

DAMIAN LESZCZYŃSKI
University of Wrocław

**Positive basis of negative freedom.
Remarks on Isaiah Berlin's concept***

Abstract

In this article I examine some aspects of the conception of negative liberty, mainly in view presented by Isaiah Berlin in his famous *Four Essays on Liberty*. I try to prove that his dualistic conception of liberty is unsatisfactory and incomplete. It results from his one-sided and in fact incorrect analysis of positive liberty. Berlin wrongly identified positive liberty only with the source of oppression neglecting the fact that this kind of liberty is a necessary condition for liberal negative liberty he wanted to defend.

The distinction between negative and positive freedom proposed by Isaiah Berlin has received a number of comments and criticisms. Some of these comments (formulated by, among others, Gerald MacCalluna, John Gray and Charles Taylor) are very insightful and accurate. They mainly point out the lack of precision in this distinction (as was acknowledged by Berlin himself), the lack of understanding of the nature of freedom as a tripartite relationship (rather than between two parties) or too radical a juxtaposition of the two types of freedom and excessive depreciation of one of them. Nevertheless, this distinction settled into political philosophy and is still in use (functioning) but sometimes distant from the original sense (such as in Erich Fromm), usually fulfilling the role of a general or even a common sense introduction to the discussion of freedom. This is especially true in the texts dedicated to the emergence of specificity of the liberal approach, a typical negative freedom as the opposite of positive freedom, which is the possible source of unjustified tyranny, is often mentioned. On this general and common level the concept of positive freedom has gained (nomen omen) some negative characteristics, which is probably the intention of the author himself, becoming an exemplification of the essence of enslavement from which we can only be released by – positively evaluated – negative freedom.

Coming back to Berlin's source text and considering once again the distinction that he proposes, it turns out that this issue is neither as simple nor clear as it is

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often presented today. It results not only from Berlin's imprecise and somewhat chaotic (though charming) style, but primarily from the fact that focusing mainly on the criticism of positive freedom, he did not carefully consider the complex relationships between the two concepts of freedom, and above all he did not take into account the issue of the basis, which would require the realization – both in theory and in practice – of the concept, (which he accepted) of negative liberty as a freedom typical for liberalism. In this article I would like to address this last issue, trying at the same time once again to look at the structure and consequences of the idea of positive freedom put forward by Berlin.

Positive liberty as autonomy

The general understanding of positive freedom is more or less known but let us recall it here, based on the Berlin's paper. Positive freedom is connected with the question "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?"¹ While the measure of negative freedom would be the level of interference in the activities of the subject (the lower the level, the greater freedom), the range of positive freedom can be measured by the degree to which an entity has an impact on his decision, and so is their conscious author. Positive freedom is associated with the "desire of an individual to become the master of his own fate" and the desire to "rule himself." Berlin puts it in this way: "I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's acts of will. I want to be a subject and not an object, to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer-deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other people."² This characteristic is quite chaotic and allows the construction of different and sometimes conflicting definitions of what freedom would be (the freedom from other people for example, is different to the freedom from the "laws of nature"), but so far it can be summed up as follows: an individual is free in a positive way when he is conscious and a sovereign author of his actions. "Awareness" can be understood here both epistemically, as knowledge about what you are doing, as well as teleologically, as intentionality. Thus some deliberate targeting of specific actions heading towards some specific results: "sovereignty" would be understood as autonomy, that is *independence from the factors which are transcendent to the subject in decision making process* (as opposed to heteronomy). The term "author" would suggest self-rule, which to some extent would lead to autonomy, whereas "the actions" would, generally speaking, define any possible

¹ I. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, [in:], I. Berlin, *Liberty*, H. Hardy (ed.), Oxford–New York 2002, p. 169. On the subject of positive freedom as autonomy cf. i.a: J. Gray, *Liberalism*, Minneapolis 1986, pp. 56–60; *idem*, *On Negative and Positive Liberty*, [in:] *Conceptions of Liberty in Political Philosophy*, J. Gray, Z. Pelczynski (eds.), London 1984; L.J. McFarlane, 'On Two Concepts of Liberty', *Political Studies* 14 (1966); G. Dworkin, *Theory and Practice of Autonomy*, Cambridge 1988; G. MacCallum, *Negative and Positive Freedom*, [in:] D. Miller (ed.), *Liberty*, Oxford 1991.

² I. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, p. 178.

effects of the subject's activities, both in material, and mental, terms (for example, loyalty to the nation as a conscious and autonomous choice). Simply speaking, if I am free (in a positive sense), then I do what I want and I am enslaved when I have to do what someone (or something) tells me to do. To describe such a situation Berlin uses the psychological term "self-direction". He also talks about the power over oneself, controlling yourself. Following Kant, Berlin refers to the concept of an autonomous self as a creator of values and goals. Such a situation can be schematically recognized as follows:

$$S \rightarrow A$$

This indicates the existence of a relation of determination between a subject (S) and her actions (A), which can be described as asymmetric and irreflexive (which is not of special importance here). However, the case of slavery (lack of positive freedom) would look something like this:

$$E \rightarrow S \rightarrow A$$

In this case we would talk about the relation of determining the subject by an external factor (E), which would shape the relationship between S and A. We would deal here with a transitive relationship, in the sense that S would be an intermediate element used by E to obtain A. Therefore we cannot talk about S as autonomous, sovereign, and self-directed. What is more, in principle, S cannot be called a subject in the strict sense, because from this perspective it would be treated as an object (tool or means) to achieve a goal, not as a goal in itself (in the language of Kant). Let us add one more important thing: in the first case the subject as a conscious and sovereign author of his actions would be responsible for them in the sense that he would be their intentional culprit. However, in the second situation, the issue of responsibility would become more problematic: the subject (in a limited sense, given its predetermination) would be, from the material point of view, a doer but we could think of him as an unintentional doer, and therefore an active element in terms of performance, but not their author. What is more, in a very general sense of an external determination (which will be expanded further on in the text) we could demonstrate that even the authorship and intentionality of an action does not determine the responsibility of the subject for them if you can show them as a result of transcendent causes (in extreme cases it can lead to a situation in which the subject is never responsible for his actions; it is here to explain to what extent he remains "the subject", and also how we should understand this relationship of indirect "agency").

