea that a person has a fixed and well-defined identity that is not shaped by his interaction with other people is more problematic.

In his writings, Berlin indeed recognizes that "the individual self is not something which I can detach from my relationship with others or from those attributes of myself which consist in their attitude towards me."³³ In his *Personal Reflections*, Berlin relates his own experience of collective identity.³⁴ Berlin asserts,

³² Berlin (1969) in Henry Hardy ed.2002: 216

³³ Berlin (1969) in Henry Hardy ed.2002: 202

³⁴ Berlin,1998

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As for my Jewish roots, they are so deep, so native to me, that it is idle for me to try to identify them, let alone analyze them. But this much I can say. I have never been tempted, despite my long devotion to individual liberty, to march with those who, in its name, reject adherence to a particular nation, community, language -the myriad unanalysable strands that bind men into identifiable groups³⁵

Although Berlin recognizes the influence that other people have on the identity of a person, –namely, the fact that people have collective identities rather than private individual identities- he does not explore the full implications of this issue for political freedom. But, if one were to undertake the task of exploring the nature of a collective identity, one would find that a collective identity has an important bearing for both ‘positive’ and ‘negative freedom’.

People have different identities depending on the persons they interact with and depending on the social institutions they belong to. Yet, people are not always free to express these identities because they cannot overcome moral obstacles produced by social, political, and economic factors. Hegel can assist us in clarifying the reasons why a person at times lacks the ability to express his identities. Hegel explains that if the right of the subject to display its particularity (the “right of subjective freedom”) is regarded as self-sufficient, the freedom to choose between alternatives is indistinguishable from arbitrariness, and this arbitrariness conceals the domination of given drives and inclinations.³⁶ The freedom that Hegel talks about is ‘negative liberty’ insofar as it consists

³⁵ Berlin, 1998: 258

³⁶ Hegel, 2001:107

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in the ability to make choices. Hegel's suggestions that the freedom ('negative liberty') to choose between different opportunities camouflages external drives and influences raises the issue that people can be conditioned and manipulated in relation to the very composition of their desires, values, and identity. In short, Hegel's insights suggest that the identity and will of a person is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Such influence is a product of the interdependence between subject and object that characterizes human condition. T. H Green accurately describes the relation between subject and object in his analysis of Herbert Spencer's views on subject and object. Green states that "neither of the two correlata [subject and object] has any reality apart from the other. Every determination of the one implies a corresponding determination of the other."³⁷ As a result, "the object.... is in truth nothing without the subject" and vice versa.³⁸

Insofar as the particular self that a person expresses is influenced by external drives and inclinations we can infer that upon making a choice a person is not always acting under the direction of his own will. Accordingly, the choices that a person makes and the identity that he displays when given the opportunity are not always free. It is important to further clarify the circumstances that may prevent a person from displaying his true identity and to investigate the implications of this factor for political freedom. In order to do so, we need to analyze the impact that a society divided along the lines of identity groups has for the political and for the social life of a person. Because membership into a group is so important to the identity of a person, such membership often directs the decisions that a person makes. Accordingly, the identity of a person provides the bases on

³⁷ T. H. Green, 1885: vol.1, part I, p.387

³⁸ T. H. Green, 1885:vol.1, part I, p.388

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which he establishes coalitions with other people and on which a he competes with other individuals to achieve his goals. A struggle between conflicting cultural, moral, and linguistic standards underpins the competition that takes place among identity groups as they attempt to accomplish their goals; this struggle leads to the dominance of some cultural, moral, and linguistic values over others. Such domination tends to prevent some people from expressing their true identity because it fosters in them a sense of insecurity and low self-esteem. A low self-esteem and self-hate undermine people's ability to master themselves and induce them to conceal both consciously and unconsciously their true identity. In other words, it is possible to say that the competition that exists among identity groups undermines the internal 'positive freedom' of some people; as a result, the latter surrender their 'negative liberty' to act according to their will, which is to say, their freedom of opportunity. In this case, 'negative liberty' is not sufficient to protect human freedom to choose among a multiplicity of ends.

Carmichael's writings of the 1960s and 1970s about the condition of black people in the United States allow a closer understanding of how moral factors can inhibit the liberty of a person to choose his own ends. What Isaiah Berlin's discussion of political freedom understood solely in its 'negative liberty' dimension implies for black people is that they should be able to do what they like without constraints. It is their conscience that should tell them what they ought to do, without any external restraint posing limits on the expression of their personalities. Carmichael's writings, however, suggest that this view of freedom failed short of reality in the 1960s and 1970s because the imposition of white people's cultural, linguistic, moral and behavioral standards on blacks generated in them a sense of inferiority and self-hate, which hindered their ability to master themselves and to

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express their will and identity freely. More specifically, these cultural and moral impositions rendered blacks incapable of deciding the course of their life because they destabilized their identity by inducing them to make decisions in line with the prevailing cultural and linguistic norms rather than according to their true feelings and will.³⁹ For example, black women straightened their hair and used skin bleaches in order to be more acceptable to white people, without necessarily been fond of this practice. Such acceptance was important to them because it secured them much needed access to economic opportunities.⁴⁰ In part, blacks incorporated the ideas of white society about them because how a person views himself depends on his experiences and interaction with other people. Accordingly, if a person grows up in an environment where people constantly demean his worth, he will eventually start questioning his own worth, too. Alternatively, in an attempt to resist these cultural impositions, blacks systematically adopted those standards that white society denigrated. For example, as a result of being defined “lazy,” “apathetic,” and “stupid”, black students lost interest in striving for high educational standards and high grades in defiance of white society.⁴¹

