



ISSN: 0975-833X

REVIEW ARTICLE

FREEDOM IN LIBERALISM AND RELIGIOUS INTELLECTUALISM (INVESTIGATING THE  
POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS IDEAS OF ABDOLKARIM SOROUSH)

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ARTICLE INFO

**Article History:**

Received 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2014  
Received in revised form  
15<sup>th</sup> August, 2014  
Accepted 07<sup>th</sup> September, 2014  
Published online 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2014

**Key words:**

Liberalism, freedom,  
Enlightenment,  
Religious enlightenment,  
Religion being time-dependent.

ABSTRACT

Liberalism as a universal thought, after the collapse of the East Front, gained its former power as a dominant idea on the global market. It is natural that a universal idea influences the local ideas worldwide. This article hypothesizes the impact of liberalism on religious intellectuals after the 1980s, covering the first decade after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in a case study of the ideas of Abdolkarim Soroush. However, due to the breadth of content on liberalism and religious intellectualism movement which includes many authors and the numerous works of Soroush, in this paper the concept of "freedom" in liberalism is used a way that after presenting the totality of religious intellectualism in Iran, and the totality of the ideas of Soroush, the compatibility of the meaning of freedom in liberalism and his thought is only examined in terms of being right or wrong. Therefore, the research question is to what extent is the concept of freedom in liberalism in line with the meaning of freedom used by Soroush in his works? In this study, an analytical method is chosen so that case compatibility in research is examined more clearly. The data collection instrument is of documentation-library type.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, Fukuyama proposed the ascendancy of liberalism over the other ideas in a paper (Fukuyama, 1992). Fukuyama actually based his theory on evidence presented by other thinkers. The evidence is taken from the work of people like who published his famous books of "The Third Wave," and "power change," in confirming the superiority of liberalism over the other global thoughts and Huntington who wrote the "Three waves of democracy," on the same basis. Religious intellectuals in Iran and especially Soroush who were influenced by the dominant thought over the world which resulted in the expansion of Liberalism again and decrease in Marxism after the 1980s, used concepts of liberalism, including freedom in their actions and works. In this paper, religious intellectualism was limited to Soroush not only because of the paper length and structure, but also the fact that most researchers distinguish Abdolkarim Sorosh and Mojtaba Shabestari as the most important religious intellectuals after the revolution.

**Freedom in liberalism**

Freedom is one of the favorite components of liberalism. Other components include democracy, rationality, constitutional government, separation of powers, cognitive pluralism, human

rights, etc. Isa Berlin divides freedom into two categories including negative and positive freedom. According to him, negative freedom (which includes natural and personal rights) reaches to liberalism and democracy and positive freedom (which includes civil and transcendent rights such as freedom of speech) reaches to totalitarianism. It seems that general definition of freedom can be found in Mack Colom's definition regarding to various scholars' votes. According to him, any definition of freedom includes three characteristics: first of all, a factor that can be a person, stratum/class, group, nation, gender, and a race. Liberalists mostly focus on personal freedom. The second, a barrier that hinders the above mentioned factor. When factors cannot precede the barriers facing, ideology is applied to remove the barriers, e.g. women's freedom that is faced with sexual discrimination. The third, a goal followed by a factor (various factors have different goals. The goal of liberalists is to live in freedom and nobody should interfere (Transvaal and Richard Dogger, 2005). The three cases can be drawn in a diagram, which in the following diagram; "factor" (person) can reach to the goal (freedom) by passing the "barrier".

**Religious intellectualism in Iran**

The trend of religious intellectualism started as an active organization in 1994s, but it should be said that Dr. Shariati stated the term "religious liberalism" for the first time. He believed that religious liberalist should be liberalist about

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his/her society, history, and culture. It seems that he tried to change and modify the society by presenting oeuvres and conferences. It can be said that Shariati's oeuvres are the most prominent sample for watching the relationship between the world's prevailing dialogue (the left dialogue) and the prevailing thought of religious restructuring in Iran (Qoreishi, 2005). About one year after Shariati's death, the Islamic Revolution of Iran occurred in 1978. After the Islamic Revolution, Marxism's thoughts paled in the world. Thus, in Iran, Dr. Soroush and his followers (by crossing over Shariati) accepted the terms such as obeying rule, separation of powers, freedom, affability, tolerance, etc. by criticizing the process of ideologizing Islam and Marxism. Since the middle of 1980s, deep changes occurred in the world market of the thoughts and a new season was opened in the evolution history of the world market of the thoughts. Then, Marxism collapsed and liberalism and nationalism revived. Meanwhile, liberalism was graded in first place of significance (Qoreishi, 2005).

