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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Isaiah Berlin and Feminism: Liberty and Value Pluralism

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Abstract

Isaiah Berlin's account of freedom is more useful for feminists than is generally recognized, especially when seen in the context of his value pluralism. Focusing on the work of Nancy Hirschmann and Sharon Krause, I argue, first, that Berlin's concept of negative liberty can be used to resist patriarchy when his notion of the 'conditions' of negative liberty is taken into account. Second, positive liberty is also useful to feminists, but Berlin does not, as some feminist (and other) writers suppose, simply reject positive liberty; on the contrary, he sees it as a fundamental human value of great importance. Third, Berlin's value pluralism makes a crucial contribution. It explains why he distinguishes negative liberty from its conditions and why he does not reject positive liberty as a value. It also explains how feminists can see the value in both negative and positive liberty without trying, paradoxically, to fit them both into a single concept. Further, my liberal-pluralist extension of Berlin's pluralism locates all these insights within a complex but coherent political outlook which provides a sympathetic resource for feminism.

Keywords Isaiah Berlin · Feminism · Value pluralism · Liberty · Nancy Hirschmann · Catherine MacKinnon · Sharon R Krause · Liberalism

Trying to link Isaiah Berlin with feminism may seem an unpromising task. Take, for example, this passage from an unpublished letter:

> Feminism: I don't know what I feel about that. I realise that it would not have happened if women had not been unjustly treated – of course they have. But I think that modern feminism is an exaggerated response. Seeking to correct injustices is one thing, but the fierceness, the loudness, the sometimes rigid intolerance is unnecessary: that is the platitude I offer you.[1]

Berlin probably read at least some of the foundational texts of feminism, such as those of Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, but I can find no explicit evidence of this in his published books and articles. As Nancy Hirschmann writes, 'Berlin made no reference to gender as a significant category for consideration in his theoretical writings'.[2] His letters tell us little more. One contains a passing reference to 'suttee in India', 'the circumcision of women', and 'marrying out of one's caste in India' as examples of 'physical improprieties' that violate universal values.[3] Another complains that a submission he had been sent to review ignores 'the anti-feminism of such left-wing thinkers as Rousseau and Proudhon, and even, temperamentally, Lenin with his protests against free love'.[4] The safe conclusion would be that Berlin had no interest in feminism. Henry Hardy, Berlin's editor and one of his Literary Trustees, puts it more succinctly: 'I don't think IB did feminism, not really'.[5]

[1] Unpublished letter to Ruth Chang, 30 December 1996, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Berlin 235, folio 327, quoted by permission of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust and Ruth Chang.

[2] Nancy J. Hirschmann, 'Berlin, Feminism, and Positive Liberty', in Bruce Baum and Robert Nichols, eds, *Isaiah Berlin and the Politics of Freedom: 'Two Concepts of Liberty' 50 Years Later* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. 185.

[3] Isaiah Berlin, *Affirming: Letters 1975-1997* (London: Chatto & Windus), p. 413.

[4] Unpublished letter to J. S. Rigge, 6 May 1970, Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS Berlin 188, folio 36b, quoted by permission of the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust.

[5] Email from Henry Hardy to George Crowder, 17 July 2023, quoted by permission of Henry Hardy.

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Feminists, for their part, have in general not thought highly of Berlin. Many recent feminist writers on freedom ignore him altogether.[6] His analysis of negative and positive liberty has been of interest to some feminist writers, but those who have paid most attention to this topic have, on the whole, been underwhelmed by his apparent preference for negative liberty.[7] They tend to see the negative idea in Berlin's hands as a rather flat notion that refuses to look behind people's de facto desires to the structures, including patriarchal structures, that produce them.[8] The feminist commentators on Berlin have been more drawn to positive liberty, which seems to allow room to acknowledge and resist 'internal' (psychological and cultural) constraints on freedom, which in turn opens up the idea that women's freedom is reduced by patriarchal norms. Here, the feminists object to Berlin's apparent hostility to the positive idea.

I argue that Berlin's ideas are more useful for feminists than the general impression suggests. It is not my intention to recommend Berlin's views in every respect. Although sympathetic with much of what he says, I also disagree with him on certain issues, as will emerge. My argument is only that he has more to say to feminists, both explicitly and implicitly, than is usually supposed. For one thing, his concept of negative liberty can be used to resist patriarchy when his notion of the 'conditions' of negative liberty is taken into account. When it comes to positive liberty, Berlin does not, as some feminist (and other) writers suppose, simply reject that idea; on the contrary, he recognizes it as a fundamental human value of great importance.

My principal interest, however, is in uncovering the potential for feminism of Berlin's concept of value pluralism. Value pluralism is the idea that fundamental human goods are irreducibly multiple and incommensurable, so that conflicts between them set up hard choices—hard in the sense that it is not obvious how we should make such choices, and also in the sense that such choices may entail serious losses that cannot be wholly compensated.[9] I argue that Berlin's account of freedom needs to be understood within his pluralist framework. This point has not been sufficiently appreciated by feminist (and other) writers on freedom, whose generally dim view of Berlin is correspondingly limited. On the other hand, feminist voices have been neglected in discussions of value pluralism by Berlin and other pluralists. Consequently, my broader purpose is to bring together pluralist and feminist insights in a way that will benefit both parties.

In addition to Berlin, two other writers will be especially important to my case. Nancy Hirschmann will be my primary guide to feminist thinking about freedom. This is not to deny the great range of feminist thought on the subject, but Hirschmann is especially valuable for my purposes for three reasons. First, her book *The Subject of Liberty* (2003), although now over 20 years old, has a strong claim to be the leading text on feminist freedom, balancing careful philosophical argument with a detailed and subtle grasp of concrete issues including domestic violence, welfare policies and rhetoric, and the cultural complexities of veiling.[10] Second, Hirschmann takes Berlin's theory of negative and positive liberty as her starting point, showing an appreciation of its strengths that is more sympathetic than most feminist treatments of Berlin, as well as a willingness to identify its weaknesses from a feminist perspective. Third, however, Hirschmann's approach to Berlin is representative of the general feminist neglect of his value pluralism. In all these respects, Hirschmann is an ideal foil for my attempt to see how far Berlin's arguments can be applied or adapted for feminist purposes.

Another writer with special salience for my discussion is Sharon Krause, who represents a partial exception to the general neglect of Berlin's value pluralism in theories of

[6] There is no mention of Berlin in, e.g. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Linda M. G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Jennifer Nedelsky, *Law's Relations: A Relational Theory of Self, Autonomy, and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[7] See, e.g. Sondra Farganis, 'Liberty: Two Perspectives on the Women's Movement', *Ethics* 88 (1977-1978): pp. 62–73; Nancy J. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Diana Coole, 'From Rationalism to Micro-Power: Freedom and its Enemies', in Baum and Nichols, eds, *Isaiah Berlin and the Politics of Freedom*; Sharon R. Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). See also Maria Dimova-Cookson, *Rethinking Positive and Negative Liberty* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), although she does not write from an explicitly feminist perspective.

[8] Elisabeth Anker mentions Berlin only in passing but writes that, 'Prioritizing negative freedom, Berlin's liberalism does not address how a focus on noncoercion alone enables domination to flourish outside overtly coercive forms of power, thus omitting exercises of power like exploitation, structural discrimination, or necropolitics that do not fit neatly under "coercion"': *Ugly Freedoms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), p. 20.