Whether black people embraced or rejected prevailing cultural norms, blacks were not free to choose their own ends but were rather enslaved to a lack of self-confidence and insecurity.⁴² The fact that black people were unable to assert their chosen will and identity due to moral factors implies that the difference between blacks and whites in the 1960s did not simply lay in unequal opportunities but also in blacks’ inability to master themselves. Accordingly, black people could truly express their chosen identity only if they became

³⁹ Carmichael, 1971: 118; 147; 9

⁴⁰ Carmichael, 1967:29

⁴¹ Carmichael, 1971: 65, 93-94; 1967: 36

⁴² Carmichael, 1967:23

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able to distinguish between motivational fetters and what was worthwhile to them. Had blacks gained access to all the opportunities available to white people, many of them would have nevertheless remained unable to enjoy these opportunities because lack of self-esteem and self-hate paralyzed them; namely, a lack of internal 'positive freedom' in black people prevented their enjoyment of 'negative liberty'. Accordingly, -because he understood the impact of moral factors on the ability of black people to act unimpeded- Carmichael rejected the integrationist platform advocated by King. Carmichael understood that simply creating a society in which black people gained access to the same organizations that white people attended could not increase the liberty of black people. For blacks would have entered institutions with an already established cultural, linguistic, and moral norms that would not have afforded them the acquisition of a greater self-confidence. Due to this problem, black people would have remained unable to assert their will. For example, Carmichael maintained that in interracial educational institutions black students would learn to depreciate black culture and history. By internalizing these feelings of contempt towards their own culture, history, and self, black people would have never truly followed their will but would have rather sought to model their behavior on white people's will, as expressed in white people's cultural, linguistic, and moral views.⁴³

This discussion of the impact of moral factors on the ability of a person to display his identity shows that Isaiah Berlin is not altogether correct when he asserts that a man who sits in a room and vegetates is free because he chose to do so. It is indeed possible that the man in question decided to simply sit in the room and that the man is therefore free. Yet, it is equally possible that this man is acting out of fear, or lack of self-esteem, rather

⁴³ Carmichael, 1971:37; 47

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than according to his will; in this case, the man's inaction is an indication of his unfreedom and not a manifestation of his freedom of choice. In this case, we cannot say that 'negative liberty' protects human capacity to choose.

Because moral factors prevent people from expressing their identity, people need to acquire the 'positive liberty' to reach the state of mind most valuable to them in order to increase their 'negative liberty' to display their chosen will. Thus, they can distance themselves from those feelings or ideas that they perceive as external impositions, or as less worthwhile to them. Active participation into the identity groups most worthwhile to a person facilitates the process of eliminating motivational fetters and thus, the displaying of one's chosen identities. Such dynamic involvement can enhance the 'negative liberty' of a person because it facilitates the acquisition of the level of self-confidence and self-awareness necessary to recognize and to admit to oneself the existence of moral obstacles. A person who was to attempt the task of eliminating motivational fetters by himself while living in a situation where people criticize or condemn his behavior, tastes, or thoughts, is likely to end up giving greater credits to other people's words than to his own judgment. By contrast, by interacting with other people who face similar obstacles a person can succeed in giving credit to his feelings and perceptions with greater ease because he interacts with people who share similar feelings and experience. More specifically, upon interacting with people who share a particular identity, a person can realize that his behavior is not problematic in itself but that it is problematic in a specific context, only. Thanks to this realization, this person is likely to overcome the lack of self-confidence that inhibited his ability to display this particular identity.

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It is the recognition that by interacting with people who have a similar identity a person feels greater freedom to express his own identity that has prompted a trend in modern societies to select a number of dominant identities against which people weight their behavior, thoughts, and actions. The extent to which a person perceives that he can make choices and act in line with the particular cultural, sexual, or religious characteristics specific to his most dominant identity group determines the degree to which he feels free. Freedom in this sense consists in the ability to act outside particular social and moral constraints. In other words, people can nurture and develop their true identities or selves by interacting with individuals who share the same identity. Since membership in these identity groups is free and non-compulsory, the deliberative capacity of the individual is respected while his self-confidence and self-awareness are enhanced through a greater comprehension of the factors that deny him the opportunity to act as he wishes and of the factors that are constitutive of his 'true' selves. In short, as a member of an identity group, a person eliminates those outer layers that other social groups have unconsciously or consciously enforced on him and, thus, he can uncover his inner essence. It is, therefore, evident that political freedom demands involvement in the political community; namely, 'positive liberty'.

Not all moral factors that impede the activity of a person are conscious and removable by distancing oneself from them; there are also unconscious factors that have an equally powerful influence. If we account for unconscious factors, in order to separate free choices from those that are conditioned and imposed, some criteria need to be set. We can determine whether a person's actions are free by examining if the preconditions necessary to formulate decisions exist. These preconditions are self-awareness and self-esteem. For

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how can a rational person who does not trust himself believe in his own judgment? If a person does not trust his own judgment and he makes decisions under the influence of other people's suggestions or under the influence of existing circumstances, rather than based on his own judgment, how can he be considered free in a 'negative sense'? Clearly his actions are constrained by his lack of self-esteem: even if this person wanted to act in a particular way he would not be able to so because he lacks the necessary self-confidence.

