

TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY

Original dictation (A)

For background see http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published_works/tcl/

[Dictabelts 1, 2, 3; cassette 1, side A; CD 1]

[Dictabelt 1]

Inaugural lecture: Two Concepts of Freedom – no, of Liberty, sorry. Begins:

[166] Mr Vice-Chancellor: The subject to which my chair is dedicated – social and political thought – has fallen upon evil days in this country. It is a melancholy reflection that in the land which has made a great, perhaps the greatest, contribution to political thought, among a people which still feels a legitimate pride in the names of Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Mill, Green, Bradley, so few men [gifted with a]¹ capacity for theoretical thought should today wish to deal with social or political ideas. Whatever the cause of this phenomenon, whether it is because the decline in power, wealth and influence of England has led to a preoccupation with sheer survival on the part of all political parties and institutions, and so diminished attention to the ultimate ends of life, and in particular to disagreement about them, without which politics cannot live; or whether it is because our philosophers, intoxicated by their magnificent successes in more abstract realms, have no time [for] or interest in a field in which radical discoveries are less likely to be made, and gifts of minute analysis less likely to be rewarded – whatever the cause, political thought as an academic subject is at present a backwater in English-speaking countries.

¹ [Insertions from later versions have been used where the recording is corrupt: old Dictabelts are sometimes brittle, and the stylus can jump, as on a scratched vinyl recording.]

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[167] And yet this is in a sense both strange and dangerous. Strange, because there has perhaps been no time in modern history when so large a number of human beings, both in the East and the West, have had their notions and indeed their lives altered, and in some cases most violently upset, by social and political doctrines which have cast their spell upon them or their rulers. And dangerous, because when ideas are neglected by those who ought to attend to them – that is to say, intellectuals, persons trained to think – they acquire a momentum and a power over great multitudes of men too great and violent to be altered by rational criticism. Over a hundred years ago the German poet Heine warned the French not to underestimate the power of ideas: philosophical concepts nurtured in the stillness of a professor's study could destroy a civilisation. He thought that the *Critique of Pure Reason* was the sword with which the old religion and the old metaphysics had been beheaded; and the works of Rousseau the bloodstained weapon which in the hands of Robespierre – like the analogous doctrine of Fichte in the hands of fanatical German philosophers – would one day destroy liberal culture in the West.

It is a very vulgar historical materialism that denies the overwhelming power of ideas, and says that ideas are mere material interests in thin disguise. It may be that, without the pressure behind them of social or economic forces, ideas often remain impotent; what is certain is that these social and economic forces – which, after all, are no more than men working, feeling, striving with and against other men and inanimate nature – achieve their effect through the medium of ideas, and most of all social and political ideas. Ideas are of interest solely so far as they constitute problems or answers to problems which arise in the course of men's reflection about their place and their purpose in the world, and the nature of that world, and their own relationship with it. Political theory, even in its most active aspect, as a political doctrine or faith which finds issue in action, is nevertheless part of this general self-consciousness which commonly goes by the name of philosophy. Despite every effort to separate them, guided by a blind scholastic pedantry, politics has remained indissolubly intertwined with ethics and with every form of thought which enquires about the ends of life and the hierarchies of human values. To neglect it on the grounds of its necessarily imprecise subject matter or the proportion in it of empirical content in comparison, say, with logic or the philosophy of the sciences or of

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our knowledge of the external world is merely to allow oneself to remain at the mercy of primitive and uncriticised beliefs in one of the great realms of human experience.²

[168] Political philosophy is a branch of moral philosophy and consists in the application of moral ideas to the sphere of social relations. It seems to me that unless this truth is grasped the present condition of our world is unlikely to be understood. For world is today divided between two great outlooks which, although they show certain common assumptions, are split, it seems to me, most of all by the difference in their conceptions of the deepest and most central of all political problems, that of obedience. Why should I (or anyone) obey anyone else? Why should I not do as I wish? This seems to me the central problem of all political theory, for if it were not necessary or desirable that some men should obey the orders of others, or yield to the superior force or authority of these others – whatever the form the obedience takes – all men could do as they wished, and in the total absence of friction between men the problems that give rise to political speculation could scarcely have arisen.