Freedom, split, tyranny

Writing about positive liberty Berlin attempts to demonstrate how it becomes the basis for tyranny and a threat to liberal negative freedom. His reasoning is as follows: the desire to be a conscious and sovereign author of his actions causes a subject to become divided into the "true self" (rational, higher) and the "false self" (empirical, lower). In the case of freedom there is a compatibility between

these levels of consciousness, that is, the empirical self follows the guidelines of the rational self. However, what may happen is the case when the first escapes the former and, under the influence of external factors, acts against it. What is worse, it may lead to a situation when the rational self disappears completely or is dominated by the empirical self, giving some false justifications imposed by transcendent causes. We are dealing here with a classic enslavement combined with the lack of personal awareness of this enslavement. According to Berlin, this may result in a situation when someone claims the right to knowledge about the true goals and intentions of the rational self, determined by the false goals and intentions of the empirical self. Thus, referring to this knowledge about the real needs and interests of individuals, we can, at the political level, coerce them to perform certain actions, referring not only to their well-being but most of all to the compatibility of these measures with the content of the rational self and therefore including real goals, desires and interests. Therefore we can reach a paradoxical situation where individuals enslaved by determining transcendent factors inconsistent with their rational self will be freed by obedience to other external determinants allegedly consistent with their rational self. In short, a man is freed from coercion by the use of coercion of another kind.

Before analyzing these ideas, I would like to focus our attention on several things. Firstly, the reasoning of Berlin, based on the transition from positive freedom by splitting the subject to transform his freedom into a kind of slavery, does not describe the only possible and necessary consequence of positive freedom. On the contrary, it seems that the ontological problem of the relationship between the subject, his actions and external factors does not necessarily entail the adoption of a psycho-epistemological concept of the “self” split. Rather his concept, whose origins will be mentioned later on, seems to be something rather added to the concept of positive freedom, and at the same time, because of its consequences, difficult to integrate without falling into some serious problems (for example, is the concept of the split of the subject into the real and false the result of the real or false self?). In short, it seems possible to accept the concept of positive freedom without accepting the concept of the split subject.

Secondly, a similar problem relates to the transition from the concept of the split “self” to the political issue of justifying coercion by knowledge inaccessible to the subject of his own rational self. Berlin himself demonstrates that the problem of the split can be solved within the subject, for example, based on a scheme of asceticism and therefore does not necessarily entail launching political, or any other external coercion mechanisms. Additionally, there is a serious epistemological problem here, and therefore the question of the origin and validation of the knowledge possessed by someone about the subject which is inaccessible to the subject himself. Due to the difficulties associated with this idea, it appears that the transition from positive freedom and the subject split to the described herein form of a “releasing constraint” is not inevitable. And similarly due to a combination of two prime elements, requires some theoretical effort, much bigger here because it is easy to encounter difficulties (ex. Is my knowledge of the content of the rational self unattainable to a given subject the result of my rational self or

the empirical one?). Regardless of these comments, it must be stated that such a relationship between the three elements discussed, though not necessary, does exist and what is more important, we find numerous practical confirmations of it, which are very well pointed out by Berlin in his essay. Since the transition from positive freedom to tyranny is based on coercion justified by the knowledge of the real aims of individuals, let us have a close look at this very issue.

The Epistemic dimension of freedom

In this context the following remark by Berlin appears to be very significant: “I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realise that it is not”.³ We are dealing here with two important issues. Firstly, what is being addressed here is the “notion” of being free, not the reality of being free, which will play a significant role in attempts to impose on individuals certain actions which are against their will, justifying them by saying that their subjective “notion” does not matter in comparison with the objective facts. Secondly, freedom, or being free, is described here in terms of truth, doubt and scepticism. Let us focus on the latter problem.

Admittedly, Berlin clearly writes here about a situation in which it is believed that the statement “I am free” is true. However, his reasoning leads us to a conclusion that first of all we have to consider a state where the truth of this assertion is known. Berlin, referring to Enlightenment thinkers, as well as Hegel and Marx, tries to demonstrate that the consequence of the doctrine of positive freedom is the thesis according to which “to understand the world is to be freed”,⁴ which can be paraphrased as “knowledge will set you free”. In order for the same knowledge to become a justified basis for coercion, it must have a specific character. Let us now consider its two dimensions – subjective and objective.