[9] See, e.g. Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 212-217; Berlin, 'The Pursuit of the Ideal', in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, second edition, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[10] Hirschmann has continued to write about feminist freedom since *Subject of Liberty*. As far as I can see, her basic position is unchanged, although there have been adjustments that I shall note where relevant. See, in particular, 'Introduction' and 'Response to Friedman and Brison', in 'Symposium on Nancy J. Hirschmann's *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom*', *Hypatia* 21:4 (2006), pp. 178–181, 201–211; *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); 'Berlin, Feminism, and Positive Liberty'.

freedom. In *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty* (2015), Krause argues for an explicitly pluralist conception of freedom and acknowledges Berlin's value pluralism. This is helpful, but I argue that Krause is mistaken when she sees Berlin as failing to apply his pluralism to freedom and as defending a monist account of freedom as negative liberty.

In the first section I set out Hirschmann's feminist critique of Berlin's discussion of negative and positive liberty, together with the theory of feminist freedom she develops out of that discussion. Second, I review the feminist potential of negative liberty in the light of Berlin's idea of the conditions of negative liberty, which itself needs to be understood in the context of value pluralism. Third, I look at the positive idea of liberty, again in its pluralist frame, arguing that Berlin is not as hostile to the idea as is often supposed. Finally, I argue that Berlin's value pluralism, especially when developed as 'liberal pluralism', enables us to clarify the relation between negative and positive liberty within an overarching vision of feminist freedom. While Hirschmann tries to fit the two liberties within a single concept of freedom, resulting in a paradox, value pluralism explains how both values can be affirmed without the paradox. This is where the work of Krause is important, although I argue that her position is much closer to Berlin's than she allows. Further, my liberal-pluralist extension of Berlin's pluralism locates all these insights within a complex but coherent political outlook which provides a sympathetic resource for feminism.

Hirschmann on Berlin and Feminist Freedom

Hirschmann argues that Berlin's negative and positive liberty both contribute important elements to a satisfactory feminist view of freedom, but also that they suffer from weaknesses both general and specifically relevant to feminism. Once these weaknesses are taken into account, feminist freedom must go beyond Berlin's two freedoms, while at the same time learning from them. Hirschmann's vision of feminist freedom 'transcends the duality even as it borrows from it'.[11]

Negative liberty is the absence of deliberate interference with the agent by other people or the state—essentially, the absence of coercion. The great merit of this kind of freedom, Hirschmann writes, is the way it respects the choices people actually make. This is important for feminists because women's choices have so often been limited by legal, cultural, and coercive barriers. Consequently, Hirschmann writes, 'feminist freedom requires that women's decisions be respected, regardless of what they choose'.[12] That holds even if what they choose is at odds with feminist orthodoxies—for example, a decision to stay with a violent domestic partner or to oppose abortion rights. Negative liberty fits with this view because it conceives of freedom as non-interference with whatever the agent might want to do, regardless of what other people may think of that preference.[13]

However, Hirschmann also argues that Berlin's negative idea has two serious limitations. First, it assumes that deliberate interference by others is the sole constraint on freedom. What this crucially leaves out is the possibility that a person's freedom can also be constrained by 'social forces'.[14] By social forces, Hirschmann means constraints that are not so much deliberate interference by other individuals or agencies as social structures or patterns that may have arisen without any deliberate intention. Because poverty, for example, cannot easily be brought under the heading of 'deliberate interference by others', it does not seem to count as a restraint on negative liberty for Berlin, yet many people would say that poverty is quite obviously a serious constraint. This is another important point for many feminists, who link some of the most severe restrictions on women's choices to poverty. In situations of domestic violence, for example, women often find it difficult to leave an abusive partner because they are dependent on his economic support.

The negative idea has a second limitation, Hirschmann argues: in respecting people's actual desires, negative liberty does not ask where those desires come from. The social forces that limit women's freedom include not only economic factors but a range of internal restraints. Of these, the most important is the idea that 'our desires, preferences, beliefs, values – indeed, the way in which we see the world and define reality – are all shaped by the particular constellation of personal and institutional social relationships that constitute our individual and collective identities.'[15] What we value and want is the product of an identity that is formed by the personal and social relations in which we live.

Social construction is especially important for feminists, Hirschmann argues. 'If we are socially constructed, feminists have argued, male domination has played an important part in that construction; its laws, customs, rules, and norms have been imposed by men on women to restrict their opportunities, choices, actions, and behaviors.'[16] For example, the social construction of women as the naturally 'caring' gender may be used to imprison them in domestic roles and prevent them from realizing other potentialities. It follows that, to combat patriarchy, we need to recognize as barriers to freedom not only the external coercion acknowledged

[11] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 31.

[12] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 237.

[13] The value of the negative idea to feminists is also emphasized (within limits) by Farganis, 'Liberty', pp. 62–63, 65–66.

[14] Hirschmann, 'Berlin, Feminism', p. 187.

[15] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 10.

[16] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, pp. 10–11.

by negative liberty but also the internal restraints of social construction.

For this purpose, we might look at Berlin's positive idea of liberty. This is promising because the hallmark of positive liberty is precisely the attention it pays to internal barriers. Positive liberty is classically conceived as the idea of self-mastery, or control over the self by the most authentic part of the personality—the 'true' or 'real' self.[17] On this view, the agent is free only when she is governed by that part of her that is most truly herself.[18] For example, if the authentic self is defined as the rational part of the personality, then the agent is positively free only when reason controls her emotions.[19]

For feminist purposes, Hirschmann argues, positive liberty looks useful because it enables women to question the norms imposed on them by patriarchy. 'Positive liberty in particular offers [feminists] important ideas about the social construction of choice that Berlin himself did not recognize.'[20] The negative liberty that Berlin favors is consistent with patriarchy because people can be unimpeded in choosing, yet conditioned in their choices by patriarchal identities. Positive liberty enables us to question such choices because it allows that what is chosen may be imposed rather than authentic to the person.

However, Berlin famously points to a problem with positive liberty: the Rousseauean paradox of being "forced to be free". The classic subject of positive liberty is not the empirical self, with its actual will and wishes, but the authentic or true self. It is conceivable that people can be mistaken about what is authentic to them and that others may know better. This leaves open the possibility that, on a political level, an authority such as the state, the party, or the church may claim to have that superior knowledge. When such authorities force people to act accordingly, they can claim that they are only enforcing the demands of people's authentic selves. Those subject to their dictates are in effect 'forced to be free', in Rousseau's phrase.[21] For Berlin, this line of reasoning is just a 'sleight of hand' by which oppression is redefined as freedom; the result is not genuine freedom but 'a monstrous impersonation' of freedom.[22]

Hirschmann interprets Berlin's attack on the notion of forcing to be free as meaning that he rejects positive liberty as a value. To some extent, she thinks, this is understandable, because Berlin is pointing to a real problem, one familiar from the classic political theories of Rousseau and Hegel.[23] Hirschmann also finds the same pattern in some feminist theories—she sees Catharine MacKinnon's campaign to outlaw pornography in this light.[24] In Hirschmann's account, MacKinnon assumes that patriarchal social construction is so complete that women's acquiescence in harmful practices like pornography is determined. Since their agency is so imbued with patriarchal norms, women cannot be expected to defend their own well-being and freedom effectively and the state must step in. MacKinnon 'logically commits feminism to a state that forces women to be free by outlawing those freedom-robbing practices.'[25] So, for Hirschmann, Berlin does well to warn people, including feminists, of the dangers of positive liberty, in particular the way its classic appeal to the authentic self allows the second-guessing of people's actual choices.

