

PARADOX OF FREEDOM AS ELUCIDATED IN AVENGED SEVENFOLD'S SONG OF *M. I. A.*

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Abstract: Humans who have complete freedom tend to feel confused about the choices that exist. They will be confused about what is right and what is not because of the amount of freedom. The song *M. I. A.* by Avenged Sevenfold tells the story of a soldier who feels confused about his choice when he goes to war. He hopes that what he chooses and does is the right thing, but it is more complex than that. So, how is the Paradox of Freedom reflected in Avenged Sevenfold's *M. I. A.*? The analysis involves tensional matters between 'freedom of' and 'freedom to' in the song through qualitative method. Through the theory of positive and negative freedom by Charles Taylor, people are pushed always to choose positive liberty, but the reality is always negative. It is reflected in this song when goodness never reflects such freedom. Such realization of freedom may also hinder others' freedom. In conclusion, the paradox of freedom in the song is reflected through the complexities of choices that will emerge one freedom but eliminate another.

Keywords: *charles taylor, m. i. a., negative freedom, paradox of freedom, positive freedom*

INTRODUCTION

The understanding of songs as a kind of literature has been known worldwide. The main idea of the lyrics alongside with the melodies are its closed indication with poetry (McPherson, 2023). As the main literature besides prose and drama, poetry plays a big role in showing denotative, connotative and even myth-related experience. That condition also resembles the points of lyrics in a song. The closed experience is well understood in songs' lyrics since it represents various identities and its drawings to the world (Jati, 2020; Maulana and Suprayogi, 2022).

Moreover, the important points of the lyrics of songs underline the idea of being cultural. It truly accentuates the matter of human beings in an aesthetic sense. Some use rhymes, but some may be more contemporary by stating deeper contexts (Maulana and Suprayogi, 2022; McPherson, 2023). There is no specific formula for making good lyrics. It is because the lyrics of songs bridge matters of being conceptual and contextual. It is conceptual since it shows the importance of the human world in its representations. In many senses, the lyrics of the songs are a true reflection of everyday life either. This situation also brings in crucial points of song lyrics alongside its condition in poetry as part of humans' everyday life.

One of the good lyrics of the songs is shown in the song M. I. A. by Avenged Sevenfold. The title is an abbreviation of Missing in Action that underlines the missing soldiers who were told to defend their country (GeniusMedia, 2020). The lyrics are reflections of the real world since those indicate the truthful and bitter realities of war. It is a matter of freedom that is always in question. The concept is so vague that people are confused about which truth must be embraced to live a better life. However, for soldiers, a chain of command is the truth for them (Oktafiani et al., 2023; SongFacts.com, 2020). Later, in war, they still question freedom as their consciences may always arise when facing such horrible impacts of war.

This article would like to analyze how freedom is indicated in the song of M. I. A. So, the question is how is the Paradox of Freedom reflected in Avenged Sevenfold's M. I. A.? The analysis involves tensional matters between 'freedom of' and 'freedom to' in the song. The former is the negative aspect while the latter is the positive one. One aspect may be better, but the latter could not be done by undermining the former.

The indication of positive liberty will be brought deeper to underline that freedom is more suitable to existing ethical aspects of humanities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Taylor's Continuances on Positive Freedom

Human beings could not be separated from freedom. In a sense, freedom is intrinsically included in every being. In the other sense, any freedom must be accentuated externally in order to strengthen the self of the individuals (Askland, 1993; Levy, 2015). Those two aspects are in tensional conditions from one to another. The bridge between them two is related to any constructivist idea of freedom. Constructivism thinks that freedom is not totally intrinsic or extrinsic since it is always related to the concept of being a priori and a posteriori as well (Hwang, 2021; Levy, 2015). One being could not totally be free without regarding any external matter. In reverse, external ideas will only be impactful if being applied to the internal self.

With the facilities of reason, humans are free beings to choose their own path, both the path of good and the way of evil. There is no one or anything that forces or hinders humans from determining these two paths (Hwang, 2021; Levy, 2015). God only provides facilities in the form of life (spirit) and organs (as tools) that humans can use to choose their path. Therefore, as an independent being, human beings must be responsible for their actions and he has no reason to corner God in the crimes he committed (Hwang, 2021; Levy, 2015).