The subjective dimension corresponds roughly to what is included in Berlin’s statement quoted at the beginning of this section. What does it mean that subjectively I know I am free? Identifying this claim of having a comprehensive knowledge of the reasons for my actions will not be enough because I can have a thorough knowledge of the reasons for my actions, which are heteronomous. There is in fact no contradiction in the idea that I may know about my own enslavement. So such a knowledge is not enough but it must be a knowledge about me being the cause of my actions and that there are no external reasons for my actions. In short, I know that I am free in a positive way when I know that I am a conscious and sovereign author of my actions and their only cause. What does the subjective nature of this knowledge rely on? On the fact that the verification of the legitimacy of this information about being a conscious and sovereign author consists in referring to my own sense of freedom. I am free because I feel free, I do not feel anyone’s interference, I feel I am in control of myself. In the context of the aforementioned split, I could say that my rational self is perfectly clear and completely controls my empirical self, namely, that I am convinced that this is so.

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 189.

There is of course a problem indicated at some point by Bachelard as a problem of a controlling meta-cogito. The point is that the verification of one's own thinking is done on a meta-level which, in order to be verified and analysed, also needs to be treated from the next meta-level up, and so on ad infinitum. Therefore, the binary distinction into the empirical and rational self would not seem sufficient: the rational self controls the empirical self, but to make sure that this control is performed properly, it would be necessary to control the rational self from the perspective of the rational meta-self, etc.

If we put the matter in such a way, it would appear that if the knowledge of our freedom is subjectively verified by referring it to the feeling of being free (we may quote Descartes and say "clear and explicit"), that mere verification must also be verified. Since this process is infinite, the final decision, whether our subjective knowledge of freedom/slavery is legally valid, would be impossible. An attempt to appeal to existing information about being the conscious and sovereign author of one's own actions will not change much here, because it would also require some verification that, on the subjective level, would probably always proceed according to the above scheme (i.e. to avoid regress, it would ultimately require some version of the evidentialist theory of truth). But this infinite regress is not the most serious problem. The fundamental difficulty lies in the fact that, by accepting the split of the subject into the real, rational self and the false, empirical self, we assume that some of our beliefs are false. This is inadequate in terms of non-compliance with our "real" nature. However, the feature that attests to their falsity is not immanent, because in this respect they do not differ from true beliefs. Besides, this is what the specific character of their falsehood that "pretends" to be real and "pretends" to be them relies on. We take false desires as true because we do not find in them a criterion which would enable us to classify them into one category or the other: this criterion would have to be external, but we do not have it on a subjective level, as the ultimate criterion here is our deep sense of obviousness. This situation slightly resembles the Cartesian problem with the demon deceiver: the excellence of deception lies in the fact that the falsehood resembles the truth in every respect (e.g. a perfectly deceptive dream is the one which is identical to reality, since it does not include any immanent characteristics which would distinguish them). In this situation our "clear and explicit" feelings are not any criterion. According to Descartes, the demon can deceive us even about obvious things such as the fact that $2 + 3 = 5$, i.e. that deep sense of obviousness linked to this equation, and the inability to imagine that it could be otherwise are also the result of deception. What is more, as shown by Father Bourdain, who pointed out some errors and inconsistencies in Descartes' thinking, even the conjectural certitude of the principle of contradiction, which is used in the formulation of considerations, may be based on falsehood. In short, assuming the split of a subject we know only that each of our beliefs may be an expression of either the real or false self. However, we do not know which is which. Moreover, we have here one more difficulty, mentioned earlier, which consists in checking whether the distinction between these two selves is not the result of the false self.

Therefore, the situation is as follows: some (or all) of the subject's beliefs re-

lated to the sovereignty of his decisions are wrong, and he, even being aware of this fact, does not have adequate criteria to identify them as such. Generally speaking, we can say that all the beliefs of the same subject concerning himself – and therefore also of his objectives, desires, interests and all of his self-knowledge – may be wrong, and from the immanent (subjective) point of view, it is impossible to state that. It is easy to notice here a classical theory of the the so-called false consciousness. Besides, Berlin examining these issues, makes an explicit reference to Hegel and Marx (it may be appropriate to recall here also Freudian psychoanalysis and Nietzsche's genealogy as related sources). However, the statement that a subject, as Freud said, is "a stranger to himself", i.e. has a false understanding of himself or lacks the criteria to determine which part of his self-knowledge is true and which is false, is one thing, and the other is the recognition that because of that somebody from the outside can direct him in such a way that he will implement his "real" goals and interests.

In this situation, from the subjective knowledge of personal freedom, which, as we have shown, based on the considered theory, can be totally misleading, we should move on to some form of objective knowledge. Thus it would not only be possible to ignore out insufficient and confusing subjective criteria, but also to find a basis on which we could present and explain their imperfection. The solution here would be a knowledge of freedom which would be of a scientific nature in a general and common sense of the word, i.e. general knowledge, universally valid, independent of individuals and concerning the true – independent of subjects – reality. This knowledge will not only allow us to recognize our own situation in the context of freedom/slavery, but also, as a result, the ability to control reality through anticipating and constructing conscious strategies for our actions. This approach is determined by Berlin as "rationalism" (Oakeshott and Hayek use this term in a similar way), associating it with, among many, the doctrines of Marx and Comte, noticing the assumptions underlying the "many modern ideologies: nationalist, communist, authoritarian and totalitarian"⁵ and recognizing them as an inevitable consequence of the doctrine of positive liberty. However, as I mentioned at the beginning, from the point of view of the logic of the theory, this relationship is neither necessary nor the only one possible. In conjunction with the concept of positive liberty, and especially the concept of the duality of the subject and false consciousness, the concept of the possibility of objective knowledge as the basis for controlling people is not easy to validate, though, admittedly, it is the only reasonable way, from the standpoint of the theory, which is supposed to be the ground for political practice. Besides, from this perspective, the whole structure – and therefore the theory of false consciousness connected with the doctrine of objective knowledge – is an extremely powerful tool by means of which it is very easy to justify totalitarian action as heading towards liberation. And in this respect Berlin is right, but the fact that positive freedom has been connected with morally reprehensible doctrines, (which he considers to be the main argument for the rejection of the former) is, as I shall show later, not only unreasonable, but

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

theoretically impossible if you want to defend negative freedom; and that is what Berlin wants to do. For the time being, I suggest we examine this “objective knowledge about freedom,” and primarily how we can implement it in the context of the doctrine of false consciousness.