However, Hirschmann also sees Berlin's critique of positive liberty as going too far. In her view, he helpfully conceptualizes positive liberty but then unhelpfully rejects it as a value. He 'offers a vocabulary for a more complex understanding of freedom that is more conducive to feminist concerns', but then shies away from endorsing that concept as a goal to be pursued because the problem of forcing to be free makes that goal too dangerous.[26] In this way, he abandons the genuine value that resides in the positive idea, especially in its recognition of internal restraints on freedom. Only if such restraints are acknowledged, Hirschmann argues, can we arrive at an understanding of freedom that can cope with the socially constructed harms of patriarchy. As she puts it in a later article, feminists need to '[resurrect] positive liberty from the dustbin to which Berlin sought to toss it'.[27]

Nevertheless, a genuinely feminist vision of freedom, in Hirschmann's view, must be more than just resurrected positive liberty or negative liberty. Both contribute to a feminist

[17] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', pp. 178–179.

[18] Berlin's understanding is thus different from formulations of positive liberty as 'effective freedom', or access to resources. He would associate this with the idea of ability, which he distinguishes from liberty altogether. This liberty-ability distinction needs to be understood in the context of value pluralism, as I argue below.

[19] This rationalist view, found in Socrates and Plato, for example, is only one of many ways in which human authenticity has been understood. It contrasts with the non-rational accounts found in Heidegger and the existentialists, and with the combination of rationality and emotion found in Mill and other liberal theorists of personal autonomy, as discussed below. See, e.g. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[20] Hirschmann, 'Berlin, Feminism', p. 186.

[21] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, translated by Maurice Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), Book I, ch. 7, p. 64.

[22] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', pp. 180–181.

[23] Hirschmann discusses these and other classical theorists of freedom in *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory*.

[24] Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), esp. chs 3 and 13; *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), ch. 11; *Only Words* (London: HarperCollins, 1994).

[25] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 226.

[26] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 14.

[27] Hirschmann, 'Berlin, Feminism', p. 197.

theory of freedom—negative liberty reminds us to respect choices, positive liberty to be prepared to ask where those choices come from and to question them—but such a theory must also transcend them. The key is to get beyond patriarchy. Of course, that is easier said than done, but it is essential if neither negative nor positive liberty is acceptable so long as they are presented in a patriarchal context. In such a context, both the choices protected by negative liberty and the authentic agency endorsed by positive liberty will be shot through with patriarchal norms.

Since the current patriarchal context is oppressive and restrictive of freedom, 'new contexts' must be created, and since the ability to create new contexts is also socially constructed, 'changing contexts and increasing freedom for women and other nondominant groups requires increasing their ability to participate in the process of social construction'.[28] For example, 'battered-women's shelters provide new contexts in which a woman can come to understand her experiences and her selfhood in new and different ways that can help her end the violence, whether by leaving the batterer or by more effectively identifying and accessing the tools at her disposal'.[29]

The upshot is that, from a feminist perspective, freedom, or progress toward it, calls for a delicate balance between respecting and questioning choices—between negative and positive liberty. On the one hand, Hirschmann emphasizes the importance of agency—of respecting actual choices, even when these may not seem optimal, the message of negative liberty. But feminist freedom also requires 'that we ask questions, that we continue a critical engagement with the foundations and meaning of desire and choice'—the thrust of positive liberty.[30] Moreover, freedom involves not only the recognition of social context but also an active engagement with and transformation of that context, broadening and diversifying it to accommodate as wide a range of people and their choices as possible, through critical reflection on existing patterns.

Negative Liberty, Its Conditions, and Value Pluralism

Recall the problem Hirschmann sees with Berlin's account of negative liberty: this is opposed only to deliberate interference by others, so does not recognize important constraints on freedom such as poverty and socially constructed (including patriarchal) identities. One response is acknowledged by Hirschmann herself: the scope of negative liberty can be expanded beyond Berlin's account. Hirschmann discusses a series of negative-liberty theorists who adapt Berlin's basic view, progressively broadening the negative idea to include wider understandings of the barriers to negative liberty. At the apex of this development she places Amartya Sen, who, like Hirschmann, sees poverty as a social force and one that restricts freedom in the negative sense.[31]

However, although the expansion of negative liberty goes beyond what Berlin is prepared to say, what he is prepared to say is more useful to feminists than Hirschmann and others allow. I consider two of Berlin's most important ideas, neither mentioned by Hirschmann: the conditions of (negative) liberty, and value pluralism.

As we have seen, Hirschmann accepts that Berlin's negative liberty captures part of what a feminist understanding of freedom should include—the centrality of choice and respect for actual choices—but she also objects that it is too flat and uncritical. This verdict neglects Berlin's idea of the 'conditions' of liberty. He is aware that his conception of negative liberty is a narrow one, but he draws a distinction between the concept of negative liberty itself and its value: it is one thing to be negatively free, another to experience one's negative freedom as valuable. 'What is freedom,' he asks, 'to those who cannot make use of it?'[32] Negative liberty is valuable to people only when they enjoy 'the conditions of its exercise'.[33] What are those conditions? 'To offer political rights, or safeguards against intervention by the State, to men who are half-naked, illiterate, underfed and diseased is to mock their condition; they need medical help or education before they can understand, or make use of, an increase in their freedom.'[34] So, the conditions of liberty certainly include the enjoyment of a broadly material well-being—access to food, clothing, and medical care—although the reference to literacy and education suggests not just economic but also cultural and intellectual development. Berlin is clearly aware that the value of liberty can be constrained by socioeconomic factors.

What about the other major source of constraint that concerns feminists like Hirschmann, social construction? Berlin does not link the conditions of liberty to social construction directly, but there is no reason why those conditions could not be extended to cover social construction—they could include psychological and cultural factors as well as material or economic ones. Berlin could argue that even if someone is negatively free, that freedom may be of little value to that person if she is laboring under psychological or social-structural constraints. He could recognize the same constraints

[28] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 205.

[29] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 216.

[30] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 236.

[31] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 22–23.

[32] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 171.

[33] Berlin, 'Introduction', in *Liberty*, p. 45.

[34] Berlin, 'Introduction', in *Liberty*, p. 45.

as Hirschmann, albeit seeing them as affecting the value of negative liberty rather than negative liberty itself.

In this connection, Diana Coole writes that Berlin 'seems to have had some inkling' of internal constraints on negative liberty in three respects: first, he rejects Mill's idea that there can be actions that affect only the agent, 'since individual acts always have interpersonal effects that may harm others'; second, Berlin sees (in the manner of Hegel and Sartre) that personal identity is always dependent on recognition by others; third, he understands that 'my sense of agency is only intelligible within a social network'.[35] Coole concludes that 'Berlin outlines here (and apparently endorses) a social constructionist, intersubjective theory of the self'. If so, it is not true, contrary to Hirschman, that Berlin's negative liberty leaves no room for social construction.

Moreover, Berlin's awareness of ways in which liberty can be constrained by social construction is no mere 'inkling' but a vital component of his political thought. It is central, for example, to his understanding of the essential value to human well-being of group belonging and of the positive recognition of that belonging by others.[36] This is in turn a foundation of his analysis of the importance of nationalism, whether this takes the form of the liberal Zionism to which he was personally committed, or of the decolonization movement of the 1950s that he endorses.[37] As a diaspora Jew, he is only too painfully sensitive to the damage that can be done, including the damage to one's sense of freedom, when our self-identification is disparaged or patronized by those around us. This aspect of his work should be acknowledged as a resource for those feminists who emphasize the role of social construction and patriarchy.