It is an understanding of the importance of self-confidence and self-awareness in making unimpeded decisions that induced Carmichael to assert that blacks needed to acquire self-confidence and self-awareness in order to lessen the fear that they felt in acting according to their inherited culture, language, and behavior. In Carmichael's view, to develop a greater sense of self-worth black people needed to group together and to create independent social organizations that would render them able "to create their own terms through which to define [themselves] and [their] relationship to the society, and to have these terms recognized."⁴⁴ More specifically, Carmichael believed that independent organizations could nurture self-confidence in blacks by promoting their "true beauty, language, and behavior"; "true" in the sense that it was the one they acquired at birth.⁴⁵ The use of words with a positive connotation to describe their physical, cultural, and linguistic characteristics would serve this purpose.

Another reason why having the external ability to act unimpeded ('negative freedom') is not sufficient to make a person free is that due to ignorance a person may wish what he would not have desired had he had adequate knowledge. Thus, an individual

⁴⁴ Carmichael, 1971:35; see also Carmichael 1971: 63-65
Carmichael, 1971: 93-97. At times, I use the words 'distinctive individuality' to refer to what Carmichael defined as black people's 'humanity'

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may choose a particular end simply because he is not aware that this choice is harmful to him; yet, if he were aware of the consequences of this choice, he would never have made it. Education is therefore critical to self-realization: through education a person can better comprehend his will and identity. For example, blacks could develop pride in themselves and thus acquire the confidence to act according to what they truly felt as black people and cease to make decisions according to what they believed that was socially acceptable by learning the history of their departure from the shores of Africa and of their arrival in the United States. Blacks could also gain a greater self-confidence by studying history from the perspective of the African and African-American subject rather than from the European subject.⁴⁶

One person's decision not to be involved in political life may be interpreted as an indication of his contentment with the existing situation. But such contentment can only be based upon lack of interest or to passivity. For by isolating oneself from the body politic a person agrees to forfeit his will and identity and to act according to the will of another person or people. Isolation is an implicit agreement to surrender one's will and identity over to other people because the extent of political, economic, and political power of a group of people determines the ability of this group to affect laws and legislations. The fact that the political power of a group affects its capacity to influence laws means that laws are never impartial because they are made by men who cannot and do not completely dissociate themselves from their interests and points of views; hence, the identity of the people who legislate determines the extent of opportunities concretely available to other identity groups. The reason why the identity of the group with the greater political power

⁴⁶ Carmichael, 1971: 82-83

has an impact on the opportunities that can be enjoyed by other groups is that in passing laws the group in question can use phraseology and language that weaken the level of self-confidence of other people and thus discourages their activity. In short, some people can skillfully use passivity and disinterest to covertly decide the extent and type of opportunities available to other people. Accordingly, if a person sits in a room and does not have a say in the formulation of decisions about the type and extent of opportunities available to him, he may never have the ability to enjoy these opportunities concretely because other people may prevent him from leaving the house by locking the room.⁴⁷ Lacking the ability to explore different opportunities, a person cannot decide what identities he wants to embrace. Similarly, if a person in a wheelchair does not participate in political action and remains at home, he may never be able leave his house because all buildings will be constructed with staircases, rather than with appropriate devices. As in the case of a person who sits in a room, the person on the wheelchair cannot choose what identities he wants to embrace because the opportunity to exit the house and interact with other people is denied to him.

Marx and other theorists have provided important insights about the relation between the identity of the group with the greatest political power and the opportunity available to other groups. These scholars have argued that liberal theorists' very conception of individual rights and representative institutions protects the freedom of some particular groups more the others.⁴⁸ No matter how impartial a legislator is, his actions will always reflect his views and life-experience. Carmichael's writings invite reflection on this problem. He claimed that in making laws white people had the ability to influence laws to

⁴⁷ Dietz, 1972:24

⁴⁸ Marx, 1959 and 1970; Marx and Engels, 1970; MacPherson, 1962

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their advantage due to the different and contrasting cultural, linguistic, and moral views of blacks and whites. For example, although black people had the theoretical right to walk freely in their community, the police created a climate of fear in blacks' communities that confined blacks to their homes.⁴⁹ In a situation where the identity of the group with the greatest political power has an impact on the opportunities that other groups can concretely enjoy we can safely say that active involvement in politics is vital to political freedom.

Another reason why privacy is not a sufficient condition to guarantee 'negative freedom' is that laws are not adequate to guarantee to a person the enjoyment of a particular opportunity because they cannot change the internal feelings of citizens and address the issue of covert discrimination. Such covert discrimination consists in theoretically allowing universal access to a specific opportunity but in granting actual access to it to only those people who comply with specific cultural, linguistic, or religious standards. In this case, only if representatives from all the different groups that comprise the body politic have some degree of control over existing opportunities, can opportunities be made available to all citizens. For example, Carmichael observed that the political, economic, and social dependency of blacks on the white community made the rejection of the prevailing cultural and linguistic norms difficult because white people allowed only those blacks who conformed to their standards to have access to employment and social opportunities. In other words, black people were dependent upon the way white people perceived them for the enjoyment of opportunities because they relied on white people's social, economic, and political power for a living. Carmichael saw the fact that white people controlled most sources of credit and economic opportunities as a testimony of the

⁴⁹ Carmichael, 1971: 17-30; 36; 1967: 1-4

economic dependence of the black community on the white one. In Carmichael's view, the fact that the white community owned most of the houses in black communities and that it could thus decide the rent amount charged to black people was a further indication of the economic dependency of blacks on whites.⁵⁰ Carmichael also asserted that blacks were dependent upon the white community due to the fact that white people controlled most employment opportunities and could decide which one to make accessible to them.⁵¹ For example, the white community controlled boards of education in black communities and had the power to hire and to dismiss black teachers and school principals to their liking.⁵² Similarly, white people had the political power to decide in which areas of the city black people could live.