Freedom and gnosis

First of all, it should be noted that the very wording of the theory of false consciousness has some contradictions. This theory states that all human actions, whether practical or theoretical, and also their justifications, are determined by external interests which do not allow us to treat them as real. The fallacy is defined here as a result of external determination: whatever is heteronomous, is false. This theory, however, says that all human creations are somehow determined which raises a question about the status of this claim. For if it is true, it is also determined, so it is false, and if it is not determined, then the theory is false, since a large quantifier has been used in this theory. It can be formulated as follows: all human creations are false as heteronomous except this very claim, but is hard to take it seriously. Therefore this concept should be reformulated in such a way so that it could include conditions which would allow it to be treated, as opposed to all the others, as objective and autonomous. In order to do this we can, for example, make use of some version of historicism that incorporates a teleological theory of the development of human thought, whose culmination would be gaining some self-knowledge of the theory defended by us. We can also form some philosophical anthropology, within which some conditions the human “enlightenment” could be determined and thus a situation in which a man would have a chance to get to know the “truth” about reality, hidden until now behind the veil of Maya.

As I said, all these problems are related to the already formulated theory of false consciousness. It is easy to notice that they are also associated with an attempt to formulate and validate any other theory which would accept the assumption of a subject split, and especially one whose aim is to define the “appropriate” human desires and verify subjective beliefs about freedom/slavery, and thus whether one is, or not a conscious and sovereign author of one’s own actions. I have mentioned that from a theoretical point of view it is a very difficult task – especially if we try to remain loyal to the principles of traditional logic – but a close look at the history of ideas shows that there have been many attempts to implement them, referring to the scheme, which, though based on religious and mystical sources, fitted quite well into the western intellectual tradition. What is in question here is a model of Gnostic enlightenment, consisting in the capture of knowledge (*gnosis*) about reality inaccessible to others, which is supposed to be one step closer to salvation. It just so happens that both the myth of the hermetic knowledge for the initiated, as well as the eschatological perspective associated with it, would perfectly fit into the doctrines designed not only to explain the reality, but also to change it. An interesting description of numerous contemporary social movements as a form of political gnosis can be found in the writings of many contemporary

political philosophers, including Eric Voegelin and Alain Besancon.⁶ Here I will try to focus only on those elements that are related to the issue of freedom.

Let's start with this: what would an objective knowledge about freedom rely on? First of all, it could not be justified on the basis of our sense of being a conscious and sovereign author of our own actions. Besides the very feeling could not be any argument in favor of being free – it would be easier to present it as the effect of false consciousness, that is, in fact, the consequence of the enslavement. Thus, the subject cannot have an objective knowledge about himself. So can he have this type of knowledge about anyone else? Such knowledge would be related to, firstly, the relationship between the subject and the external determinants, and secondly, the same mental state of a subject, distorted by false consciousness. So in the latter case, it is knowledge of the third-person perspective (in the words of Searle) about the first – person perspective. In short, this knowledge would have to include information about whether a given subject (group of subjects) is or is not a conscious and sovereign author of actions, and what is his own self-image. Obviously, this would imply an opportunity to gain knowledge of the relationship existing in the sphere of being and mental states of others which would not be determined by external factors (i.e. true), which, if we accept the theory of false consciousness, is indeed possible, but cannot be recognized as such (let me repeat it once again: this theory does not have to assume that all knowledge is false, only that there is no criterion to distinguish false knowledge from the true knowledge, and to be more precise, we cannot not get to know it because it does not exist. The mere knowledge of the criterion would necessarily imply that we had it before, because what I take as a criterion, may yet prove to be false). Thus, as you can see, even though we can formulate conditions which must be met by objective knowledge about freedom, and therefore relating to the relationship between the subject, his actions and external determinants. However, due to the adoption of the concept of duality (false consciousness), its correct formulation becomes impossible. We should now consider how it happened that despite these serious theoretical difficulties this type of such knowledge was formulated.

As I mentioned before, the whole structure of the concept presented here is clearly Gnostic. The drama unfolds on three levels – the ontological, epistemological and ethical (political). At the ontological level there is a close predetermination of human actions by external factors over which people have no control and do not even suspect their existence. So we have to deal with the widespread enslavement, which in typical Gnosticism takes the form of binding the soul with matter by an evil god, and in philosophical and political doctrines can be shown as the domination of an individual by an evil “system” or imperfect social relations (relations of production). At the epistemological level, we can talk about the lack of knowledge of individuals about their situation or having some kind of false knowledge, and thus showing a different picture of reality (usually false knowledge contains some information which convinces a man that he is free, and the factors “really” acting against him are shown as beneficial for him). Also here

⁶ Cf. eg. E. Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, Durham 1975; A. Besancon, *Les sources intellectuelles du léninisme* Paris 1996.