Some concepts of freedom seem universal in defining leisure in which unconstrained openness is attained. Instead, the freedom of leisure is a freedom to become, some space within the rigidities of life to make consequential decisions (Askland, 1993; Levy, 2015). Leisure is at least enough release from the obligation to choose an activity that may have its meaning or purpose. Moreover, the tension above is also related to the wider situation as indicated by the idea of liberty. Isaiah Berlin indeed is someone who is considered the one that gives great points to various political philosophies until now. He accentuates that liberty is exactly a matter of consequentialism (Hwang, 2021; Taylor, 1985). Even he thinks that liberty is not deontological. It works through practice in everyday life. It is not totally intrinsic or extrinsic since any conception is always a matter of being related to social matters (Levy, 2015).

Berlin underlines the matter of negative liberty. The negative one is related to ‘freedom of’ to show that being free is out of any constraint (Hwang, 2021; Taylor, 1985). If there is no forceful situation that halts the movements of any person, he/she is considered free. Liberty as political sense of freedom in its negative sense exactly explains the area in which it may work. It also involves understanding of being able or inability to do anything (Askland, 1993; Kaltsas, 2019). The negative aspect of liberty also emphasizes the need for non-interference by other parties. Self is considered as essential if only his/her existential points are always intact.

The second one underlined by Berlin is the positive sense of liberty. This one is indeed more optimistic since any person is believed to be able to embrace the wholeness of any freedom. Therefore, this positive sense must be able to show the real control of freedom. By holding on to the realness, freedom in the positive sense shows its emphasis on ‘freedom to’ (Kaltsas, 2019; Taylor, 1985). This idea also positions freedom in matters of determination that could easily compare one freedom to another to accentuate which one is the best or at least better than the other. Being positive in liberty also shows that people must reach the best for them though they must always question everything unrelated to their own consciences (Oktafiani et al., 2023; Pearce, 2021).

For decades, the trends in political philosophy have taken sides with negative liberty, though the fundamental reasons are based on the positive ones. The choices are reasonable since those understand that the main idea of being free is merely more existential than essential (Askland, 1993; Taylor, 1985). In negative sense, liberty could be achieved if people understood who they must fight to have freedom. The struggle is the main conception being done rather than merely focusing on the essence of freedom itself. It is also related to the Marxian concept that the main idea of any oppression is not the condition, but the existence of the oppressors (Askland, 1993; Kaltsas, 2019). Therefore, the oppressors must be eliminated or neutralized so that liberty can come to those who are forced all this time.

The Paradox of Freedom captures the deep connection between communication and political culture (Askland, 1993; Taylor, 1985). It ranges from the ancient art of rhetoric and the revolutionary role of newspapers to liberal broadcast media and the toxic misinformation of the digital public sphere. With clear-eyed analysis,

contemporary debates over media, populism, and cancel culture are not too different from the democratic cultural experiences of the past (Askland, 1993; Kaltsas, 2019). As people grapple with a fast-changing, hyper-digital world, they prove democracy is always perched precipitously on a razor's edge, now as ever before.

In addition, the preferences for negative liberty are shown since it is more rational to see freedom as a matter of being social than individual. The social aspect in this sense is a matter of being collective that will gain more power to struggle to the ones that hold the oppressions (Askland, 1993; Pearce, 2021). The abusive practices must be stopped in any matter to raise the freedom for everyone. It will be pointless if the essence is known but cannot be realized. Freedom must always be engaged socially as an idea of being in a negative sense of liberty.

Interestingly, Taylor comes up with ideas and explanations that negative and positive liberties are matters of everyday life (Askland, 1993; Taylor, 1985). He does not think that one is better than the other. Yet, two of them may correlate to each other in various understandings. The first is that positive freedom lies in the exercise-concept, while the negative one is stated on opportunity-concept. Any opportunity to realize freedom will not make any sense if that person does not know how to exercise it in real life (Oktafiani, et al., 2023; Taylor, 1985). Any self-realization is not meaningful if someone is not aware of his/her own potential for positive freedom.