Since there is a large range to determine what constitutes an obstacles and what does not -what constitutes an obstacle for one person may not represent a barrier for another one- laws that secure unimpeded action to a diverse citizenry can be passed only if the greatest number of people possible contribute their views to the formulation of laws. Berlin would contend that the government is a non-partisan institution, sufficient to regulate interaction among citizens through laws. This idea is problematic because a legislator would have to be aware of the concrete reality in which the citizenry lives in order to pass laws that secure universal actual enjoyment of unimpeded action. It is unlikely that a legislator can fully comprehend the diverse realities of the citizenry due to logistic constraints, such as lack of time and resources, and because it is unlikely that he can understand the reality and experience of another person in all its nuances.

⁵⁰ Carmichael, 1971: 73; 1971:20

⁵¹ Carmichael, 1971: 33

⁵² Carmichael, 1967:101

Alternatively, all the different groups that compose the body politic would have to be represented in government, in order to secure the 'negative liberty' of all the citizens. This alternative is more viable. The fact that in a society, where only a few people are involved in political activity, these people have the power to decide the actual extent of the 'negative freedom' of the rest of the citizens implies that lack of political involvement can lead to totalitarian consequences, even in a society where the authority of the government is apparently limited.

Understanding the importance of equal representation, Carmichael asserted that blacks needed to gain greater political power through the election of exclusively black political parties in counties where blacks were a majority. In counties where blacks were a minority political power could be obtained by gaining adequate representation.⁵³ By working in a multiethnic environment but by being solely concerned with bargaining and advancing the interests of black people, blacks could secure specific political rights for blacks and thus, make adequate opportunities available to them. For instance, upon becoming a sheriff a black person could end police brutality and decrease the level of fear produced by police brutality in black communities. Thus, he could secure to black people the concrete opportunity to walk without impediments.⁵⁴

It can be argued, therefore, that the state and external obstacles are not the only threat to human choice but that lack of self-esteem and self-hate, as well as how other people perceive us, equally undermine our will and thus, our ability to express our chosen identities. Separating completely the public from the private sphere is problematic in modern societies because people cannot be politically free in isolation. More specifically,

⁵³ Carmichael, 1971:21

⁵⁴ Carmichael, 1971: 207

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due to the fact that people have multiple identities, people are often unable to shape their actions according to their will; or else, covert discrimination denies them the opportunity to express their different identities. Both these problems can be addressed only if a person is an active player in the political community and gains self-mastery. Political involvement is essential to eliminate *both* legal obstacles and moral barriers and to secure one's 'negative liberty'.

Having ascertained that 'positive freedom' is conducive to the enjoyment of 'negative liberty' we can say that Berlin's contention that 'negative liberty' is a superior ideal to 'positive liberty' because it protects human capacity to choose among a multiplicity of ends is not applicable to modern pluralistic societies. This obscures the fact that in a pluralistic society external impediments are not the sole obstacle to human choice but moral factors hinder the liberty of a person to choose as much as external factors. To liberate oneself from these moral barriers and express one's true will and desires, an individual needs to interact with other people who face similar obstacles. In other words, in a society where people have multiple identities 'positive liberty' enhances the 'negative liberty' of a person by enabling him to acquire the capacities necessary to overcome those moral obstacles that impede his activity, as well as by allowing him to overcome covert impediments that restrict his activity that cannot be eliminated through laws, such as feelings of antipathy and dislike.

IV. Negative Liberty

I have argued that because of its moral content 'positive liberty' is an essential aspect of political freedom in a society where people have multiple identities as it enhances human capacity to make choices. This conclusion, however, should not betray the crucial importance of 'negative liberty' and obscure the fact that 'positive liberty' can become a threat to political freedom. As Berlin characterizes it, 'negative liberty' defines the opportunity to make decisions unimpeded from external obstacles. Implicit in this notion of freedom is a need for a private sphere distinctly separated from the public sphere; namely, a search for privacy and individuality. I argue that such space is important to political freedom because it allows people to reflect on their identities and to choose those that are truly most worthwhile to them. I emphasize that political freedom requires 'negative liberty' both in its mere 'opportunity' level and in its 'opportunity' and 'exercise' level. To understand why the exclusive enjoyment of 'positive liberty' cannot guarantee political freedom, it is necessary to explore the limitations of 'positive liberty' as they pertain to people living in modern pluralistic societies and to clarify the nature of 'negative liberty'. What must be taken into consideration are the ways in which 'positive liberty' can induce people to embrace identities that other people impose on them and how 'negative liberty' can prevent this. In addition, the relation between the enjoyment of 'negative liberty' and social interaction must be taken into account.