The same point can be made in relation to psychological manipulation. Coole allows that, in 'Two Concepts of Liberty', Berlin hints at an understanding of this in his veiled reference to Vance Packard's 'hidden persuaders'.[38] But the subject looms much larger in 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century' (1950), where Berlin argues that in the twentieth century new forms of power and social control have arisen that have rendered anachronistic the optimistic rationalism and faith in automatic social progress of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[39] One of Berlin's main exhibits is precisely the capacity of states and other entities to manipulate people psychologically. Problems are dealt with not by removing them but by changing the way they are perceived so that they are no longer regarded as problems. Berlin could include among his conditions of liberty not only economic or material factors but also psychological and cultural factors influenced by social construction. He is well aware of social construction and psychological manipulation as constraints on the value of negative liberty.

To explain why Berlin insists on linking these factors only to the value of negative liberty rather than to negative liberty itself, I need to introduce another of his key ideas that is not acknowledged by Hirschmann (or Coole)—value pluralism. For Berlin, the most fundamental human values (liberty, equality, justice, compassion, for example) are irreducibly multiple, potentially conflicting, and incommensurable. If they are incommensurable, that means that (in opposition to ethical monism) there is no absolute hierarchy of such values that holds in all cases, and no common denominator (such as utility) by which we can quantify these values in order to weigh them against one another when they conflict. Rather, each fundamental good speaks with its own voice. 'Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.'[40]

Berlin's commitment to value pluralism is the reason why he insists on distinguishing the value of negative liberty from negative liberty itself. His pluralism invites us to see fundamental values as deeply distinct, separate considerations—they are incommensurable. In keeping with this view, freedom needs to be distinguished from other important values. 'Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience.'[41]

This is the point of Berlin's relatively narrow definition of negative liberty: it enables him to separate negative liberty from other values. Hence his tendency to deny that poverty is a constraint on negative liberty. He sees poverty as the absence of ability or capacity, which is a different value from negative liberty. Moreover, ability is no less valuable than negative liberty if the two are incommensurable considerations. We should keep all this in mind, he argues, when making public policy, so that we are clear about the costs of that policy. A policy that increases taxes in order to fund welfare programs does not simply increase negative freedom for everyone but trades off a measure of negative liberty for taxpayers in order to realize a greater capacity in themselves and others to use that kind of liberty. Such a policy may well be justified, and Berlin believes that it is—he is explicitly

[35] Coole, 'From Rationalism', p. 209.

[36] See 'Two Concepts', Section VI ('The search for status').

[37] Berlin discusses nationalism in general in 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power', in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, second edition, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2013), and Zionism in 'The Origins of Israel' and 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation', in *The Power of Ideas*, second edition, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). His support for decolonisation is expressed in 'Two Concepts', section VI.

[38] Coole, 'From Rationalism', pp. 210–211.

[39] Isaiah Berlin, 'Political Ideas', in *Liberty*.

[40] Berlin, 'Pursuit of the Ideal', p. 14.

[41] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 172.

supportive of redistribution—but we should be honest about its costs.

> The obligation to promote education, health, justice, to raise standards of living, to provide opportunities for the growth of the arts and the sciences, to prevent reactionary political or social or legal policies or arbitrary inequalities, is not made less stringent because it is not necessarily directed to the promotion of liberty itself, but to conditions in which alone its possession is of value, or to values which may be independent of it. And still, liberty is one thing, and the conditions for it are another.[42]

Berlin's distinction between liberty and its conditions is not without its problems. One line of objection is suggested by criticisms brought against John Rawls's similar distinction between liberty (defined negatively) and 'the worth of liberty'.[43] Rawls holds that although liberty itself must be equal for all citizens, the worth of that liberty to individual citizens need not be equal—although egalitarian 'justice as fairness' requires that the worth of liberty be maximized for the least advantaged. It has been objected that equal liberty is a hollow abstraction without equal worth of liberty—for example, citizens do not really have equal rights of political participation when wealth is so influential in capitalist liberal democracy.[44] Similarly, it might be argued that Berlin's conditions of liberty need to be equalized, yet that is impossible in the capitalist system he envisages.

Both Rawls and Berlin can reply that to insist on the equal worth of liberty, or on the equalization of liberty's conditions, is neither possible nor desirable under any system of social justice. It is impossible because people are different, so they value different liberties in different ways and in varying degrees; it would be unfair because it would effectively require some to subsidize the expensive preferences of others—for example, 'to achieve equal worth of freedom of conscience would require lavishing resources on people whose religions require pilgrimages, elaborate rituals, costumes, and cathedrals, while withholding resources to those who silently meditate and practise self-denial'.[45] Berlin could add that this is an instance of conflict among incommensurable values, in this case liberty and justice.

A more straightforward objection to Berlin's distinction between liberty and its conditions is that the dichotomy is a little too rigid. Someone might fairly object that in some cases there is more of an overlap between freedom and ability than Berlin allows. He is right that there is a sense in which negative liberty can be distinguished from its conditions, but there is also a legitimate sense of freedom which includes some notion not only of non-interference but also of capacity to do things with the opportunities given by non-interference—the idea often referred to as 'effective freedom'.[46] Berlin really has no good reason not to acknowledge effective freedom alongside the negative idea as a genuine form of liberty.

Still, even if Berlin is too rigid in his complete separation between negative liberty and ability, it is important to see that his reason for the distinction is not a desire to define liberty narrowly just for the sake of it or because he supports a minimal state (he does not), but rather his value pluralism—albeit taken too far in this case. He is concerned about poverty, he supports a redistributive state, but against a pluralist backdrop he argues for these views in the name of values other than liberty, such as equality, justice, and compassion. These commitments are in line with standard positions in feminism.

Positive Liberty and Forcing to Be Free

While Berlin's concept of negative liberty may be more persuasive when supported by the conditions of liberty, it does not follow that feminist purposes are satisfied solely by negative liberty and its conditions. Hirschmann argues that feminism needs positive as well as negative liberty.[47] Her version of Berlin's negative-positive contrast turns on the distinction between external and internal barriers to freedom: negative liberty focuses on external barriers, positive liberty on internal ones. While feminists need negative liberty because they need freedom from external obstacles like patriarchal laws and coercion, they also need positive liberty because they need freedom from patriarchal social construction. Hirschmann sees Berlin as a disappointment in this respect because, having usefully formulated a positive conception of liberty, he then (she thinks) rejects it as a political goal. Consequently, Hirschmann believes, feminists need to rescue positive liberty from Berlin's dustbin.

[42] Berlin, 'Introduction', p. 45. Compare Berlin's support for the politics of redistribution with the following claim by Anker, *Ugly Freedoms*, p. 183, note 47: 'For Berlin, absence of power is the only true condition for freedom. Negative freedom does not require politics for its realization, as participation in larger projects or collective activity for a better world only lead to despotism'. None of this is true.

[43] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 204–205.

[44] See, e.g. Norman Daniels, 'Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty', in Norman Daniels, ed., *Reading Rawls: Critical Studies of A Theory of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

[45] Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 62.

[46] Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginners' Guide for Students and Politicians*, second edition, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 55–59.