Second, giving total indications of negative freedom will leave no place for any positive sense to grow. Even people know that positive freedom is too exact and predictable, but it is needed as a way to underline ethical conscience (Ibrahim, et al., 2023; Taylor, 1985). People still need deontological aspects even though utilitarianism has flourished widely today. Any discrimination could not be erased if people do not know what is the idea behind being totally free.

Third, the obstacles to freedom are not totally external since those could always be internal as well. Any opportunity could not be realized if people do not build such self-awareness to any internal and external threat (Ibrahim, et al., 2023; Taylor, 1985). Moral understandings must still be ways to define how and what must be done to freedom. If it is not applied, then negative freedom will only result in other discrimination. It is due to any freedom that no longer stands in essential factors, but merely on the flexible flowing of it (Askland, 1993). People will only be free since they

choose this one rather than the other. That one will only decrease the real values of freedom than keeping it together in matters of self. This paradoxical autonomy and freedom to choose is configured within an epistemological space demarcated by the tensions between modularisation and hypertextuality, linearity and co-existence, and also performance and character (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Taylor, 1985).

Fourth, the idea that negative liberty is social will only degrade its aspects. Any authentic desire will be eliminated since the focus is merely on being out of any constraint (Taylor, 1985). The positive one is still needed, not due to its metaphysical sense, but in its firm point of authority. A positive understanding of freedom will always ask whether anyone must be the one who is legitimate to be free. This aspect even will also question whether focusing on merely liberating will surely later raise the matter of authoritarianism.

Fifth, choices are the ones that must be praised in order to bridge the matter of positive and negative sense of freedom (Taylor, 1985). People should be able to practice choices in matters of having opportunities and ways to exercise it as well. Negative sense should slowly be positive in order to enrich the former one.

Sixth, the matter of freedom is not totally dependent or independent. Somehow, both may work as ways to enrich self-determination and self-awareness of surroundings (Taylor, 1985). By being dependent, widened knowledge could be attained since social matters could always support any individual needs. In reverse, being independent is good in a metaphysical sense of ethics and may also give better contributions to other people as well.

The six points above indicate that Taylor tends to take side to positive freedom but by not undermining the sense of being negative. He thinks alternatively that being negative and positive in freedom must be totally seen in a political sense (Askland, 1993; Taylor, 1985). Politics should always take care of decision-making that accentuate individuals and societies alongside with their flexibilities in everyday life.

Freedom then is not a situation that is natural, not even neutral at all. If there are still exceptions, true freedom and freedom will never be achieved in full and meaningfully. Therefore, freedom is in the never-ending process of interpretation. Taylor believes that freedom is both 'of and to' that brings more sense to impacts of self as well (Schubert, 2020; Taylor, 1985). While Berlin tends to differentiate those two

aspects that later be used as justification of any political concession, Taylor chooses to widen the writing of Berlin to recent logical sense. Through various advances in information and technology today, people could no longer say that they are free to do anything because they want to or because no one stops them to do so. It is more complicated than that. Philosophical understandings of freedom are still needed, at least as guidance, to underline any potential and existing freedom in life (Askland, 1993; Schubert, 2020). Any tensional matter on freedom will always exist as problems will always arise to show its importance in relations between closed individuals and open societies.

METHOD

By using the qualitative method in its research design, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through explorative approach, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between M. I. A. song by Avenged Sevenfold and positive freedom by Charles Taylor alongside literary concepts and cultural studies ideas. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters through closed reading technique in data collection. The data analysis includes obtaining sources, reading and listening to sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in reference lists. The research data comes from both M. I. A. song by Avenged Sevenfold and positive freedom by Charles Taylor arguments. Each of them is read and then broken down into every particular element. The ideas in the song lyrics accentuate questionable matters to be answered as involved in positive freedom. The premises and logics used in positive freedom's ideas are also drawn to underline matters of being suitable to the values of human beings. Here, M. I. A. song by Avenged Sevenfold is the object while positive freedom by Charles Taylor is a tool to analyze.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