### **Contemporaneity of religion (constriction and expansion of religion)**

It can be said that contemporaneity of religion is the most important concept in religious-political thoughts of Abdolkarim Soroush regarding to the thought of liberalism and Christian writers. Dr. Soroush in "theoretic constriction and expansion of religion" seeks to restructure and reform religion (Islam) by bringing philosophical and ...about cognition, wisdom, and reminding the power of science in the contemporary revolutions. He believes that understanding religion like other existing concepts in the world will change as the time goes by. Thus, religious cognition also changes. Contemporaneity does not describe religion, but describes religious cognition (Soroush, 1991, Introduction). Like Mojtabid Shabestari another scholar, Soroush assessed religious oeuvres and contexts by hermeneutically understanding religion's context. He believes that various interpretations of religious contexts during history and the difference with the contemporary scholar's interpretations show contemporaneity of religion. Understanding and cognition of contemporaneity has geometry and understanding religion is always contemporary. Motahari and Shariati was both contemporary pious. One's religion is as much as his/her understanding of religion as if one's science is as much as his/her understanding of nature (Ibid, 97). In fact, human's understanding will change and religion will be always constant (Ibid, 99). Therefore, contemporaneity of religion means harmonization between religious understanding with other understandings, cognitions, and contemporary basics (Ibid, 115). Soroush believes that jurisprudence, interpretation, ethics, and theology are both deficient and imperfect, since they are derived from human's understanding. He believes that understanding contemporaneity of religion has four meanings including first, an adapted and harmonized understanding of contemporary sciences. The second, an understanding derived and influenced by contemporary sciences in substances and referent (it means that religion should use its contemporary sciences and experiments for more understanding). Third, a responsive understanding to the theoretic questions and the last, a responsive understanding to the practical questions of the time (Ibid, 157).

Continuing the issue of contemporaneity of religion regarding to the changes to understand it, he describes the function of religious scholars so: religious or religion-seeker scholars' function is to teach the pious to admit the minimum of necessities and do not tie religion to theological differences and do definite, integrated, and social actions in practice. Then, they should know that the lasting science belongs to God and consider them as similarities. They should also know that if exists a difference in a commandment, it does not belong to God and if God wished, there will exist more religious sciences than now and saved us from the unbeknown, passives, doubts, and differences (Soroush, Bi ta, 9). According to this reasoning, Soroush considers the substances and ...for religion and separates them according to their definition and function as well as separates the constant and changing components of religion in such a way. All events occurred during the Islamic history, whether at the time of Imams or after them are all..and were able to not happen. Since they are such so, they cannot be considered as religious basics. In general, the role of characteristics in religion (the substantial characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad is exception) are all ... and do depend upon historical events (Soroush, Bi ta, 5). He even believes that jurisprudential endeavor requires cultural interpretation of the ...as if the jurisconsult should concur with the world and the time living in to expand and preach religion. Accordingly, due to Soroush's thoughts, there can be a liberal, moral, and open opinion about religion. If it means religious thoughts and teachings should be criticized morally and experimentally before religion's option and constantly purge our pre assumptions and do not forget the history of humanity and continuously concur our rights with other's rights, the response should be positive. Thus, we can have a liberal opinion about religion. This opinion is ...and does not relate to the public, imitating, definite, practical, and political opinions (Soroush, 2001).

### **Dr. Soroush and freedom**

Dr. Soroush, in a classification divides freedom into two categories using Isa Berlin's political thoughts. As we know, Berlin has divided freedom into two categories: Positive and negative freedom. He has a famous article under the title "positive freedom and negative freedom" or as I describe it "freedom from" or "freedom in". Discriminating these two categories is necessary. Negative freedom should be translated as "release" or release from". "Freedom from" means to release from a set of barriers, chains, and obligations. The motto of "freedom from" is that free us, release us, ignore us, and do not chain our feet. "Freedom from" means free from prison, free from strangers, cruel ruler, boss, and free from the chains fastened us. Internal freedom means to free from the knaveries such as envy, jealousy, heartburning, etc. A woman who wants her husband to divorce her, she wants "freedom from". In other words, she wants to free from the husband's teases. Human, what they want and what they understand in the first step is "freedom from" when facing with the concept of freedom (Soroush, 2000). Accordingly, freedom means person's financial and life security against any strange aggression and violation, especially the government's aggression due to Isa Berlin's liberal definition of negative freedom and definition of freedom in classic liberalism. According to Berlin, negative

