

Modern freedom and political philosophy

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



There is no simple answer to how modern freedom is defined within political philosophy. In a free country with a modern democracy, political freedom could be defined as justice and fairness. There are two types of liberty; positive and negative. Positive liberty is freedom to act upon one's will and evolves around entitlement. This freedom is the ability to achieve your goals. Negative liberty is freedom from outside interference and evolves around natural right. This freedom is a zone of non-interference. Rawls and Nozick both present a version of negative liberty but offer different views of what freedom is. Each of these philosophers envision a different role for government on how to protect and redistribute among its citizens. Modern freedom deals with things like money, food or access to services like healthcare and sanitation and who gets to decide who gets what and on what basis. Nozick and Rawls have two separate ideas of freedom. When equality is valued over freedom wealth imbalances in society must have a small gap even at the cost of individual liberty. When freedom is valued over equality individual rights will be respected even when that means accepting large wealth differences.

John Rawls, a 20th century American philosopher, born in Baltimore Maryland, USA in 1921, argued social and economic inequalities are ethically justified only and if they are of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society. This ideal would create a more level playing field for members of society. People are allowed to engage in a world of economic exchanges that are mutually beneficial and that may result in some people accumulating more wealth than others. However, no one may get ahead at the expense of the neediest. Wealth redistribution plays a huge role in his

version of freedom, which means a larger role for government. This is a form of need-based justice that focuses specifically on making sure that everyone is actually in a position to achieve their basic needs. Therefore, Rawls serves the utilitarian ideal and that no one may be left behind and makes wealth imbalance be strictly controlled into society. Rawls liberty is mostly taken to be negative liberty.

In theory, his idea works. There's a problem in this practice though. This means everyone is getting what they need which in theory sounds fair, but in reality favors people in need and puts those less in need at a disadvantage. This form of freedom is actually unfair to those who have gotten the most wealth through hard work. For example, a heroin addict may consume tremendous resources, there are methadone clinics to establish and hospital stays to cover. Now, add in being a homeless heroin addict to the equation. Homeless shelters need to be constructed, as well as food and water needs to be supplied. This is expensive and the money must come from somewhere. This is all covered from the rest of society. There will always be those that abuse the system as well. For instance, those who are simply too lazy to work and want everything handed to them. This brings society to a stand still and holds everyone back. People can not move ahead unless the poorest of the poor do, meaning the bottom 1% can forever feed off the rest.

Conversely, 20th century American philosopher Robert Nozick disagrees with John Rawls' for those reasons and had his own ideas of freedom. First though, to demonstrate why he disagreed, Nozick created an experiment about professional basketball. Wilt Chamberlain, probably the most famous

athlete of his day, decided that he'd only play under certain conditions. He states he will only play if tickets for games he plays in costs n cents more than tickets for games he doesn't play in. As well Chamberlain will be paid more than the other players. He is popular, so more people will show up for games he is playing in, even with the extra price. Moreover, since a majority of people come to watch only him, he is entitled to ask for more money than his teammates.

Nozick argues we cannot and should not try to even out the naturally uneven playing field. We may start out in life with unequal amounts of wealth, but we are given a chance to end it with more or less than we started with (at least in a country that is a first world modern democracy). We are entitled to the things we have, and as long as you have obtained everything legally, there is no reason to feel guilt. If you are Chamberlain, you are more than entitled to have and want more, even if the other players don't have it. His freedom to have more does not cause the others to have less or restrict their freedom to achieve wealth. If his talent at basketball leads to a mass amount of wealth while others go hungry, that's not his fault. Nozick's beliefs in having no restrictions by outside forces on achieving your goals, and his liberty can also be taken as negative liberty. " Taking the earnings of n hours of labour is like taking n hours from the person; its like forcing the person to work n hours for another's purpose" (P. S., & Deveaux, M., 2014, pg. 295).

Although both Rawls and Nozick's freedom are considered negative liberty, they can be easily differentiated. " Rawls believes in a large role for government, especially with the job of redistribution of wealth, whereas

Nozick's only role for government would be police protection of private property and legal enforcement of laws and contracts" (John Hacker-Wright, PHIL 1010 DE Course Material). Another major difference is that Rawls believes in his difference principle, which is founded on two concepts: " First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with similar liberty for others", and " Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all" (P. S., & Deveaux, M., 2014, pg. 257). In other words, no one is left behind and everyone has equal opportunity. Nozick however, disagrees completely and believes this is unfair to those who are better off. Imagine working your way up from the bottom and finally reaching a point where you've amounted a mass of wealth just for someone to take it from you because another member of society was lazy, uneducated and needed a home paid for by the government. Now, you have to pay much more just to carry this member of society and your life's work depletes.

As a result, I believe much more in the freedom and ideology Robert Nozick has presented. I do not believe the better off should be punished just for being better off. I believe the less well off should not hold the better off back. You do not decide how much you have when you start in life but you can definitely decide and work for how much you end with. My idea of freedom aligns with Robert Nozick's idea and with negative liberty, in that you should have no limits or outer forces holding back your achievements. Where I side with John Rawls however, is if a lower member of society has been affected by a disability or a life altering effect on the body or mind, every member of

society should have an equal role in helping through government taxation to give these people the help they deserve, regardless if they are rich or poor. When people have no choice in the cards they've been dealt, they deserve help, not just from the top 5% but from every member of society. That is what modern freedom looks like.