War and Freedom in the song of *M. I. A.*

Since Bob Dylan received his Nobel Prize in Literature won in 2016, the song lyrics have been widely approved as crucial points of literary works. Those are involved in poetry that reflects meanings of everyday life by examining imaginations and

aesthetic indications of a song (McPherson, 2023). The melodies and the lyrics that are played together may enrich understanding of each other as well. Therefore, analyzing song lyrics is important since it could underline the matter of humans' experience. It is also related to recent streams of literature that tend to underline more about matters of experiences and tastes rather than merely concepts and definitions.

The themes of war are also involved in various song lyrics, a direct reflection of conflicting freedom in realities. Indeed, the main reasons behind such lyrics are to criticize any bad impact of war. No one will really benefit from war since the fire may burn anyone without any exception (GeniusMedia, 2020). The buildings are turned into rubbles while the children could only weep to their deceased parents. The actors of wars could only be returned while having such post-traumatic syndrome. The values that they bring are illusory since sooner or later they will realize that any peace and stability are always better than conflicting wars.

One song lyric that criticizes matters of war is the song by Avenged Sevenfold entitled M. I. A. This song was published in 2005 in the album entitled City of Evil (GeniusMedia, 2020). Abbreviated from Missing in Action, this song accentuates the wrongdoings of war. The soldiers may be obedient to such a chain of commandos, but their consciences will never die either. The frontman of the band even commented to the media that this song does not underline any political position of the band (GeniusMedia, 2020; SongFacts.com, 2020). The song is genuinely having the purpose to reflect conditions of soldiers coming home from war in Iraq. The band would only like to expose the truth experienced by those people through aesthetic manners.

The full lyrics of the song are listed in the following:

[Intro]

*Staring at the carnage, praying that the sun would never rise
Living another day in disguise
These feelings can't be right, lend me your courage to stand up and fight, on tonight
Stand up and fight*

[Verse 1]

*The fighting rages on and on, to challenge me you must be strong
I walk your land but don't belong, two million soldiers can't be wrong
It's no fun but I've been here before
I'm far from home and I'm fighting your war
(Not the way I pictured this, I wanted better things)
Some are scared others killing for fun, I shot a mother right in front of her son*

(Take this from my consciousness, and please erase my dreams)

[Chorus]

*Fight for honor, fight for your life
Pray to God that our side is right
And though we won, I still may lose
Until I make it home to you
I see our mothers filled with tears
Grew up so fast where did those years go?
Memories won't let you cry
Unless I don't return tonight*

[Verse 2]

*So many soldiers on the other side, I take their lives so they can't take mine
(Scared to make it out alive now murder's all I know)
Nobody tells me all the reasons we're here
I have my weapons so there's nothing to fear
(Another day, another life, but nothing real to show for)*

[Chorus]

[Bridge]

*Staring at the carnage, praying that the sun would never rise
Living another day in disguise
These feelings can't be right, lend me your courage to stand up and fight*

[Verse 3]

*Watching the death toll rise wondering how I'm alive
Stranger's blood on my hands, shot all I can
There are no silent nights, watching your brothers all die
To destroy all their plans with no thought of me
(No thought of me, no thought of me)*

[Outro]

*Walk the city lonely
Memories that haunt are passing by
A murderer walks your streets tonight
Forgive me for my crimes, don't forget that I was so young
Fought so scared in the name of God and country (GeniusMedia, 2020)*

The lyrics above show the point of view from a soldier regarding the war that he/she faces at that time. The soldier must always survive by killing the enemies. Though the soldier may feel justified, his/her little heart could always speak differently. It is due to such horrific conditions that must be faced every day in his/her station. Moreover, the consciences spoken in the lyrics of the song underline matter of freedom

(GeniusMedia, 2020). The song really questions the crucial existence of freedom that does not bring any stability, but prolonging shootings and bombings.

