

PHi3001 Berlin, Two concepts of liberty, Questions

Read Berlin's essay that has been made available in Blackboard and then answer these questions. Thoughts, puzzles and even answers can be posted in the replies to the blog post.

1. Find the definitions of negative and positive liberty. Translate them with the use of an example. Which one sounds intuitively more important for political freedom according to you?
2. Describe some limitations on negative liberty by the state. Are these all exercises of power? All they all illegitimate?
3. Why can't negative liberty be unlimited? If it is only to be limited when I interfere with others, then is it a question of how can my private space be protected? What is the distinction between the private and public sphere of decision making?
4. What is despotism? Can one legitimately coerce men in matters concerning the public sphere? Is this another way of classifying the significance of power?
5. Why, according to Mill, is negative liberty of value? Why should it be protected? Is Mill's claim true?
6. Is the opposite to coercion non-interference? What could it be? (Note the use of good and bad in the text.)
7. Berlin talks about the death of civilisation. He also assumes that negative liberty is not universal. What sense can you make of these claims?
8. Are negative and positive concepts of liberty contradictory? Or opposite? Is it a choice between one or the other or are they logically distinct? What does this mean?
9. How do we say someone has greater or lesser freedom in the positive sense of the word?
10. What is the distinction between my 'real' self and my 'enslaved' self? How can I coerce others for their own sake? What are the dangers of this?