there is a demand for real knowledge, tearing the veil of false pretences. At the ethical level (political), demands for the release from the current situation are being formulated, and thus salvation (classical religious gnosticism), or emancipation (political gnosticism). The last two levels are closely related: salvation can only be gained through some secret knowledge. However, as I have already indicated, a problem emerges at this point: how do we gain this “real” knowledge, since it is assumed that false consciousness is the natural feature of subjects and thus creating false knowledge inspired by external factors and serving to justify their enslavement? Despite the rationalistic form of this eschatology, there is no rational transition which would allow us to justify the validity of such knowledge (the condition of salvation) assuming the theory of false consciousness (the condition of slavery). The only transition has a mystical character and consists in referring to some kind of enlightenment, so that at a given moment in history there is an entity that is given a privilege to know the truth, and liberate humanity. Obviously, the appearance of such an entity (or a group of entities) may be justified by the occurrence of “relevant socio-historical conditions” but it does not alter the fact that after the stripping the usually pseudo-scientific phraseology we are faced here with a scheme reminiscent of the plot of the popular movie *The Matrix*.

Paternalism and coercion in the name of freedom

It is not my intention to provide a detailed analysis of this phenomenon but because it is a possible (though not necessary) consequence of the positive concept of freedom which is being examined here, let us take a look at it on the basis of the examples from the Marxist philosophy. It is known that both in classical Marxism and its subsequent mutations, the concept of false consciousness played an important role because it explained the reasons for the acceptance of the status quo by people. This, according to marxian theory, indicates universal slavery but also allows to reject any spontaneous attempts to liberate as false, because they are based on a false vision of reality (the “spontaneous” actions were generally understood as an attempt to change capitalism in an evolutionary way and through reforms suggested by trade unions). In the early writings of Marx we can find attempts to show that negative freedom which is offered to individuals in the framework of liberal democracies, is a deliberate action aimed to arouse in them a false sense of being free, while in fact these individuals do not have this freedom and their decisions are determined by the ownership and family relations, religion, etc. In this situation, the only solution – both theoretical and political – would be emancipation or salvation through the knowledge about what the world “really” is and drawing practical conclusion in the form of a revolutionary reform. Here we are faced with a clearly explained doctrine of false consciousness and a demand for an objective study of reality as a means to liberation. Obviously the latter is to be dialectical materialism in the form presented by Marx and Engels which would in this case play the role of political gnosticism.⁷

⁷ About the concept of freedom in the works of Marx cf. J. Gray, ‘Marxian freedom, Individual Liberty, and the End of Alienation’, *Social Philosophy and Policy* 4 (1986); R. Aron, *Essai sur les libertés* Paris 1965, ch. I-II.

As I showed above there are serious difficulties involved in an attempt to formulate and justify an objective theory assuming the mechanism of false consciousness, which are also related to Marx's theory discussed here. In his writings – as well as the writings of his commentators – it is hard to find a decent methodological justification of how this theory can be validated. However, if we acknowledge that we are simply dealing here with is a secular version of some religious and mystical reasoning, perhaps such a validation will be able to take a purely declarative form. And indeed it does. In the Communist Manifesto, the work of Marx and Engels, we find the following excerpt: “When the class struggle nears the decisive hour [...] a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat”⁸ to act as its guides, on the grounds that they “raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole”.⁹ The validation that is being referred to, may also rely on the fact that what is possible in theory (the transition from the doctrine of false consciousness to objective science), becomes possible in practice, in action (more or less as in the discussion of Zeno with Diogenes: theoretically impossible movement becomes self-evident and possible in practice). “The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.”¹⁰ It can be said that according to the doctrine of dialectical materialism, we all, except its founders, have false consciousness. Proclaiming this doctrine is a proof of having the true and objective knowledge (and therefore any polemics with opponents seems to be so easy: anyone who does not agree with this theory can be simply accused of having false consciousness which is evident in the fact that he does not agree with this theory). For Lenin this kind of idea took the form of “the Party” doctrine as having a real and unmediated knowledge : “The role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory.”¹¹ From this perspective, party members know better than the workers, what are their real goals, needs and desires are : “The workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system [...] It can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside [...] The working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness [...] The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals.”¹²

⁸ K. Marx, F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm> (1.12.2013).

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm> (1.12.2013).

¹¹ W.I. Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/i.htm> (1.12.2013).

¹² *Ibidem*: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/iii.htm> (1.12.2013).

Such examples are numerous and we do not have to reach out to Marxist philosophy, but also to psychoanalysis, Nietzscheanism or certain trends of post-modernism. As Berlin rightly points out, we are dealing here with a kind of paternalism, which consists of the fact that the use of coercion against people is justified as being good for them and their freedom so it helps them to become conscious and sovereign authors of their own actions.¹³ This paternalism has two basic forms: epistemic and political. In the first case it looks like this: since it is acknowledged that all cognitive activities of a subject and their results in the form of statements are considered to be worthless because of their external determination and deformation, the subject must base all his knowledge on the knowledge of another subject who escaped universal determination. In other words, he has to acknowledge external criteria of truth and falsehood, however not in the form of facts as the basis for verification, but the authority of the “enlightened” or “initiated” individual. He must therefore not only recognise the other person to be always right, but also the fact of his “enlightenment”, that is someone’s ability to gain knowledge that he does not have because of some reasons. Political paternalism is based on this epistemic paternalism and thus a position according to which individuals are not able to make right decisions (that are beneficial for them), because they do not know their real objectives, needs and interests, and must yield to the leadership of some enlightened entities that would take appropriate decisions for them and for their benefit. Historically, the doctrine of paternalism was usually associated with monarchy and some conservative trends, where the opportunity to act as a “teacher” was justified by referring to class background or some traditional hierarchy. Nevertheless, as Berlin implies, since the Enlightenment it has become one of the most common characteristics of trends that can be described as progressive, anti – traditional and collective. Interestingly, the classic paternalism rarely referred to human freedom: controlling people and using coercion against their will was rather justified with the concern for their salvation, morals, or welfare. These movements, on the other hand, began to justify the concern of progressive paternalism for the “real” freedom of a man who could not gain it by himself, but only under coercion. Here the concept of coercion changed its meaning as it was claimed that it was only to make a man, as the result of external pressure, act as if he was acting of his own accord if he had a true knowledge of his situation.