Furthermore, the lyrics also cover paradigmatic and syntagmatic understandings between war, peace, and freedom. While war is believed as a way to reach peace, the realities are totally different than being imagined (Jati, 2020; Levy, 2015). The idea of *civis pacem para bellum* is always out of sense since it could only underline any wrongdoing alongside with its various justifications. Further tensions are emphasized in this article. The following sub-chapter analyzes the song lyrics as the data through the theory of positive freedom underlined by Charles Taylor.

Perspectives of Tensional Freedom in *M. I. A.*

The lyrics of the song of *M. I. A.* by Avenged Sevenfold indicate such criticism of the matter of war. Indeed, war is nothing but a disadvantage for everything. People get killed, mothers lose children, and anyone loses houses (OldTimeMusic, 2020; SongFacts.com, 2020). However, war keeps going on bringing such nuisances to the world itself. Any surrounding matter is no longer ethical since decision makers of the wars merely focus on their own interests. It is never a matter of everyone or as situated on consequentialism. The war is not diplomacy; it is destruction in which any right is violated. It is such abuse of everyday life where dominations take place out of any reality of human beings.

The intro of the lyrics underlines the matter of the carnage of war. There is no single sun that would rise. It symbolizes matter of absence of hope in any war. People must live in disguise to see that they are truly different from their enemies. Eventually, as human beings, things are quite similar from one person to another (Taylor, 1985). However, war pushes people to differentiate them from another, shaping such demonization to the enemies. It keeps prolonging until nothing is left. Both sides could only stand up and fight though they do not really know what they are fighting for since they are only following commandos from their superiors (OldTimeMusic, 2020; SongFacts.com, 2020). Both sides could only nod without questioning while surviving day by day in vain.

The Verse 1 shows how the wars are about rage and any fighting is against it. Being strong in an unknown land is a must. The soldiers must justify their unjustified

feelings. They must be true though they are never sure about it (Raza, 2023; Taylor, 1985). They do not have the war since they are fighting it for other people. They must justify that what they do is for their family at home even though they have to kill others preemptively. Indeed, there is no dovish agenda behind any war. It is actually so hawkish that even any dream is turned into a horrifying nightmare.

The Chorus examines how honor is about fighting for life. The soldiers in any war must stay confident that they could survive any fighting. Praying to God is about confessions to any wrongdoing. They could only ask God to always strengthen their minds and actions (Schubert, 2020). They know that it may be wrong but if they surrender then they could not survive either. Memories of the ones who left and are lost could never eliminate any true reality of war (Raza, 2023). Tears never come together with joy in wars. Severe sadness is always there, haunting any bullet that kills without considering anything.

Verse 2 covers any deed done by the soldiers at war is about murder. Though it is related to the matter of survival, it is still condemnable. No complete reasons exist in any war. They must always follow without questioning and die without knowing the real truth (GeniusMedia, 2020; SongFacts.com, 2020). All of what they do is justified by patriotism. They could no longer believe in anything but their own weapons. It is because they do not have any freedom of choice. While any weapon of martial arts could shape choices of life and death, bullets only have one sole purpose that is the death itself.

Verse 3 is more eerie since the lyrics emphasize death related to blood. The shots done by the soldiers are inevitable. They have to shoot or be shot in reverse. No night is silent, meaning that night will be full of cries from the way of losing friends, families, and even enemies (GeniusMedia, 2020; SongFacts.com, 2020). The minds of the soldiers are never being paid attention. They are merely tools for a country to defend its territory. In this case, this verse accentuates that the presences of the soldiers fighting the war are merely such collateral damage to prolong the existence of a nation.

The Outro reflects regrets of the soldiers. They know that they have other choices are they are human beings with given freedom. However, their freedoms mean nothing since they do not put their trust in their conscience (Schubert, 2020; Raza, 2023). They have to put their trust merely on the weapons in which its bullets will

remind them of any killing. When they return to their countries, they may not be heroes, but murderers. They justify their doings and hide behind the flags of the nations (GeniusMedia, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2023). They must be so positive though they must embrace the matter of being negative every day.