The central problem of political theory seems to me to be that of coercion. Nobody will deny that upon the answer to it diametrically opposed views are held in large areas of the world today, or that the opposition of these views, if not the cause, is at any rate the most articulate expression of the great systems embattled against each other at this moment. It seems to me therefore that no problem is more worthy of examination.

[1]

Coercion is the deprivation of freedom. And what is freedom, at least in its political sense? We know that more than two hundred definitions of this word have cast a dark cloud upon the subject. Yet there are at least two senses of the word which few would deny to be central, or at least two criteria which determine whether a man or a nation or a group is free or not. [169] The first, which I shall call the negative sense or criterion, is the answer to the

² [Here, as in *Liberty*, I have omitted a dutiful encomium of Berlin's predecessor in his chair, G. D. H. Cole.]

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question ‘What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is left to do what they like without control by other persons?’ The second is the answer to the question ‘What is the source of control, when it exists, which can prevent someone from doing what he wishes?’ To say that there is only one sense of the word ‘freedom’, but two criteria for its determination, seems to me merely a confusion; for the two questions seem genuinely different, even though the answers to them may overlap. Let us take them one by one.

1. The negative concept

I am said to be free to the degree to which no human being interferes with my activity. This is the classical sense of liberty in which the great English philosophers, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Paine, and indeed Mill, used it. Political freedom was simply the area within which a man could do what he liked. If I was prevented by other persons from doing what I liked, I was to that degree unfree; and if the area within which I could do what I wished was legally contracted beyond a certain minimum, I could be described as being enslaved.

‘Slavery’ was not the term that covered every form of inability. If I say that I am unable to jump more than ten feet in the air, or cannot see because I am blind, or cannot understand the more esoteric pages of Hegel, it would be eccentric to say that I was to that degree enslaved or coerced. Coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I wish to act. If someone is described as a slave to his passions, for instance, there is a feeling, which is quite correct, that the word is being used in a somewhat metaphorical sense. Certainly there is a sense in which he is not free; and this sense is of the greatest importance, as will, I hope, presently be made clear. But it is not primarily a political sense: a man who is a slave to his passions is certainly a slave in some sense different from that in which Uncle Tom was a slave to Simon Legree. Uncle Tom was a slave because he was coerced by another human being in the relevant respects. To be prevented from attaining what you or (in the case of the slave to his passions) in your rational moments you desire is certainly to be, to that degree, not free. But you lack political freedom only if some other person deliberately prevents you from attaining your goal.

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This is brought out best by the expression ‘economic slavery’ and its counterpart ‘economic freedom’. It is argued, very plausibly, that men who are too poor to purchase something upon which there is no legal ban are as little free to acquire it as they would be if it were [170] legally forbidden, i.e. if they were threatened with legal coercion if they attempted to do so. If it were the case that my poverty was like a disease – that I could not buy a house as I cannot see if I am blind – this would not naturally be described as a lack of freedom. It is only because it is suspected or believed that my inability to purchase the house is due to the fact that other human beings have made arrangements whereby I am prevented from having enough money with which to buy the house that I begin to speak of slavery. If my poverty is due to bad luck or accident, or the unintentional effect of social or political institutions, then I simply speak of lacking economic freedom. If I believe that I am being prevented from acquiring the objects that I desire by a deliberate plan on the part of certain other human beings, which they desire to implement but to which I am hostile, I speak of oppression. In all these cases the criterion of whether I am justified in speaking of myself as deprived of liberty is the part played by other human beings in frustrating my wishes. I am then in a position to say that by freedom I mean a situation in which others do not interfere with my actions. The wider the area of non-interference, the wider my freedom.

This is certainly what Hobbes and Bentham and J. S. Mill meant when they used this word. They disagreed about how wide this area could or should be; they all admitted that it could not be unlimited, because, if it were, then all men could interfere without limit with all other men, and their minimum needs – without which men cannot survive – could not be satisfied in the condition of lawless anarchy which would prevail; or at least the needs of the weaker majority would have little chance against the force employed by the stronger minority; [171] which at any rate justified some limits upon the freedom of individuals, with a view to letting all of them, or a great majority, attain, not indeed to as much as they would wish, but to more than they would succeed in getting under any other system.