Liberalism and negative freedom

Let us summarize our considerations so far. According to Berlin’s statement, there is a string of consequences connecting the demand for positive freedom, understood as being a sovereign and conscious author of one’s own actions with the claim of the subject split and the theory of false consciousness which is based on it, as well as the epistemic and political paternalism, manifesting itself in the use of coercion against people justified by the pursuit of their liberation. As I have tried to show, this type of reasoning can actually be carried out but it is not necessary and even if there is a fairly close relation between the theory of false

¹³ Berlin also writes about paternalism, *cf.* I. Berlin, *Two concepts of Liberty*, p. 203.

consciousness and paternalism (especially in politics), it is difficult to demonstrate that the concept of positive freedom as autonomy must inevitably lead to the idea of the subject split and the double “I”. Let us assume, however, that the mere possibility of carrying out such reasoning can be seen as so dangerous in practice that we should as a precaution eliminate the theoretical concept of positive freedom as a potential source of tyranny. Concluding his considerations, Berlin writes: “Pluralism, with the measure of ‘negative’ liberty that it entails, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of ‘positive’ self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind.”¹⁴ Therefore, we should abandon the desire to pursue the idea of an autonomous and completely transparent subject and focus on the minimalist conception of freedom defined as “freedom from” and proposed by liberalism. Let us take a look at the fundamental features of the concept.

“Freedom – writes Berlin when characterising its negative concept – is usually measured by the scope where nobody interferes with my activities. Political freedom in this sense is the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree; and if this area is contracted by other men beyond a certain minimum, I can be described as being coerced, or, it may be, enslaved. Coercion is not, however, a term that covers every form of inability. If I say I am not able to jump more than ten feet in the air [...] it would be eccentric to say that I am to that degree enslaved or coerced [...] Mere incapacity to attain a goal is not lack of political freedom.”¹⁵ According to this position “defence of liberty consists in the ‘negative’ goal of warding off interference.”¹⁶ Obviously, Berlin notices that in some situations interference and limiting individual liberty would be justified, which would entail the necessity to define some criterion which would allow us to state whether such interference is justifiable or not, that is to define the degree of freedom which every individual is entitled to, and more precisely, because it is about negative freedom, freedom from, define an area within which individual freedom can be limited.¹⁷ In order to define such a criterion we could refer to e.g. the concept of freedom proposed by J.S. Mill, who writes that “the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of *action* of any of their number is *self*-protection [...] the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over a member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.”¹⁸ Let us ignore here the highly ambiguous notion of “harm” that allows various interpretations (including those

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

¹⁷ This distinction is very important because determining the possible area of freedom entails an attempt to codify the rights available to man, which contradicts one of the fundamental principles of classical liberalism, according to which “what is not prohibited is permitted”. The area of negative freedom is not determined by (from the inside) rules, but by (from the outside) prohibitions.

¹⁸ J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, [in:] J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism and On Liberty*, M. Warnock (ed.), Malden–Oxford 2003, p. 94.

which would be incompatible with the presented here concept of negative liberty) and let us consider the rest of the definition, in which Mill negatively refers to paternalism and attempts to limit freedom of the human justified by being good for them. “His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise [...] Individuals are accountable to society only for actions and behaviour that affect others”.¹⁹ We are dealing here with a typical liberal concept related to individualistic anthropology. Using a metaphor we can say that the freedom of individuals resembles force fields whose edges are connected. The activities undertaken within these fields are the sole issue of individuals because they concern only them, and those that go beyond the edges automatically start to apply to other individuals. If they are undesirable and harmful, they cause intervention of some institution which was set up to serve this purpose. The area of negative liberty is therefore determined by the freedom of others. From this point of view a man can hurt himself (by risking his freedom, possessions, health and life), but he cannot hurt others (and thus, by analogy, risk their liberty, possessions, health and life). Obviously, this creates a lot of problems of axiological and institutional nature: we have to, as I have mentioned before, determine the definition of harm, thanks to which we will be able to establish the scope of this “force field”, we should also address the issue of power and the way we appoint it etc. In this case, however, these problems are not of interest to us. According to Berlin’s suggestion, what is important is that in a situation when positive freedom can quite easily turn into tyranny, it would be safer and more reasonable to take care of negative freedom, i.e. the non-interference and independence.