The song lyrics of M. I. A. indicate an understanding of the paradox of freedom. It is stated implicitly to give perspectives of subtext in the sense of being free and being restrained. Indeed the war is such a realization of negative freedom. In many ways, the negative aspects bring more loss than gaining benefits (OldTimeMusic, 2020; Wijaya et al., 2023). The lyrics also show that negative freedom is never enough. Any practice should always be accompanied by stable values. The fundamentals are matters of human rights that really appreciate any kind of human beings without regarding any difference in identities. This one also implies meanings that positive freedom is always needed as supported by the arguments of Taylor (Pasopati, 2018; Taylor, 1985). One aspect may be better than the other, but the latter could not be done by undermining the former. Charles Taylor pushes people to always choose positive liberty as also being underlined in this paper.

Avenged Sevenfold does not support Taylor's arguments directly. However, the need for positive freedom is strong in the lyrics of that song. The six concluded arguments of Taylor are implied well in the lyrics. In the first arguments, Taylor speaks of freedom as exercise-concept (Barry, 2019; Taylor, 1985). It is indeed related to any war that any conscience should always come to surface to guide self to any goodness. People should see opportunity in applying conscience to strengthen self-recognition of their own and others. The second one is that war has made people to stay away from the truth. There are a lot of questions regarding war, yet most of them remain unanswered. People are left with mysteries they have to understand by themselves. People should know that being free is actually so attached in their intrinsic self (Askland, 1993; Taylor, 1985). They just need to exercise it though it may need further sacrifice. The tensions are so tight in war in which it is not among weapons but between being conscientious and being justified as seen in tensional matters between 'freedom of' and 'freedom to' in the lyrics of the song.

The third argument is clearly seen. Negative freedom is needed but it should always be re-examined so that it will not eradicate the rightfulness. In war, things are

about righteousness, but it may not be related to any human right at all (Barry, 2019; Taylor, 1985). Things used to be abused brutally. It neither is not positive freedom nor reflects such positive aspects in general. The song of M. I. A. by Avenged Sevenfold tells the story of a soldier who feels confused about his choice when he goes to war; he hopes that what he chooses and does, namely fighting to defend the country, is the right thing. The soldiers have nowhere to go besides keep fighting until they die or finish their missions (OldTimeMusic, 2020; GeniusMedia, 2020). The fourth aspect is indicated in how the soldiers in war have lost their own individual aspects. They must follow any command that works in general. Even they do not directly wage war towards their own societies. They do it due to any doctrinal military agenda based on political hatred.

The sixth aspect is about the matter of choice that has been eliminated in war. The weapons are the only choice any soldier has in war. They must say yes to any political trend at that time though they may also be killed by simply nodding to it (OldTimeMusic, 2020; Pasopati, 2018). They could not have such decision-making processes anymore since their destinies are totally for the country without being questioned at all. They are not flexible at all but forced to be so diligent, rigid, and even stiff (Barry, 2019; Taylor, 1985). The sixth part shows that positive freedom is needed to eradicate any war. By doing so, people could understand more that being independent is not selfish. It is also appreciating dependencies in which any self-determination could be attained furthermore. The soldiers could also rely on the matter of being social and individual rather than following any chain of command that brings them to any useless and meaningless wars.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The lyrics of M. I. A. by Avenged Sevenfold shows the tragedies of war from the perspective of soldiers. The lyrics show eerie moments of wars that only shape any prolonging loss than preservation of victories. This literary work shows how war is matter of conflicting freedom between realizing positive and/or negative freedom. As theorized by Charles Taylor, people should realize more positive freedom, but it could never leave the reality of its negative point since it may prohibit others' rights as well.

This is a matter of the paradox of freedom that elucidates complexities of choices that will emerge one freedom but by eliminating other freedom as well. The tensions should always be kept between positive and negative freedom to bring such balance in between.

Suggestions

It is urged for future researchers to analyze signs and its meanings in the song. Further concepts and contexts in recent conflict and wars could also be dug. The concept of peace could also be analyzed through this song. Further justifications on negative freedom over the positive one could also be an important research later.

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