In order to be 'positively free' a person must be able to separate what is valuable to him from what is not. To achieve only what he considers worthwhile a person needs to exercise control over himself. Because of the need to exercise such control to be 'positively' free, as John Christman has observed, a person who seeks to expand his 'positive liberty' may become predominantly concerned with the ways in which desires are

formed -whether as a result of self-reflection, pressure, manipulation or ignorance- and disregard the content of individual desires; that is to say, whether his desires are truly reflective of his own will.⁵⁵ We can also say that 'positive liberty' demands that a person rationally evaluates his goals and identifies those that are rationally most valuable to him. Because it focuses predominantly on such rational evaluation, political freedom defined solely in terms of 'positive liberty' may become an incentive to not pay attention to whether citizens actually choose the goals that are valuable to them. For example, a government that seeks to enlarge the 'positive freedom' of its citizens may provide to them the means to exercise a particular profession because it believes that this profession is valuable to increase economic growth in the country and thus the welfare of the citizens. In doing so, the government does not pay attention to the fact that not all individual citizens are either fit for exercising this profession or keen on doing it. Due to the propaganda of the government and lack of alternatives, the citizens believe that entering this profession is most worthwhile to them. As a result, once they gain the necessary education to embark in this career, they feel free. But in truth the citizens of this country are unfree because they are striving to achieve something that has been imposed on them by the government. The question here is the degree to which their actions are voluntary or not. Been manipulated and coerced into striving for something due to lack of alternatives is not symptomatic of political freedom.

A desire to follow the objective mandates of reason as opposed to the inclinations of nature underpins the decision of a 'positively free' society to sacrifice those objectives that are regarded as less worthwhile to those that are considered most important. It is

⁵⁵ Christman, 1991

during the process of selecting those objectives that rationally appear most valuable to him that a person or group of people who seek to expand their 'positive freedom' may become unfree. Kant's insights into the nature of liberty permit an understanding of how 'positive freedom' can become a threat to political freedom. Kant observes that man is conscious of the fact that the time allocated to life is insufficient to fulfill his desires. Such consciousness generates in man a longing for a future life. Likewise, man gains a "consciousness of freedom" in following duties as opposed to the demands of his inclinations because he opposes the freedom of the will to the mere dynamics of nature.⁵⁶ Such freedom is derived from a separation between subjective and objective "practical necessity."⁵⁷ The "objective practical necessity" is what is important to a person independently of the "impulses of sensibility."⁵⁸ By contrast, the subjective "practical necessity" consists in spontaneity, which is to say, in doing what is important to a person irrespectively of experience.⁵⁹ If we proceed along the line of reasoning suggested by Kant we can say, for example, that when we have to decide what particular objectives to pursue we base our decision more on the possible future benefits that each of these goals can accrue to us than on the basis of our impulsive feelings towards each goal. In making these considerations we sacrifice our 'subjective necessity' to our 'objective practical necessity'.

A person who gains freedom by controlling his 'subjective practical necessity' using his 'objective practical necessity' may become enslaved to such control. Such enslavement happens if a person lives in a society that renders the 'subjective' need of the agent functional to his 'objective' necessity to a very large extent. K. Anthony Appiah's

⁵⁶ Kant, 1998: 118

⁵⁷ *ibidem*

⁵⁸ Kant, 1998: 118, 533

⁵⁹ *ibidem*

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analysis of ethnic groups can serve as an illustration of how sacrificing the ‘subjective’ need to the ‘objective’ one may lead to a condition of unfreedom. Appiah observes that identity groups are valuable because they allow people to develop pride in their identity but they may become tyrannical by enforcing upon people aspects of this identity that they would otherwise reject. Accordingly, if rejecting negative characterizations of ethnic features by developing pride in these characteristics is a valid way of resisting racism, racial identities can become the basis for new tyrannies because they become static images to which people need to conform in order to regard themselves and to be regarded as authentic.⁶⁰

We can apply Appiah’s insights to a political society. We can imagine a society that imposes on people a single fixed identity, which it deems most beneficial to the well-being of the citizens. This society imposes this identity on citizens by means of propaganda and moral coercion. We can also assume that this society does not allow its citizens to embrace any other identity. It is possible that a member of this society rationally feels that he *ought* to regard this identity as valuable, although he *feels* that this is not the case. But to follow the dictates of reason this person is ready to sacrifice other pursuits, including his health, in order to be able to be true to this identity. A fear that a rejection of this identity would ostracize him from his society may underpin such decision; or else, he may have been exposed all his life to strong propaganda that has rendered him too ashamed and too fearful of the possible consequences of such action. We can say that the person in question is unfree because he lives in a society that has coerced him into embracing a fixed identity by inducing hi, to believe that he should adopt a specific identity because this is best for

⁶⁰ Appiah, 1996: 103-105

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him, although he may not feel that this is the case. In sum, we can say that a political society favors the 'objective' necessity of citizens at the expenses of their 'subjective' necessity to such a degree that it renders citizens unfree when a government or ruling body enforces on people a particular identity because it regards such identity as most beneficial to citizens. Such has been the case of several totalitarian regimes that believed that nurturing a single and fixed identity in people was beneficial to them.