But it was not denied that this minimum of social organisation entailed the curtailment of the area of liberty. If liberty were the only goal which men pursued, this would be a frustration of it; as it

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is, it is an attempt to compromise between their desire for liberty and their need for a minimum of food, shelter, security and whatever other basic needs men have which cannot be secured without some interdependence, entailing some loss of individual liberty. Nevertheless it was assumed by these thinkers, especially by such liberals as Locke and Mill, and by such even more eloquent defenders of it as Constant and Tocqueville in France, that although the area of men's free action must needs be limited by law, there was a certain minimum which must on no account be violated; for if it was overstepped, the individual would find himself in an area too narrow for the minimum development of his natural faculties, which alone made life worth living, and alone conferred such value as they possessed upon the various ends which men held good or right or sacred. A frontier must be drawn between the area of private life and that of public authority. Where it is to be drawn is a matter of argument, indeed of haggling. [B] Men are largely interdependent and no man's activity is so private as literally never to affect – and potentially interfere with – the lives of others in any way. The liberty of the weak depends on restraint of the strong.

[173] Philosophers with an optimistic view of human nature and a belief in the harmonisation of human interests, such as Locke or Adam Smith or, in some of his moods, Mill, believed in a large area of private life, that is to say, in a large extension of liberty which the State or other authority must not be allowed to overstep. Hobbes and those who agreed with him, especially conservative or reactionary thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth century, argued that if men were to be prevented from cutting each other's throats and making social life a chaos and a wilderness, far greater safeguards must be instituted to keep them in their places, and wished correspondingly to increase the area of State control, and decrease that of the individual. But both sides agreed that some portion of human existence must remain independent of the sphere of social control. To invade that, however small, was despotism. Thus Constant, who had experienced the full horrors of Jacobin dictatorship, declared that the liberty of religion, opinion, expression, property must be sacrosanct, and guaranteed against arbitrary invasion. Why? Because we cannot sacrifice 'eternal principles of justice and

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mercy'³ without 'degrading or denying our nature'. No doubt we cannot be absolutely free, and must give up some of our liberty to preserve the rest. But total self-surrender is self-defeating, for then there will be nothing left to preserve.

What then must the minimum be? That which a man cannot give up without offending against the essence of our human nature. 'Nature', it may be objected, is a vague term, and many views have been taken as to what the true nature of man is. To this Constant replies that there are some uses of it which are virtually accepted by all men, with whom we have a common language. If a law is passed according to which children are to be punished for not denouncing parents, or trying to save them from the executioner, then what we do may be illegal (for Robespierre or Napoleon or Louis XI passed just such laws), but nobody will say that it is natural. A law which tells us to condemn the innocent, to betray, to refuse asylum to the weak and persecuted, is felt to be iniquitous in the sense that it tramples on standards in terms of which we judge human beings to be human. Those who reject these standards without a qualm, or do not feel their moral force, are correctly described as 'inhuman', and communication with them is difficult. But whatever may be the principle in terms of which the area of non-interference is to be drawn, whether it is that of natural law or [174] natural rights, or utility in the narrow sense given it by Bentham, [or] the wider sense in which Mill speaks of it as 'grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being',⁴ or the pronouncements of the categorical imperative, or the sanctity of the social contract, or many another concept with which human beings have sought to clarify and justify their convictions, 'liberty' means liberty *from*, absence of interference beyond a certain frontier.

[Dictabelts 4, 6, 7; cassette 1, side B; CD 2]

[Dictabelt 4]

³ Benjamin Constant, *Principes de politique*, chapter 1, 'De la souveraineté du peuple': Benjamin Constant, *Écrits politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet ([Paris], 1997), 318.

⁴ *Social Contract*, book 1, chapter 6: op. cit. (00/15), iii 361; cf. Constant, op. cit. (previous note), 313.

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‘The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way’, said Mill, and meant by this liberty of thought, feeling, conscience, opinion, expression, tastes and pursuits, and liberty of combination. Was compulsion ever justified? No doubt it was: in extreme cases, where a society was genuinely endangered and the institutions which themselves preserved freedom were in peril, individual liberty could perhaps be at any rate temporarily curtailed or suspended. Moreover, since all individuals were entitled to this minimum degree of freedom, all other individuals were of necessity to be restrained, if need be by force, from depriving anyone of it. Indeed the whole function of law was the prevention of collisions: the law was what the socialist Lassalle was contemptuously to describe as being that of a nightwatchman or traffic policeman, guarding of a property and preventing collisions, with no positive functions at all.