[47] In a later article Hirschmann suggests that positive liberty is more important than negative liberty for feminism: 'Berlin, Feminism', p. 186.

The belief that Berlin throws positive liberty into the dustbin is understandable because he spends so much time in 'Two Concepts' exploring the multiple ways in which positive conceptions can be problematic. However, it is too simple to conclude that he rejects positive liberty as a value, even in politics. Again, this becomes clearer if we attend to Berlin's value pluralism. For Berlin, negative and positive liberty are fundamental values, hence 'equally ultimate'.[48]

> These are not two different interpretations of a single concept, but two profoundly divergent and irreconcilable attitudes to the ends of life. It is as well to recognise this, even if in practice it is often necessary to strike a compromise between them. For each of them makes absolute claims. These claims cannot both be fully satisfied. But it is a profound lack of social and moral understanding not to recognise that each of them is an ultimate value which, both historically and morally, has an equal right to be classed among the deepest interests of mankind.[49]

Negative and positive liberty are incommensurable values, so neither can be ranked above the other in any absolute sense; hence, neither can be tossed into the dustbin.

Berlin is not wholly consistent in applying his pluralism to freedom, but that should not obscure the fundamental point that his best understanding of freedom is conditioned by pluralism. In some passages he writes as if negative and positive liberty are not incommensurables but rather subordinate conceptions within a single, overarching concept. At one point, he refers to 'the essence of the notion of liberty, in both the "positive" and "negative" senses, [as] the holding off of something or someone … .'[50] On this issue Berlin contradicts himself, sometimes presenting negative and positive liberty as incommensurables, sometimes not. The question is which view is truer to his most fundamental beliefs, values, and purposes. Berlin leaves little doubt that pluralism lies at the deepest level of his thought—that is why 'Two Concepts' concludes with his account of pluralism in the section, 'The One and the Many'. His better view is therefore the one that is more consistent with his pluralism, and consequently he should be taken as holding that negative and positive liberty are ultimately distinct and incommensurable rather than nested within a broader concept of liberty.

Of course, Berlin sees a major problem with positive liberty in the context of politics, the problem of forcing to be free. Readers often take this to mean that he is wholly opposed to positive liberty (Hirschmann's view), but that is not so. For one thing, his forcing to be free narrative takes place only, or at least principally, within the context of politics. In the context of personal conduct, positive liberty is less of a problem. As 'the creed of the solitary thinker', positive liberty 'enters into the tradition of liberal individualism at least as deeply as the "negative" concept of freedom'.[51] In personal conduct, the ideal of self-mastery is more likely to be self-imposed; and even if my authentic self is second-guessed by those around me, they are less likely than political authorities and leaders to be able to force their judgment on me. Even in this personal context, positive liberty still has pathologies, according to Berlin – for example, the forms of 'self-abnegation' promoted by some versions.[52] But these problems are not of the same kind, scale, or severity as being forced to be free in the political sphere.

It may be that limiting Berlin's worry about positive liberty to the political realm (at least on the score of forcing to be free) is little comfort to feminists, for whom 'the personal is political'. Even within the political context, however, it can be asked whether all forms of positive liberty (and there are many, corresponding to different accounts of authenticity) are equally vulnerable to the worry about second-guessing. Certainly, there must be concern with formulations that depend on narrow or highly prescriptive versions of the true or real self: the freedom envisaged by Rousseau, Hegel, and (in Hirschmann's analysis) MacKinnon. But positive liberty can be formulated in more capacious, open-ended, or 'procedural' ways.

This is true of many versions of 'personal autonomy'. Here, self-mastery involves a self that is not understood as a fixed standard or end—such as Rousseau's devotee of the General Will, or Hegel's fully rational being, or MacKinnon's model feminist—but as the dynamic and open-ended product of a process of critical reflection. Such a process might authenticate any of a wide range of possible selves.[53] This kind of personal autonomy is not so vulnerable to second-guessing and consequently to the forcing to be free problem. If my authentic identity is not a goal whose content is fixed and substantial, but rather the outcome, whatever that may be, of my own process of critical reflection, then it is harder to second-guess and use against me.

Hirschmann, however, is suspicious of personal autonomy as a model for feminist freedom for two main reasons.

48 Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 213.

49 Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 212.

50 Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 204.

51 Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 185.

52 Berlin, 'Two Concepts', section III ('The retreat to the inner citadel').

53 See, e.g. Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), Part V; Gerald Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Emily R. Gill, *Becoming Free: Autonomy and Diversity in the Liberal Polity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); John Christman, *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-Historical Selves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

First, she sees the idea of personal autonomy as typically implying a degree or kind of individual self-direction that is impossible in the face of social construction. Autonomy, she argues, assumes the notion of a true self or 'essential "inside"' that is capable of ruling the person independently of her relations with others, but that is impossible because of the degree to which the self is not only constrained but actively constructed by the web of relations and norms in which she is located.[54]

Personal autonomy, however, does not necessarily contradict social construction in this way. On the one hand, personal autonomy need not be conceived as radical self-construction, as if the person develops in a social vacuum. On the other, social construction need not be conceived as so total that it eliminates agency. As Hirschmann writes, patriarchy is not wholly determining: 'Counterdiscourses have always existed because the dominant discourses are always self-contradictory; such contradictions ensure spaces in which alternate constructions can take root'.[55] So, it is possible to formulate personal autonomy as a form of freedom in which a person, situated within and formed by a social or cultural context, is capable of critically evaluating that context.[56]

Second, Hirschmann worries that conceptions of personal autonomy are potential platforms for forcing people to be free. 'Even these procedural criteria are extremely value-laden, echoing the essence of Enlightenment rationality.'[57] That is to say, those who advocate personal autonomy tend to place too much emphasis on reason as the key to freedom, ignoring or downplaying the role of emotions and desires. This is especially evident in those formulations of personal autonomy that stress the need for a unified 'plan of life'.[58] People are almost always torn between contending desires and values, and to insist on a rationally defensible plan as a requirement for freedom is unrealistic.

Again, however, this presupposes an unnecessarily narrow and rigid conception of personal autonomy. The autonomous person need not be a wooden model of Kantian rationality but can be conceived as reflecting critically on her situation through a combination of reason and emotion.[59] That process of reflection need not assume or lead to a unified plan of life, but could operate in a more piecemeal way, navigating issues in 'highly variable and unpredictable circumstances'.[60]

Further, Hirschmann endorses a version of positive liberty that is essentially a form of personal autonomy in the end. This follows from her stress on the need, if we are to be free, to be willing to raise critical questions about our desires and self-understanding. We must be 'critically aware of the contexts we live in, draw on and utilize in making our choices'[61], and 'it is vitally important to freedom that critical questioning about desire, about who we are and what we want, be constantly engaged'.[62] It is hard to see how this is different from a suitably moderate idea of personal autonomy that takes into account a significant (although not total) degree of social construction, the role in self-formation of the emotions as well as reason, and the recognition that no process of critical reflection is likely to produce an entirely unified, harmonious self.

Hirschmann is right to see the need for a positive as well as negative dimension or kind of freedom, but Berlin would agree. His value pluralism makes it clear that he regards positive liberty, no less than negative liberty, as a fundamental human value. Hirschmann is also right to endorse Berlin's concern about the hijacking of positive liberty in the service of forcing to be free arguments, but such arguments do not apply to personal autonomy.