'Positive liberty' opens the path to moralistic interpretations. Morality can become a powerful coercive means because it promotes the very idea of a 'true' self, which can be distinguished from the exclusively empirical or contingent desires. The idea of a 'real' self raises the possibility that the desires of a person are mistaken and if so, ought to be eliminated. Such moralism makes 'positive liberty' a potential threat to political freedom. For example, a person who lives in a society with strict moral codes that ascribe moral rectitude to only one specific identity feels compelled to shape his needs and desires -in short his self or persona- to correspond to this particular identity and to forgive other equally valuable identities. At last, this person is likely to embrace the identity that he has acquired by virtue of his birth as his sole and right identity due to the fact that the society in which he lives deems other identities as less important, negligible, shameful, or disturbing. A person who lives in these conditions is clearly unfree because he is unable to express choice about which identities he wishes to embrace, due to moral conditioning. Such inability arises from the fact that he is subject to a strong moral pressure that acts as a coercive factor. Moral pressure from a community or society can induce an individual to convince himself that he has achieved or become what is most worthwhile to him. But what he truly wants and would have liked to achieve, had he not been a member of this

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particular society and subject to this pressure, would have been completely different. We can say that a person in this situation is unfree because the self that wills is the community self, not his individual self.

It is important to emphasize that, when a society promotes the ‘positive freedom’ of citizens in such a way that it renders their ‘subjective necessity’ functional to their ‘objective necessity’ to an extreme extent, people can become unfree not only due to the fact that a specific identity is imposed on them but also because they cannot explore and develop the different capabilities that they possess. For denying people the opportunity to explore their capabilities means facilitating the shaping of their will according to the means available to them rather than in line with what they truly want to achieve. For example, a government may spend vast resources to promote a particular sport such as soccer, while, in contrast, it may dedicate very little resources to the practice of other sports. In this society, a person may become a mediocre soccer player just because this is the easiest path to follow. By channeling resources towards a specific sport, therefore, the society in question has in effect become a threat to the freedom of this person because he may have the capacities to become a swimmer. Due to the policies of the government, however, this person will never become a swimmer because the facilities necessary to become one are harder to access or not available at all. Had the person in question instead lived in a society that offered him the opportunity to choose among a variety of sports he would have been free to accomplish both his aspirations. Channeling large resources towards a few specific professions considered most valuable to the well-being of a body politic has been a common practice in communist societies. But such practice was not necessarily liberating for the citizens because it did neither encourage them to explore their different capacities

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nor afforded them the choice to decide which of these capacities they truly wanted to utilize. As a result, men often became a “cog in the wheel of the state,”⁶¹ as King observed; namely, men could not choose between alternative identities and as a result they used their faculties mechanically without truly imposing their will on them. We can also think about the potential threat posed by 'positive liberty' to freedom if we use the household as a miniature of the political community and think about a person whose parents are musicians. This person is likely to grow up with the encouragement and means necessary to become a musician. Yet, his becoming a musician is not necessarily an expression of his political freedom if he has not been afforded the choice to become a painter or to explore alternative professions.

King's narration of his encounter with a guitarist in a slum of Atlanta allows further reflection on how 'positive freedom' is not adequate to ensure political freedom by itself. In *Stride toward Freedom*, King explains that “the guitarist used to sing, ‘Ben down for so long that down don't bother me.’”⁶² Commenting on the episode, King observes that the words of the guitarist conveyed to him 'freedom from exhaustion' and adds, “This is the type of negative freedom and resignation that often engulfs the life of the oppressed. But this is not the way out.”⁶³ Although in the dire circumstances in which he lives the guitarist may regard his profession as an important achievement, to say that the guitarist is 'positively free' is problematic because his decision to become a guitarist was dictated by lack of alternative options. The greater 'positive freedom' that he has gained by becoming a guitarist is small compared to the unfreedom in which he lives as a result of not having

⁶¹ King, 1967:186

⁶² King (1958) in Washington ed.1986: 482

⁶³ King (1958) in Washington ed.1986: 482

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the opportunity to undertake other professions. In a political system where people are confined within segregated areas or slums where, out of necessity, they have to shape their will in line with the limited means available, or in a political system which affords citizens the means to develop only technical or exclusively artistic abilities, therefore, people are not politically free because they cannot express their multiple identities. King understood the importance of having the opportunity to explore multiple identities to truly realize oneself and for this reason he stated that the ultimate goal of the civil rights struggle was the “welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities.”⁶⁴

From this discussion on the limitations that ‘positive liberty’ poses to the expression of multiple identities it can be inferred that with its focus on achievement and action ‘positive freedom’ can be a source of unfreedom. When it discourages the development and expression of multiple identities, ‘positive liberty’ curbs political freedom because people are not ‘atomistic’ or ‘monistic’, which is to say that people do not have a single identity and moral order. The idea of a single moral order is one that ascribes to all ethical questions a universal and single answer. This idea suggests that there are universal ethical laws that legitimize a universally valid notion of what constitutes a true identity.⁶⁵ But such a moralistic view obscures the fact that people have multiple and equally important identities and thus it becomes a threat to freedom. It is precisely because King believed that people have multiple identities, rather than a single ‘true’ identity, that he disagreed with Carmichael during the James Meredith March. King responded to Carmichael’s advocacy for Black Power arguing that such slogan would “isolate the Negro

⁶⁴ King (1962) in Washington ed.1986: 118

⁶⁵ Crowder, 2004:73

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community” and suggested that the call “black equality” was more appropriate.⁶⁶ King saw a call for black equality as more appropriate to the scope of the civil rights struggle because he believed that freedom resided in offering to people the opportunity to explore a variety of identities and abilities, due to the fact that people have different capacities and have reason to value different identities. Because he thus understood political freedom, in his view encouraging black people to embrace a single and pre-established identity would have render them unfree.