What made this area of liberty so sacred to Mill? In a famous tract, perhaps the most famous of all essays on the subject, which had so profound an influence upon the thinking of generations of Englishmen and those they governed, he declares that unless men are left to live as they wish, ‘in the part [of their conduct] which merely concerns [themselves]’, civilisation cannot advance; the truth will not, for lack of a free market in ideas, come to light; spontaneity, energy, character, individuality in all its forms will decline; there will be no scope for genius, for mental vigour, for moral courage. Society will be crushed by the weight of ‘collective mediocrity’. Whatever is ‘rich, diversified, and animating’⁵ will be crushed by the weight of custom, by men’s constant tendency to conformity, which breeds only ‘withered’ capacities, ‘pinched and hidebound’, ‘cramped and dwarfed’ human beings. ‘Pagan self-assertion’ is as worthy as ‘Christian self-denial’. ‘All errors which [a man] is likely to commit against advice and warning are far outweighed by the evil of allowing others to constrain him to what they deem his good.’ Liberty consists in the preservation of an area within which human personality is to have the fullest possible play. Unless a man can pursue ends because they are his ends, make acts of choice which, even if they lead to disaster, are nevertheless felt by him as his acts, the pursuit of goals which are, at any rate for

⁵ [*On Liberty*, chapter 3: *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. J. M. Robson and others (Toronto/London, 1963–91), xviii 266 (cf. L 205/1).]

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him, absolute in that they are not means to other ends, but that alone which makes all other acts worth doing, which gives his life such value as it has in his own eyes – in short, enough political space to allow him not to suffocate, nor to survive on condition of being an instrument of other peoples' wishes – [175] that is liberty as it has been conceived by liberals in the modern world from the days of Erasmus to our own. Constant and Mill are its noblest and most convincing advocates. Every plea for civil liberty, for individual rights, for the preservation of individual variety and spontaneity against the encroachment of public authority, or the levelling tendency of custom or organised propaganda, stems from this central conception.

Two aspects of it may be noted.

[176] The first is that it is comparatively modern. There is scarcely any consciousness of individual liberty as an ideal in the ancient world. Condorcet had already remarked that the notion of individual rights is absent from the legal and moral conceptions of the Romans and Greeks, still more so of the Hebrews, and of all other ancient civilisations that have since come to light. Nor are the periods in which these notions have been dominant at all frequent even in the history of the Western world. It has seldom if ever form a rallying cry for the great masses of mankind, as equality or democracy have been. It has remained the ideal of civilised men who wish to be left in peace to pursue their duties or their pleasures or their avocations. The desire not to be impinged upon, not to be dictated to, to be free from the arbitrary deprivation of rights and liberties, has been a mark of high civilisation both on the part of individuals and communities. The desire to be left alone, to live one's life as one chooses, the very sense of privacy, of the area of personal relationships as sacred in its own right; the belief that it is more worthy of a human being to go to the bad in his own way than to the good under the control of a benevolent authority; this, which is almost a defining notion of a large element in Western civilisation, is scarcely older than the Renaissance and the Reformation. Absolute values are not necessarily timeless or eternal, but their death marks the death of an entire civilisation, the end of an entire moral system.

Another characteristic of this 'negative' conception of liberty is that it is compatible with autocracy, or at any rate the absence of self-government. Liberty in this sense is concerned with the area of

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control, not with its source. Just as a democratic community may in fact deprive the individual citizen of a good many liberties which he might have in some other society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a benevolent despot would allow his subjects a very wide area of personal freedom. Even though in a despotic society the individual would only enjoy such rights and liberties as the despot granted him, it is, at any rate in theory, conceivable that a very liberal-minded despot would grant his subjects wider liberties than they would enjoy under other systems of government.⁶ Indeed, it is arguable that in the Prussia of Frederick the Great or the Austria of Joseph II, men of spontaneity, imagination, originality and creative power, whom Mill desired to encourage, were less interfered with and felt the pressure of both institutions and custom far less heavy upon them than they would have done in the Switzerland of that time or many a later democracy.