freedom originated from human nature reaches to liberalism and democracy. It is clear that while human does not understand negative freedom, he/she cannot reach to the concept of positive freedom provided to complete negative freedom in civil societies. It can be said that the process of negative freedom towards positive freedom follow the model «factor-barrier-goal» of liberalism previously provided, which the person should pass the barrier to reach to the goal. Here, besides having negative freedom, the person removes the barrier to reach the goal. "Positive freedom reaches after negative freedom. Freedom from is gained when the barriers are removed, when the prison's door is opened, and when a boss frees his/her slave" (Ibid, 218).

Positive freedom has a guaranteed meaning, which means that human being should be able to express self, apply their willing, capitals, as well as design, plan and construct. Freedom of the deprived is the same "freedom from". Freedom of the wealthy is considered as "freedom in". Freedom of the deprived is applied to those are chained. Therefore, they loudly shout that free us from the chains. Rarely do they think that what could they do and what they wanted to do if there were not any chain. Ones who is not wealthy and does not have capital cannot enter into business if he/she be freed. Thus, if negative freedom, the first stage of political freedom is completed by positive freedom, it will be incomplete and deficient and leads to corruption (Ibid, 218-219). According to the liberal thoughts, Soroush finds economic freedom prior to political freedom. As mentioned previously, he finds freedom of the wealthy a more positive and complete freedom. According to him, freedom is a goal not a tool. Thus, freedom is men's right, therefor men should reach her/his right and goal.

Considering freedom of speech unfolded in positive freedom, Soroush says about humanity and innate rights of men in a liberal expression that: men deserve a set of rights since he/she is human and not because of something else. These rights include the right to speak, have opinion, express self and criticize. As well as, the right to defend, choose husband/wife, and choose fatherland, the right to choose religion and some other right included in the human rights charter (Soroush 2003).

What is derived from the generality of Soroush's topic in relation to freedom is that he used it in his opinions deeply in liberal thoughts and obeyed contents of the new era in defining freedom rooted in the West philosophy. In defining freedom besides using Isa Berlin's opinion, he uses Haig's justice and human rights that its articles are rooted in liberal thoughts (30 articles approbated in the United Nations in 1948). With an ultra-religious viewpoint, he also believes that men deserve freedom since he/she is human. Now, people having any religion, path, and belief deserves freedom and this right should be given to him. If consider freedom as derived from society, so, the way and form of government should be coordinated for emerging freedom.

It seems that the best form of government is democracy besides all the weak and strong points, which is followed by the prefix "liberal" in governments known as liberalist.

## Conclusion

The hypothesis in this paper was the effect of liberalism as the prevailing thought of the world on religious intellectualism after the east collapsed in the late of 20<sup>th</sup> century by studying Soroush's opinions. Liberalism has some branches including freedom, tolerance, constitutional government, human rights, etc. which all cases are humanity-oriented. It is clear that person cannot reach the desired goals without having freedom in a civil society. Thus, the paper oriented on freedom among various components of liberalism. Meanwhile, the dependent variable of the research is Dr. Soroush's intellectual impressibility of the concept of freedom in liberalism as one the most important religious intellectualists after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The researcher should identify religious intellectualism in Iran to deal with following the process of this way after the Revolution, which both the world's thought market and the intellectual procedure of the religious intellectuals went to another way. Then, this issue performed for subject connection in this paper. After the Iranian revolution, Soroush used liberal definitions and interpretations by intellectually borrowing from the world's prevailing dialogue in his peacemaker opinions. As mentioned previously, he divides freedom into "freedom from" and freedom in" with his special letter using Isa Berlin's way. As Soroush admits this is the same translation of Berlin's "negative and positive freedom". This point is clear in Soroush's thoughts and oeuvres. By using liberalism experience in his intellectual process, he recognizes freedom based on the model person-barrier-goal.

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