The nature of ‘positive freedom’, therefore, is more complex than Berlin realizes. ‘Positive freedom’ may not pose a threat to political freedom solely when it becomes tyrannical in an empirical sense; namely, when it leads to physical coercion. ‘Positive freedom’ may also become threatening to political freedom when it favors pragmatic reasoning at the expenses of reasoning along the lines of natural impulses and desires. Such process can induce a person to become what other people want him to become, rather than what he himself truly wants to be.

In short, we can say that ‘positive liberty’ enhances political freedom when it is a means to achieve the self or identity most worthwhile to a person. However, ‘positive liberty’ becomes a source of unfreedom when it obliges people –whether via moral or physical means- to shape their feelings and desires around the identity prevalent in the society in which they live.

Having ascertained the limitations of 'positive liberty', there is a case to be made for the empirical or passional self, namely, the non-rational part of human nature and for granting opportunities to people. In order to avoid the totalitarian threat of 'positive liberty',

⁶⁶ King (1967) in Washington ed.1986: 574

a person needs to have a space for himself where he can be isolated from external influences and understand what identities are most worthwhile to him. Such space is also vital to retain individual discretion and the ability to realize oneself, as one deems appropriate. In a private space, where a person can act without external obstacles, he has the freedom “to deliberate or weigh alternatives,” to “decide” and “to take responsibility.”⁶⁷ By offering people the possibility to reflect on the identities available to them and to decide which one or which ones (if any) to embrace, ‘negative liberty’ allows people to be true to themselves; which is to say, to express that empirical or irrational part of human nature, which is peculiar to each individual. By affording people the opportunity to be true to themselves, ‘negative liberty’ enables people to take decisions in line with what they truly value. ‘Negative liberty’ is also important because it affords people “the opportunity to fulfill [their] total capacity untrammelled by any artificial hindrance or barrier,” as King recognized, and thus ‘negative liberty’ affords people the choice to decide which identities they want to embrace.⁶⁸ King’s writings allow reflection on the importance of exploring identities that do not fall within the boundaries of those considered acceptable by a specific identity group. King asserts that black people should not “aim merely to be good Negro teachers, good Negro doctors, good Negro ministers, good Negro skilled laborers” but they have to strive to excel in their endeavors irrespective of their race. Only thus blacks could make the most of their different abilities and qualities.

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To be able to develop and to retain the ability to understand his will, a person needs to enjoy ‘negative liberty’ both in its ‘opportunity’ and ‘exercise’ dimension and in its

⁶⁷ King (1963) Washington ed., 1986: 120

⁶⁸ King (1963) Washington ed., 1986: 121

⁶⁹ King (1956) in Washington ed.1986: 139

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mere ‘opportunity’ aspect.⁷⁰ ‘Negative liberty’ in its mere ‘opportunity’ aspect is important because a person needs to have space for personal reflection, in order to arrive to a personal decision about his goals. ‘Negative liberty’ in both its ‘opportunity’ and ‘exercise’ concept is equally valuable because granting people a minimum number of liberties, such as freedom of press and expression, allows people to confront their opinions with that of other people and thus to clarify them.

Whether it is a mere ‘opportunity’ or both an ‘exercise’ and an ‘opportunity’ concept, it should be made clear that in a political community where people have multiple identities ‘negative liberty’ must be regulated. Such regulation is necessary because in modern political communities, where people do not live in isolation, the activity of an individual has always an impact on the activity of another individual. Accordingly, an expansion in one person’s sphere of non-interference inevitably leads to a reduction in the personal space of another person; namely, the greater the personal space given to a person, the smaller the space given to another one. In this situation, to ensure universal enjoyment of a minimum personal space where people can display their identities without the interference of other people, all citizens need to obey laws that curb their private space to a certain extent. There is a case to be made for liberalism as the political system that best accommodates freedom of choice and disagreement among contrasting identities and life-styles.

As an alternative to law-enforcement, King proposed enforcing Christian principles to guarantee a minimal area of non-interference to every citizen. King suggested that citizens needed to embrace non-violence and selfless love, which is to say, to love each

⁷⁰ See: part II

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other not to advance their own good but to promote the good of one's neighbor, whether friend or enemy - a kind of love, which King called "agape" deploying a Greek term for "love". Love and non-violence would foster altruistic feelings in people and reduce their hate and frustration. In this way, the Christian principles of love and non-violence would reduce the potential for violent interference among citizens.⁷¹ For example, King asserted that

Non-violent direct action enabled the Negro to take the streets in active protest, but it muzzled the guns of the oppressor because even he could not shoot down in daylight unarmed men, women and children. This is the reason there was less loss of life in ten years of southern protest than in ten days of northern riots.⁷²

King believed that obedience to the Christian principles of love and non-violence was the only way to ensure to a black person the concrete opportunity to protest because these principles would eliminate feelings of hatred in white people and thus eliminate the source of repeated violence and brutality against blacks. In other words, King suggested that if a black person could not display his chosen identities because such exercise would restrain the liberty of a white person to express his own chosen identities, both groups had to be made to love one another in order to allow both of them to display their identities to a certain extent. The idea that a person interferes with the actions of another person out of hate or scorn for this person, therefore, underpins King's advocacy for a Christian alternative to law enforcement as a means to secure a minimal area of non-interference to