[177] Freedom in this sense is not, at any rate logically, connected with self-government. Self-government may indeed be a guarantee of its preservation, and has been defended as such by believers in individual liberty. But there is no necessary connection: the question of who governs me is logically distinct from the question how far government interferes with me; and upon this the great contrast between the two concepts fundamentally rests.⁷ For the 'positive' sense of liberty is an answer to the question: By whom am I governed? Who is to say what I [178] am and what I am not to be or do? And although it seems at first as if there was an intimate connection between individual liberty in the sense of an area free from interference, and democracy in the sense of government not by some outside body but by myself and others like myself with whose interests mine were intertwined, direct government by us of ourselves, or at any rate by our representatives, yet the difference [sc. similarity] is more apparent than real. The desire to be governed by myself, or at any rate to participate in the process whereby my life is to be controlled, is no doubt as basic a wish as that of [sc. for] a free area for action, perhaps more so. But it is not the same; so different, indeed, as to have led in the end to the great clash of ideologies of which I spoke at the beginning. For it is nothing other than the positive

⁶ [A2 replaces the the previous sentence.]

⁷ [A5 inserted here as note.]

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conception of liberty which those who believe in the negative concept represent as being at times no better than a disguise for total slavery.

[Dictabelt 5; cassette 3; CD 5]

[Cassette 3, side A]

Mrs Sheldon, would you add the following extra bits, each on a separate piece of paper? They've got to be inserted somewhere, I don't quite know where, and I think you'd better put them down as extra supplementary bits marked A, B, C, D, E.

[A1] A.

[207] No doubt every interpretation of the word 'liberty', however unusual, must include the minimum of what I have called 'negative' liberty, that is, an area within which my wishes are not frustrated; for a being who is literally prevented by others from doing anything that he wishes to do is not a moral agent at all, and could not either legally or morally be regarded as a human being in the full sense, even if in a physiological or biological or even psychological sense he is to be included within the human species. But Mill and Constant want more than the minimum: they demand the maximum degree of non-interference compatible with the minimum demands of social life.

It is not clear that this demand for liberty has ever been made by any but a small minority of highly civilised and self-conscious human beings. The bulk of humanity has certainly at most times been prepared to sacrifice this to other goals: security, prosperity, power, virtue, rewards in the next world or indeed justice, equality and many other values which appear wholly or in part incompatible with the attainment of the greatest degree of individual liberty and certainly do not need it as a precondition of their own realisation.

[A2] B.

[176] The tyrant who leaves us a great area of liberty may be unjust, encourage the wildest inequalities, care little for order or virtue or knowledge; he may be a savage or a lunatic, but provided he does not curb our liberty, he meets with Mill's specification. It

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seems to me that it is only by conceiving an extreme and perhaps improbable situation of this kind that the full contrast between individual liberty in Mill's sense and self-government can be made clear.

[A3] C. Oh, not C. Would you just add to A?

[207] It is not the demand for individual *Lebensraum* which has stimulated the rebellions and wars of liberation for which men were ready to die in the past, or for that matter in the present. Men who have fought for freedom or fought wars of liberation have commonly fought for the right to be governed by themselves or their representatives – harshly governed if need be, tyrannously and without much individual liberty, but in a manner which allowed them to participate, or at any rate to think they participated, in the legislation and administration of their collective lives.

[A4] Then C. or D, whichever it is.

[209]⁸ Constant makes this contrast exceedingly clear. In his celebrated essay on the conception of liberty by the 'Ancients' and the 'Moderns' he declares that for modern man liberty means the right not to be arrested, detained, killed, maltreated by the arbitrary will of one or several individuals; the right to express one's opinion, choose one's profession and exercise it; to dispose of one's property, even to abuse it as one pleases; to go and come without having to account for one's motives or moods, or having to ask permission beforehand; the right to unite with others in the pursuit of one's interests, to profess whatever faith one wishes with one's associates, to fill one's days and hours in accordance with one's own inclinations, one's own fancies; finally the right to influence administration by nominating officials, by presenting petitions and demands of which the authorities are obliged more or less to take notice. Liberty in this sense is the security of the enjoyment of the function of private life, and liberty in this sense is something which is guaranteed by institutions which exist for this purpose. This is what modern men mean by liberty and it is not primarily political in content.