Feminist Freedom and Liberal Pluralism

Berlin's value pluralism is an essential context for understanding his view of the nature and value of negative and positive liberty and for drawing out the potential of those ideas for feminism. I now consider the implications of value pluralism for the relation between the two liberties within an overall vision of feminist freedom. My argument is that Hirschmann's account of that relation would be clarified and strengthened by bringing value pluralism into the picture. Thus amended, her overall vision of freedom is strongly supported by my reinterpretation and development of Berlin's pluralism in the form of 'liberal pluralism'.

The problem posed by value pluralism is that if fundamental goods are incommensurable, it is not obvious how to choose among them or trade them off when they conflict. This is a problem that Berlin never addresses in any detail; he only makes a few suggestions.[63] However, the

[54] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, pp. 38–39.

[55] Hirschmann, 'Response to Friedman and Brison', pp. 204, 205.

[56] See, e.g. the account of personal autonomy within a cultural context given by Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), ch. 5.

[57] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 38.

[58] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 203.

[59] Mill's understanding of autonomy, e.g. is read in this way by Richard Lindley, *Autonomy* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986), ch. 4.

[60] Diana Tietjens Meyers, 'Decentralizing Autonomy: Five Faces of Selfhood', in John Christman and Joel Anderson, eds, *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 27.

[61] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 35.

[62] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 236.

[63] See, e.g. Berlin, 'Introduction', pp. 42, 47; 'Pursuit of the Ideal', pp. 17–19.

value-pluralist literature that has built on his work contains two main proposals.[64] First, when incommensurable values conflict we can get some guidance by looking at context. Although value pluralists believe that there is no way of ranking fundamental values in the abstract, many, including Berlin, accept that we may have good reason to rank such values in a particular situation.[65] Berlin's defence of negative against positive liberty is an example. In the abstract, the two values are equally fundamental, but in the political context the negative idea is safer (according to Berlin) because, as history has shown, positive liberty can be used to justify forcing people to free.[66]

Second, conflicts among incommensurable values can be approached by philosophical argument based on the concept of value pluralism itself. In this way, value pluralism gives rise to a norm which may be called 'value diversity'. To take value pluralism seriously is to recognize that human well-being is constituted by a range of distinct fundamental values, all of which should be respected. This implies that a desirable society will be one in which people have real opportunities to pursue that full range of values, or at least as full a range as possible. 'If there are many and competing genuine values,' writes Bernard Williams, 'then the greater the extent to which a society tends to be single-valued, the more genuine values it neglects or suppresses. More, to this extent, must mean better.'[67] Not all values can be maximized simultaneously, but we can promote as wide a range as practicable.

Moreover, value pluralism implies the salience, especially for political purposes, of personal autonomy—people's capacity to control their lives through critical reflection on their cultural, ethical and personal norms. A person who makes decisions by following cultural customs (such as patriarchal traditions), or by mechanically applying monist procedures such as utilitarianism, employs value rankings that can be questioned on pluralist grounds in particular cases, since it can always be asked why those particular values should be prioritized rather than others. Those best placed to respond to the hard choices of pluralism in a way that does justice to the complexities involved are those able to take a critically reflective view of the various values, principles, and background conceptions of the good in play around them.

These pluralist arguments for value diversity and personal autonomy amount to a case for a broadly liberal form of politics. Value diversity connects with liberalism because liberal societies are characterized by individual rights and liberties that open paths to the pursuit of many different values. Personal autonomy is a liberal value almost by definition.[68] True, these values are not realized equally by all versions of liberalism. They are ill-served by those forms, classical and neoliberal, where people's life prospects depend so much on the vagaries of market allocation. But the promise is better kept by social or egalitarian forms of liberalism in which market distribution is corrected or supplemented by state intervention, enabling more people to pursue the goals that inspire them, hence enabling a wider range of values to be realized.

The extension of Berlin's value pluralism in this way, through the principles of value diversity and personal autonomy, is what I mean by 'liberal pluralism'. This goes beyond the arguments explicitly offered by Berlin, but its basics are largely in keeping with his own view, in particular with his case for economic redistribution. The principal practical difference between Berlin's own position and my liberal-pluralist extension is that the latter places more emphasis on the political role of positive liberty conceived as effective freedom and personal autonomy, on multiculturalism (within liberal limits), and on deliberative democracy.[69]

Liberal pluralism assists Hirschmann's case for feminist freedom in several ways. First, pluralist attention to context supports her emphasis on the importance for feminists of the concrete situation. For Hirschmann, the degree to which women are free depends on the extent to which their choices are unconstrained, which in turn depends on circumstances. Going deeper, it depends, too, on the social construction of women's desires and identity, which again varies according to context. It follows that 'to analyze freedom theorists must examine specific concrete situations in which that construction takes place'.[70] For example, whether individual women

[64] The following summarises arguments developed most fully in George Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (London: Continuum, 2002); George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004); George Crowder, *The Problem of Value Pluralism: Isaiah Berlin and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[65] See, e.g. Berlin and Williams, 'Pluralism and Liberalism', in Berlin, *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, second edition, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 326. Other value pluralists who accept the possibility of contextual practical reasoning include Stuart Hampshire, John Kekes, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Henry S. Richardson.

[66] As implied by my earlier discussion, this argument is more convincingly deployed against some kinds of positive liberty rather than others. Personal autonomy is not vulnerable to the kind of manipulation described by Berlin, nor does Berlin's attack on forcing to be free affect positive liberty in the sense of effective freedom, or access to resources.

[67] Bernard Williams, 'Introduction' to Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, xxxvii.

[68] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974 [1859]), ch. 3.

[69] For arguments linking value pluralism to multiculturalism, see George Crowder, *Theories of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), chs 7 and 9. The connection between value pluralism and deliberative democracy is explored in Crowder, *Problem of Value Pluralism*, pp. 165–172.

[70] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 34.

who take the veil have freely chosen to do so is a complex question that depends on their response to cultural context.

But the veiling example also shows that context, although always framing choice, does not necessarily determine it. Although there are cases where cultural or political context is such that women have little choice—for example, Afghanistan under the Taliban—in other cases, perhaps most, women respond in different ways to cultural norms, some accepting the norm, others resisting it. This indicates the limits of appeal to context as a way for pluralists to resolve conflicts among incommensurable values. In some cases, to describe the context of choice is tantamount to ranking (at least de facto) the values at play—for example, women's lives under the Taliban. Elsewhere context, while essential to understanding the issue, is not so dispositive. Hirschmann gives the example of the tension between the values of physical security and preserving relationships that complicates so many cases of domestic violence. Her response is that 'feminists should be asking how these two goals can be reconciled'.[71] Pluralism would suggest that we cannot exactly 'reconcile' these goals but must try to balance or trade them off according to situated judgment in context.

A second way in which liberal pluralism offers support to Hirschmann is through the principle of value diversity. Liberal pluralists want a society in which people are able to pursue as wide a range of values as possible. Similarly, Hirschmann calls for 'a wider diversity of values and goals'.[72] To achieve this, she urges feminists to turn away from the narrow silos of interest-group and identity politics, instead conceiving of politics in terms of 'issues' on which people can have views that are not determined by either self-interest or identity. People's views come out of their concrete experiences but need not be imprisoned by those experiences. Further, a wider picture emerges when feminism takes into account 'a diversity of voices and experiences'.[73] Different voices, informed by distinct experiences, represent and express different 'ideals and norms'.[74] Hirschmann's view here is endorsed by the liberal-pluralist encouragement of value diversity.