⁷¹ King (1968) in Washington ed.1986: 13; King (1962) in Washington ed.1986: 124-125

⁷² King (1968) in Washington ed.1986: 13

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every citizen.⁷³

In summary, 'negative liberty' is important to political freedom because it enables a person to embrace and to display the identities that are truly worthwhile to him. By contrast, 'positive liberty' threatens political freedom by weakening the ability of a person to be himself in all the different facets of his nature; namely, by imposing a particular objective or will on people. It is apparent that the 'negative liberty' to have opportunities and to make decisions is conducive to 'positive liberty' because it favors self-reflection and understanding, which are essential abilities to understand which identities constitute motivational fetters and which do not; this is to say, that 'negative freedom' is a precondition to the exercise of self-mastery.

⁷³ King (1958) in Washington ed., 1986; King (1956) in Carson ed.1997: 428-429

V. Conclusion

This essay has used the fact that people have multiple identities to argue that ‘positive liberty’ and ‘negative liberty’ are two inseparable dimensions of political freedom. How extended is the area, where I can act without impediments? To what degree do I master myself? The answer to the first question defines the nature of ‘negative liberty’; by contrast, the answer to the second question establishes the character of ‘positive freedom’.

The ability to make choices, in other words, is essential to ‘negative liberty’: the choice to pursue an action as one’s wishes. Implicit in the idea that political freedom resides in choice is the view that freedom is a potential that is intrinsic to each individual that the individual may or may not wish to transform into action. The ability to make unimpeded choices demands a separation between the private and the public realms. This understanding of ‘negative liberty’ is reflected in a political society with minimal laws and with a minimal government that guarantees to the individual citizen a sphere in which he can act without impediments. Such distinction, however, is only valid if one assumes that impediments to freedom are external to the individual: by separating myself from other people I prevent their intrusion in to my actions. But, if one assesses the impact of moral impediments on the ability of a person to act, it becomes apparent that the private and the public spheres cannot be completely separated and that it is insufficient to define political freedom solely as freedom from external restraints. What becomes important when one includes moral obstacles in a discussion of political freedom is the ability to overcome these moral obstacles. Such ability requires self-mastery. Self-mastery is provided by ‘positive liberty’. Political freedom in this case increases the more a person controls

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himself. Such control allows a person to reject externally produced moral obstacles, such as lack of self-confidence, and to become able to act as he truly chooses to. Furthermore, in order to be 'negatively free' a citizen needs to assert and reassert his 'negative liberties'. To do so, the agent must be an active participant in the political community in which he lives.

There is an additional problem with Berlin's definition of 'positive liberty' and 'negative freedom' as two antithetical notions. In stating that political freedom can be defined solely as 'negative liberty' or exclusively as 'positive freedom', Berlin fails to assess the problematic impact of 'positive freedom' on the capacities and on the moral sphere of a person. 'Positive freedom' can become a reason for men to acquiesce to the will of another person whether due to physical coercion or psychological pressure. In this case, political freedom cannot be defined exclusively as the ability to master oneself because such self-mastery obscures the mastery of other people or circumstances over myself. For citizens to be able to reach or to be what is most worthwhile to them, which is to say to enable citizens to exercise *self*-mastery, they need to have some areas where they can act, as they desire, in order to be able to explore their different identities and identify those worthwhile to them. Only if the agent is free to explore alternative options, can he truly decide which of these options is most important to him. Also, because men are interdependent, the freedom of a person to reach what is most valuable to him inevitably restrains the liberty of another person to accomplish what he values most. To guarantee to every citizen a minimum space, where each can be free to accomplish their goals, all citizens need to respect laws that restrain their activity to a certain extent. The agent, then, can master himself, while respecting the equal freedom of other people to do the same. As

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Dietz observes, therefore, "the freedom 'from' is the freedom 'to' and the freedom 'to' insures the freedom 'from'."⁷⁴ Political freedom defined as a combination of both 'positive liberty' and 'negative liberty' ensures that each citizen is never completely unfree because either a reduction in his 'positive freedom' leads to an increase in his 'negative liberty', or a lesser 'negative freedom' is conducive to a greater 'positive freedom'.

One implication of my analysis is that the enjoyment of political freedom demands the promotion of ideological diversity in order to avoid extreme forms of indoctrination. Diversity can be encouraged in a variety of ways. With respect to opinion, this means securing a wide variety of points of view -deep, shallow, unusual, and traditional. This may mean challenging people to think beyond their perspective and creed; namely, as Mill observed, "if opponents of all important truths do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them, and supply them with the strongest arguments which the most skillful devil's advocate can conjure up."⁷⁵ Educating people to a wide range of theories and perspectives can also promote diversity of opinion. Promoting diversity is essential to decrease the chances that a person acts under moral compulsion, rather than out of choice.⁷⁶

A further implication of this essay is that opposition between the different identity groups needs to be minimized because we live in political communities where a person's activity inevitably has an impact on the activity of another person. Promoting civic virtues, which foster values of national unity and tolerance, love, and respect for one another, can minimize opposition among identity groups.

⁷⁴ Dietz, 1972:28

⁷⁵ Mill, 1975:164

⁷⁶ Crooker, 1980: 69-74

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