

## I Do What I Want: Positive Freedom and the Empowered Democratic Citizen

Freedom has been divided by modern political theory into two branches: negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom is freedom *from* constraints while positive freedom is the freedom *to act* in order to take control of one's life (Berlin 1969). Recent scholars of classical democracy have tended to assign positive freedom to the public sphere and negative freedom to the private (e.g. Hansen 1996, 2010; Andrews 2004; Raaflaub 2004). In this view, Athenian citizens enjoyed positive freedom through political participation and legal equality, thus achieving self-determination by their collective decision-making. Conversely, negative freedom applied to the private sphere, where individuals were protected against state interference. Many passages of Greek literature distinctively define democracy's freedom as 'doing whatever one wishes' or 'living as one wishes' (e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1310a28-33, 1317a40-b2; *Pl. Rep.* 557b4-6). The ability to 'do whatever one wishes' has accordingly been interpreted as an articulation of that private, negative freedom, since it is opposed to slavery. This paper analyzes the notion of 'doing whatever one wishes' by closely reading passages from a range of classical texts and argues that it is an expression, instead, of the individual's positive freedom, applicable to both the public and private realms. Democratic citizens were not simply free *from* unjust rule but also free *to do* what they wished. Freedom's opposition to slavery, then, further conveys the aspect of empowerment in positive freedom. A slave is not even an effective *kurios*, or authoritative master, of his own body (*Ar. Pl.* 6), and thus unable to carry out or execute his will. A citizen, by contrast, is free and so *kurios* over himself, his household, and to some extent the city, and he may do 'whatever he wishes' in that capacity.

In order to establish that the notion of ‘doing whatever one wishes’ expresses a positive, not a negative, freedom, I begin with a key democratic institution, the practice of self-selection, or voluntarism (Hansen 1991: 72; Farrar 2009). I use the legal language of self-selection, with its deployment of the verb *boulomai*, to show that the idea of self-determination or positive freedom is linked to this process (Aeschin. 1.32; Dem. 24.63; SEG 26: 72.34). Next, I analyze passages from Plato (Rep. 557B) and Aristotle (*Pol.* 1310a28-34, 1317b11-15), who use terminology very similar to this legal language to define freedom, thus explicitly linking the concept of ‘doing whatever one wishes’ with *eleutheria*. The philosophers’ attention to the attainment of one’s desires as a crucial part of democratic freedom corresponds to the desire-driven nature of the self-selection process. Finally, I use passages from Herodotus (3.83) and Thucydides (2.37, 7.69) to show that positive freedom in the private sphere, expressed by ‘doing whatever one wishes,’ was important to champions of democracy, as well as its critics, and also to ordinary Athenians. In all these texts, the individual as an autonomous actor in both public and private capacities comes to the fore.

Ultimately, I demonstrate that the pervasiveness of positive freedom in many types of discourse shows its fundamental significance to democratic thought. Practically, positive freedom gave rise to components of political procedure, including self-selection. Theoretically, it provided a distinctive point of contrast between Athenian democracy and other systems of government, both as a point of critique and as a core marker of identity.

#### Works Cited

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