Freedom and responsibility

Let us focus here on the following issue. What exactly do we mean when we say that a person can harm himself and as long as he does it, it should not, from the point of view of liberal, negatively understood sense of freedom, involve any external intervention in the form of limiting his independence? Well, it means, firstly, that if he operates within the mentioned above “force field”, and thus his actions, or the consequences of his decisions concern only him (despite various criticisms let us assume here that such a closed system is possible), all possible choices are available for him, including those that for various reasons we do not approve of and which are generally considered harmful and dangerous. Secondly, an approval of this situation and our restraint related to non-interference is based on the recognition that an individual can and must bear the consequences of his actions, both good and bad, beneficial and harmful, concerning him and others. By not establishing a set of rules, but merely defining which acts are punishable,

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

we allow the latter as possible, but undesirable, taking into account the fact that because of free choice an individual can make a wrong choice. “Liberty is an opportunity for doing good, but this is only so when it is also an opportunity for doing wrong”.²⁰ So why can we agree with Mill that a man while exercising his freedom could hurt himself? Because we respect his choice. The possibility of bad conduct is as important as the possibility of good conduct and bearing the consequences: when the choice of evil is not available, opting for good is no longer a choice but it becomes a duty. If I act right and become rich, the consequence will be my wealth, and, in accordance with the principle of negative freedom, no one should interfere. If I lose money – as a result of bad investments or gambling in a casino – its consequence will be my poverty, which, according to negative freedom, is only my business, and nobody should interfere.

The existence of such consequences of our own decisions and an approval of a man being fully responsible for them, regardless of their nature, means that the concept of negative liberty must be complemented with the notion of responsibility. A number of philosophers, including Locke, drew their attention to this fact, stressing out that without responsibility freedom becomes lawlessness. Thus, negative freedom is not only the question of the limits of legitimate intervention but also the problem of the scope of legitimate responsibility. Let us recall one passage from Hayek’s *The Constitution of Liberty*: “Liberty not only means that the individual has both the opportunity and the burden of choice; it also means that he must bear the consequences of his actions and will receive praise or blame for them.”²¹ So if “If we allow men freedom because we presume them to be reasonable beings, we also must make it worth their while to act as reasonable beings by letting them bear the consequences of their decisions.”²²

In short, in order to implement the liberal negative freedom, one must at the same time recognize that people are responsible for their actions. In practice it means recognizing that they should bear their consequences. However, we can ask about the justification of this position. Why do we think that people are accountable for their decisions and should bear their consequences? Because we consider them to be conscious and sovereign authors of their decisions.

Here we have reached a fundamental problem which, it seems, escaped the attention of Berlin and his commentators. The easiest way to formulate it reads as follows: negative freedom is possible only when we assume that subjects are free in a positive way. Therefore, if we think that “a man can act without hindrance from other people” and that “he is responsible to the public only for the part of his conduct, which applies to others,” we have to at the same time assume that he is an independent entity, and thus conscious and sole author of his actions. For if we acknowledge that the decisions of individuals are heteronomous and that their actions are determined by external factors, then the concept of responsibility becomes blurred and disappears or moves towards these factors: if I am not the author of my success or failure, I am not responsible for them but also I am not

²⁰ F.A. von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Chicago 2011, p. 142.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 133

²² *Ibidem*, p. 139.

free. Responsibility and consequences can only be attributed to someone who makes his decisions independently. Therefore, if we recognize that liberal negative freedom can only function when it is linked with responsibility, we have to recognize that the individual seeking non-interference in his actions is, in the words Berlin “a subject, not an object” who is moved by his own reasons and purposes, decides for himself, determines his own goals and the means to achieve them. Thus, only be an entity who is positively free can be free in a negative way.

This situation, however, requires going beyond the Gnostic consequences of positive freedom. An example of such an approach may be the classic dispute of St. Augustine with Manichaeism, defending the thesis of heteronomous character of human acts determined by physically understood and transcendent “evil” or “forces of darkness.” One of the main subjects of the dispute is the problem of sin, understood in the context of guilt, redemption and salvation. Well, the possibility to consider one deed as sinful (an evil act that should be condemned but which also can be forgiven) depends on whether it was committed knowingly, intentionally and independently. “Whoever has done anything evil by means of one unconscious or unable to resist, the latter can by no means be justly condemned.”²³ In other words, you cannot draw the consequences and make the man responsible for actions committed under duress, when he lacks positive freedom. “He who is forced by necessity to do something, does not sin.”²⁴ He who does not sin, cannot bear consequences for his deeds. However, it applies not only to works qualified as evil (“Why a penance was imposed on us if we do not commit evil acts?”),²⁵ but also good, because in this case the question of consequences looks the same: if my actions are heteronomous in the sense discussed here, I do not bear any consequences for them and therefore I am not responsible for them. In this case, however, as Augustine noticed, just as it is pointless to talk about crime and punishment for sin, we can neither talk about their forgiveness and remission, nor a reward for good deeds. In the absence of positive freedom the whole doctrine of salvation becomes meaningless. Putting it into modern categories, we can say that in the absence of a positive freedom, the concept of liberal negative freedom does not make sense: if in fact we are not independent in our actions, of what significance, from the point of view of our freedom, is the fact whether anyone interfered or not? But even if we agree that it is relevant (because, let’s say, the question of our autonomy or heteronomy cannot be decided), a problem still remains how to legitimize the principle of non-interference based on the concept of responsibility. Let us repeat once again: since I am not positively free, I am not responsible for what I do (in the sense of authorship). However, setting out the limits of negative freedom (freedom from unjustified interference) is linked to the issue of bearing the consequences of our own decisions

²³ St. Augustine, *Concerning Two Souls*, <http://gnosis.org/library/dedua.htm> (1.12.2013).