Third, liberal-pluralist support for personal autonomy is in tune with Hirschmann's position. The complication, of course, is that she does not see her conception of feminist freedom as an autonomy conception, but I have argued that the essence of personal autonomy is self-direction in accordance with critical reflection, and that is what Hirschmann advocates.

Finally, liberal pluralism resolves a problem with Hirschmann's account of the relation between negative and positive liberty within her overall picture of feminist freedom. On the face of it, this relation looks paradoxical, since on Hirschmann's view feminist freedom must both respect the choices of the individual (negative liberty) and question those choices (positive liberty). Feminist freedom requires the critical questioning of desires, yet the person who acts in defiance of critical questioning, who has no good reasons for acting but says 'I just want to do it', is still free.[75] How can I be both free because I am doing what I want and simultaneously unfree because I am not critically reflective?

Hirschmann's theory does in this respect have a look of unresolved paradox, but that is only because she assumes that an adequate theory of feminist freedom must be a single, monist concept that contains everything we want from freedom. Thus, she refers to 'the integrity of the concept of freedom' as requiring both that choices be respected whatever they may be and that the same choices be evaluated critically.[76] Behind this lies the assumption, widespread not only in the feminist literature, that an acceptable concept of freedom must include all of freedom's dimensions. But that assumption is rejected by Berlin (at least on his better view) and by liberal pluralism. As I argued earlier, if Berlin's view of negative and positive liberty is interpreted through the prism of his pluralism, the two ideas 'are not two different interpretations of a single concept' but two distinct concepts.[77] This insight is readily accepted by liberal pluralism, with its value-pluralist foundation.

The advantage of the liberal-pluralist view is that we are no longer stuck with a paradox. With Hirschmann, we can see the importance of both negative and positive liberty in understanding feminist freedom, or freedom in any application, but on the pluralist view we are no longer under pressure to do the impossible and combine them within a single concept. Instead, we can see them as distinct and incommensurable considerations, in tension with each other. Hirschmann comes close to this view when she writes that negative and positive liberty 'identify different aspects of human experience'.[78] Once negative and positive liberty are seen as incommensurable, the fact that they cannot be combined within the same concept is not paradoxical but to be expected.[79]

This view is supported by at least one leading theorist of freedom. Sharon Krause argues that contemporary theories of freedom, including feminist theories, are typically monist:

[71] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 220.

[72] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 222.

[73] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 224.

[74] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 209.

[75] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 236.

[76] Hirschmann, 'Response to Friedman and Brison', p. 206.

[77] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 212.

[78] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 209.

[79] This is compatible with allowing that distinct concepts representing incommensurable values can be combined in practical judgment, as I argue below.

'freedom is generally conceived to be just one thing'.[80] On most views, there is a single key that unlocks the meaning of liberty as a whole, although there are different accounts of what the key is. Phillip Pettit, for example, proposes 'non-domination' as the way to understand freedom, Linda Zerilli (following Hannah Arendt) says that freedom is fundamentally about 'world-making', and for Hirschmann the formula is 'personal choice'. But each of these views expresses only one kind of freedom. The truth is that 'no one account of freedom can capture without remainder all that is important to the meaning of freedom in any sphere of activity'.[81]

Rather, the experience of freedom has many distinct dimensions. There are different kinds of freedom, these conflict with one another, and they are not easily reconcilable or rankable. To grasp this, we need 'a pluralist view of freedom' that recognizes 'multiple forms of freedom that operate concurrently in the same domains' and that 'resist an easy rank ordering of them'.[82] Freedom in general can be understood as referring to 'the enabling conditions of human agency'.[83] But since human agency is threatened by a range of different constraints (coercion, poverty, racism, upbringing, and so on) in a variety of different circumstances (personal, cultural, historical), there can be no one single form of freedom; rather, different freedoms answer to different social constraints and situations.

Krause illustrates her view with the example of veiling, to which (as argued earlier) different women respond differently, bringing to it (or from it) different concepts of freedom. Some women embrace the veil as a form of resistance to Western imperialism, implying a world-making notion of freedom (Zerilli/Arendt); others accept the veil as an expression of a pious life with which they want no interference, implying a commitment to freedom as negative liberty (although veiling could well be opposed on negative-liberty grounds by those who reject the pious life); others would regard the veil as a symbol of slavery (Pettit's nondomination).

How do we mediate the conflicts between these various kinds of freedom? All are incommensurably valuable, so there can be no single rank order or formula that applies in all cases. The best we can do, Krause argues, is try to balance the competing considerations in the circumstances before us. Some guidance can be provided by always keeping 'justice' in mind, understood on the standard liberal-democratic model of equal concern and respect for individuals conceived as bearers of equal moral worth.[84] We should also honor all relevant forms of freedom as far as possible (rather than simply sacrificing some to others); recognize that the state has an important role but also that it is not the only source of freedom or unfreedom; acknowledge the relevance and force of historical context, which may indicate the priority of particular forms of freedom in particular cases; and keep open channels of communication so that different perspectives and interests can be heard. In the end, all this is a matter of situated judgment, and we have to accept the possibility of 'remainders'—that whatever judgment we make may entail a real loss in terms of one kind of freedom in order to realize a gain in another form.

In this connection, Krause criticizes Hirschmann. For Krause, Hirschmann is right to recognize the claims of both (negative) freedom as non-interference and (positive) freedom as authentic self-direction, but she sees Hirschmann as mistakenly trying to resolve the conflict between these by siding ultimately with non-interference.[85] In Krause's view, Hirschmann's understanding of freedom is in the end a monist one. In my view, things are not so clear, since in some passages Hirschmann emphasizes non-interference, while in others the bottom line seems to be the 'paradox' referred to earlier, in which freedom is defined as a single concept that is both negative and positive at the same time. Either way, I agree with Krause that in this respect 'a plural view can help. It explains why we have freedom-based reasons to care both about the actual choices that individual women make and about the backgrounds that inform their choices'.[86]

Some people will find the pluralist approach to freedom hard to swallow, since it rules out the possibility of a formula for freedom in all cases, but Krause argues persuasively that such an approach has distinct benefits.[87] It captures the complexity of freedom and agency, thus discouraging us from simply ignoring certain dimensions of these ideas and from imposing a single version on others; it acknowledges the costs of any form of freedom, including costs to other forms of freedom, and so prevents us from being complacent about the kinds of freedom we achieve—no society is simply 'free' in some unqualified sense; it explains how freedom can be resilient in hostile conditions, since although it may be absent in one form, it may be present in another; and by insisting that the full meaning of freedom is never completely settled, it holds open the possibility of new forms of freedom not previously appreciated.

Krause's approach to freedom is genuinely value-pluralist and makes a significant contribution to the literature of pluralism as well as that of freedom and feminism. She is evidently unaware, however, that this position is already

80 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 165.

81 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, pp. 18, 165.

82 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 165.

83 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 166.

84 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 174.

85 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, pp. 174–175.

86 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 175.

87 Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, pp. 19, 166–167.

sketched by Berlin. In an earlier version of her argument, Krause refers to Berlin only as an example of a prominent theorist who holds a typically monist view of freedom, in his case focused on negative non-interference; there is no mention at all of his pluralism.[88] In her later book, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, she acknowledges Berlin as a pluralist when it comes to 'values', but insists that he does not apply his pluralism to the concept of freedom.[89] Krause concedes that Berlin sees both negative and positive liberty as valuable, and even that he appreciates a need 'to strike a compromise between them'.[90] But she still sees him as (like Hirschmann) ultimately on the side of negative liberty in a strongly monist sense. For Krause, Berlin links pluralism with 'unhampered individual choice'—his argument, according to Krause, being that people need freedom of choice to navigate among conflicting plural values—so that his political upshot is 'a *laissez-faire* brand of individualism'.[91] However, Krause argues, 'the right response to the plurality of freedom is not to turn people loose to pursue whichever type of freedom they prefer but for societies collectively to find ways to honor them all as much as possible'.[92]

I hope I have already said enough about Berlin's position to show that Krause, while importantly correct about the application of pluralism to freedom, is mistaken in her understanding of Berlin in this matter. He does not hold a laissez-faire position. On the contrary, he argues for precisely the view that Krause supports, that at a social level different fundamental values need to be balanced by collective policy—that is the thrust of his defence of the welfare state when he says that liberty is not the only good and that it needs to be balanced against other considerations such as equality, justice, and compassion. He could have been clearer or more emphatic in his presentation of negative and positive liberty as plural and incommensurable values, but he makes this clear enough. Krause makes a valuable contribution by adding that the same plurality applies not only to negative and positive liberty but also to other forms of liberty (as non-domination, world-making, and so on). But that point, too, is really a development of what Berlin says already, or at the very least consistent with his view, since he is explicit that negative and positive liberty are only two of 'the more than two hundred senses of [freedom] recorded by historians of ideas'.[93] Krause claims that her theory of plural freedoms 'runs parallel to Berlin's value pluralism', but it would be more accurate to see it as a welcome elaboration.[94]

It might be objected that this pluralist approach also has problems. Someone might suppose that if we follow pluralists in maintaining the distinctness of fundamental values, we cannot combine those values when we need to. For example, there is good reason to believe that a theory of feminist freedom must include some notion of 'equality of liberty' between the sexes and between different groups of women—in this connection Hirschmann writes of the need to avoid 'systematically unequal treatment and dominance'.[95] But if 'a thing is what it is, and not another thing', then presumably equality is equality and liberty is liberty. In that case, is the notion of equality of liberty not confused?

This would be a misunderstanding. The conceptual distinctness of things does not prevent them from being combined in practice: to recognize that a bicycle and an electric motor are distinct items does not prevent us from combining them in an electric bicycle. It is the same with values.[96] Earlier I quoted Berlin as saying that, although negative and positive liberty are incommensurable, 'in practice it is often necessary to strike a compromise between them', a passage endorsed by Krause.[97] Similarly, liberty and equality are distinct values, but they can be combined or balanced in the thought that liberty should be distributed equally or that equality can be expressed, in part, through freedom. The point of pluralism is not to bring moral judgment or practical reasoning to a halt.[98] Rather, pluralism alerts us to the potential for conflict among its constituent values and, where conflict occurs, to the nature of the choices we have to make, which are usually compromises, and to the losses we may have to endure.

Moreover, to see fundamental values—for example, liberty and equality—as incommensurable does not mean that, in particular cases when they are in conflict, we cannot rank them or trade them off for good reason. As I have argued, liberal pluralism is compatible with practical reasoning, understood as partly contextual, partly philosophical. In this connection it might be asked whether liberal

[88] Sharon R. Krause, 'Plural Freedom', *Politics and Gender* 8 (2012): p. 239.

[89] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 166.

[90] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 166, quoting Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 212.

[91] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 170.

[92] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 170.

[93] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 168.

[94] Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 170.

[95] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, p. 233.

[96] For a sophisticated discussion of 'mixed-value goods' with incommensurable components, see Joseph Raz, *Engaging Reason: On the Theory of Value and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 8.

[97] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', p. 212; Krause, *Freedom Beyond Sovereignty*, p. 166. Berlin also refers to the need for compromise in 'Pursuit of the Ideal', p. 18. On value pluralism and compromise more generally, see Crowder, *Problem of Value Pluralism*, pp. 172–187.

[98] Contrary to the view of Ronald Dworkin, 'Do Liberal Values Conflict?' in Ronald Dworkin, Mark Lilla, and Robert B. Silvers, eds, *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York: New York Review Books, 2001). Compare the reply to Dworkin by Bernard Williams in the same collection.

pluralism gives feminists reason to place more weight on one kind of liberty rather than the other as a general rule. In *The Subject of Liberty*, Hirschmann seems overall to weigh negative and positive liberty equally for feminist purposes, but one of her later articles regards positive liberty as more important because it addresses the internal constraints imposed by patriarchy.[99]

My suggestion is that liberal pluralism comes down marginally on the side of positive liberty as the stronger value for feminists. Such a view is in keeping with the philosophical link between pluralism and personal autonomy as a capacity for navigating conflicts among plural values. There may also be a contextual case for feminists to place greater emphasis on positive liberty under current historical conditions, since it could be argued that the negative-liberty aspirations of feminism—the removal of external legal and political constraints—have made considerable progress already (at any rate in liberal democracies), while it is in the internal constraints of cultural attitude, the realm of positive liberty, where most work remains to be done.

However, this suggestion is tentative because Hirschmann is right to stand up for the importance of the negative idea in *The Subject of Liberty*. Negative liberty remains valuable for feminists because it reminds people to be wary of second-guessing, which has traditionally been a feature of patriarchy. If the negative idea is supplemented by attention to the conditions of liberty in the manner of Berlin, it can address patriarchy. As much as one can say in general terms, I think, is that the balance between negative and positive is a continuing issue for feminists (as for everyone), an issue that calls forth careful attention to context, and an issue for which feminists may find liberal pluralism to be a useful resource.

Conclusion

I have argued that Berlin gives feminists more of what they are looking for in a theory of freedom than they realize. This is especially true when his value pluralism is taken into account, and even more so when his value pluralism is developed as liberal pluralism.

The argument proceeded in two main phases. First, Berlin's presentation of the two notions of liberty is less limited than is generally supposed. His view of negative liberty turns out to be broad enough to recognize patriarchy as, in effect, a constraint on liberty (or, more precisely, on the value of liberty) once his idea of the conditions of liberty is taken into account. He is not opposed to positive liberty as a fundamental value, and his forcing to be free argument applies only to some versions of positive liberty. It does not apply to positive liberty in the form of personal autonomy as this is developed by many liberal writers. All this is underpinned by Berlin's value pluralism. Pluralism accounts for Berlin's insistence that negative liberty be distinguished from its conditions, that negative liberty is not overriding (even in politics), and that positive liberty is a fundamental good on the same ultimate level as negative liberty.

Second, value pluralism, especially when extended as liberal pluralism, is a useful tool with which to construct a vision of what feminist freedom should look like. The picture that Hirschmann gives us is plausible and attractive on the whole but leaves unresolved the question of how its negative and positive components fit together. Krause shows how Berlin's pluralism makes sense of that relation but does not give Berlin the credit he deserves. My suggestion is that liberal pluralism takes the argument further by drawing out the political implications of Berlinian pluralism more fully, connecting it not only with a more complex understanding of freedom but also with attention to context more generally, with value diversity, and with personal autonomy. In all these ways, Berlin's ideas, appropriately reinterpreted, add significantly to the intellectual resources of feminism.

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[99] Hirschmann, 'Berlin, Feminism', p. 186.