²⁴ St. Augustine, *Acts or Disputation Against Fortunatus* 16 (Polish translation: Św. Augustyn, *Sprawozdanie z dyskusji z Fortunatem*, [in:] *Pisma przeciw manichejczykom*, transl. J. Sulowski, Warszawa 1990 p. 97.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

Positive freedom and free will

Agreeing that the negative freedom of an individual may be based only on positive freedom being its predecessor, we are faced with the fundamental question of free will. There is no room here to deal with this problem; I will only try to indicate what possibilities should be, in my opinion, taken into account here. First of all, we should consider what status a statement about positive freedom of an individual would have. That is, if we take the first earlier described scheme, namely $S \rightarrow A$ (an individual being a conscious and sovereign author of his actions), we must consider whether we are dealing here with a classic analytical statement, or if it is a claim based on facts or speculative ontological thesis, etc. To answer this question, it should be pointed out that there are numerous arguments – both empirical and rational – implicating the weakness of the above statement and rather reaffirming a thesis expressed by the following scheme: $E \rightarrow S \rightarrow A$, thus accepting that all human behaviour is determined by transcendent factors, independent of human will and consciousness. Let us have a look at two ways in which we could defend the thesis.

Firstly, as highlighted by, among others, Hayek, modern natural science (physics, biology) and social science (sociology, psychology) have strengthened the belief that the concept of free will is archaic and incompatible with their results, since they point to the fact of a permanent condition or mediation of human activities by biological, social or psychological factors. Hayek himself, rejecting this argument proposes to treat the concept of free will in a functionalist way, which would mean that “statement that a person is responsible for what he does aims at making his actions different from what they would be if he did not believe it to be true.”²⁶ This approach has some advantages as it allows us to defend the claim of autonomy as a performative rather than a factual statement, but Hayek is trying to defend it in such a way that he shows a dependency of the concept of responsibility on the concept of determinism, and in an attempt to reject responsibility, he connects with the metaphysical concept of the self being beyond any cause and effect sequences. The latter attempts seem to be unnecessary or even ineffective because if we acknowledge that the idea of positive freedom is not a typical factual statement, there is no longer any need to verify it and agree (accord) with various versions of determinism or indeterminism. Anyway, we would have to show that the need to accept a statement about positive freedom would result not from the fact that it correctly describes a certain state of affairs, but from the fact that it would fulfill some positive function and in some way would organize the sphere of social activities. In that way we could avoid a dispute about “free will” at least at the level of the arguments that refer to real science.

Secondly, the problem of free will is also analyzed at the level of philosophy. Apart from reductionist arguments which refer mostly to the reasoning which is based on the achievement of one of the real sciences (which leads us to the above mentioned problems), we should first of all focus our attention to the fact that the problem of free will as a metaphysical dispute between determinism and

²⁶ F.A. von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, p. 138.

indeterminism was criticized by Kant as the third of the antinomy of rational cosmology. Without going into details here, let us remember that Kant points to the fact that, depending on whether one accepts the perspective of phenomena or things, each party of the dispute may be right, which leads to the conclusion that its positive and unambiguous solution exceeds the capacity of our knowledge. However, what is significant from the point of view of these considerations is that in spite of the implied skepticism, Kant finds here some positive solution. Freedom, he writes, Therefore freedom does not impede the natural law of appearances, any more than this law interferes with the freedom of the practical use of reason, a use that stands in connection with things in themselves as determining grounds. In this way practical freedom – namely, that freedom in which reason has causality in accordance with objective determining grounds – is rescued [...] so that in rational beings (or in general in any beings, provided that their causality is determined in them as things in themselves) one can conceive of a faculty for beginning a series of states spontaneously without falling into contradiction with the laws of nature.”²⁷ As Hayek writes, “Rather, the statement that a person is responsible for what he does aims at making his actions different from what they would be if he did not believe it to be true.”²⁸

Let us notice that the type of freedom that Kant writes about is understood in the same way that Berlin defines positive freedom (besides in this context, there is a reference to Kant in the works of Berlin), except that if the latter subjects it to criticism as a virtually unattainable goal of human endeavour (utopian and therefore entailing coercion which is a sign of helplessness in the face of a conflict between reality and ideas), the first treats it only as a specific demand which is not an end to political actions, but their beginning and condition. The postulate of positive freedom therefore enables morality in the sense that it allows one to define the limits of possible interference in one’s actions, and thus determine the extent of negative freedom. So we can say that Berlin rightly struggles with freedom as a positive ideal which realization would determine the objectives of politics, but at the same time he does not notice that this type of positive freedom as a presumption is a condition of politics as such.

What I have described above are merely outlines of some ideas of how to justify and interpret a statement (assumption) of positive freedom, which, as I showed earlier, is a necessary condition for the liberal concept of negative freedom. To see the extent to which the paradigm of Kant’s practical philosophy can provide a satisfactory solution here, we should closely examine not only its relationship with the political philosophy of classical liberalism (which has been done many times), but also their relations at the epistemological level.²⁹ A further analysis of

²⁷ I. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 346 (transl. G. Hatfield, Cambridge 2004, pp. 97–98)

²⁸ F.A. von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, p. 138.

²⁹ In this respect it would be interesting to juxtapose Kant’s transcendental philosophy with Hayek’s anti – rational and somewhat skeptical approach and also the epistemology of the Austrian School of Economics, which he (Hayek) was associated with (e.g. the question of the limits of knowledge and the statement about the impossibility of efficient central planning in the economy).

the concept of negative freedom provided by Berlin would be of no less importance, which, regardless of some shortcomings and deficiencies, some of which I have tried to indicate, still constitute inspiring material for philosophical considerations.