⁸ [Not in published text.]

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For the ancient world, on the other hand, liberty meant the exercise, collectively but directly, of a large portion of sovereignty. It meant the right to deliberate publicly, to decide upon war and peace, treaties with foreign powers, to vote laws, sit in judgement, scrutinise the accounts and acts of public officials, the right to force them to present themselves before the sovereign assembly, to accuse them, condemn them, acquit them. But each man in this system is totally subject to authority. All private acts are in principle to be open to the surveillance of public officials. Nothing is to be left to the independent judgement of individuals, above all the choice of religion – to invent or practise a private religion would have appeared blasphemous. Terpander could not add a string to his lyre without offending the State. A young Spartiate could not visit his wife freely. In Rome, censors could enquire into the most intimate details of private life. Morals were controlled by the law, and since everything is affected by morals, everything was subject to law. The individual, sovereign in public affairs, was a slave in his private life; the all-powerful judge, inquisitor, legislator who condemned men to death and sent them into exile was wholly repressed in private. Liberty meant the sharing of public power. The danger to the modern conception of liberty is that, while absorbed in private life, we let our political rights – without which our private liberties may slip away – go too cheaply and be captured by adventurers. The danger to the liberty of the Ancients is that in pursuit of political control they allowed their private freedom to go almost completely. The two types of freedom are plainly not compatible with each other, and if I barter my private freedom for the right to take part in collective decisions which may interfere vastly with my private desires, am I more or less free? The ambiguity of the word ‘freedom’ – or one of its many ambiguities – could hardly be brought out more vividly.

[A5] Next D or E or whichever it is.

[177/1] Negative liberty is something the extent of which it is difficult to estimate. It might *prima facie* seem to depend simply on the power to choose between at any rate two alternatives. Nevertheless not all choices are called free. If in a totalitarian State I betray my friend under threat of torture, I can reasonably say that I did not act freely. Nevertheless I did of course make a choice,

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and could, at any rate in theory, have chosen to be tortured. The mere existence of a minimum of possibilities is not therefore enough to make my choice free in the normal sense of the word. The extent of my freedom depends (*a*) on how many possibilities are open to me (although the method of counting these can never be more than impressionistic: possibilities of action are not discrete entities like apples which can be exhaustively enumerated); (*b*) how easy or difficult each of these possibilities is; (*c*) how important in my plan of life, given my character and circumstances, these possibilities are when compared with each other; (*d*) how far they are closed or opened by deliberate human acts; (*e*) what value not merely the agent but the general sentiment of the society in which he lives puts on the various possibilities. All these factors must be 'integrated' in the conclusion, necessarily never precise or indisputable, drawn from this process. It may well be that there are many incommensurable degrees of freedom and that they cannot be drawn up on a single scale of magnitude, however conceived.

Now we go back to the main piece.

[11]

[2. *The positive concept*]

The positive sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the desire on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and my decisions to depend on myself and not on external forces of whatever kind.

Next record.

[Dictabelt 6]

I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes which are my own, and not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody, self-directed and not directed by external nature or other men as if I were an inanimate object, an animal, a slave incapable of playing a human part, i.e. of conceiving purposes and realising them. This is what I mean when I say that I am rational, and that it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest

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of the world. I wish above all to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being whose choices are his own, bearing responsibility for his acts, and able to explain them by reference to his own ideas and purposes. I feel free in proportion as I know this to be true, and enslaved in proportion as the facts make me realise that it is not true.

[181] This desire to be self-directed has, historically, taken two major forms: the first, that of self-denial to attain independence; the second, that of conquest of obstacles in my path to attain the same end.

[III *The retreat to the inner citadel*]

1. I am the possessor of reason and will. I conceive ends and I desire to pursue them. But if I am prevented from attaining them, I no longer feel master of the situation. I may be prevented by the laws [182] of nature – physical or physiological or psychological – or by chance or accident, or the malice of men, or the power, sometimes undesigned, of human institutions. These forces may be too much for me: what am I to do to escape from being crushed by them? I liberate myself from unfulfillable desires. I wish to be master of my kingdom, but my frontiers are too vulnerable; therefore I contract the frontiers in order to reduce the area of vulnerability. I desire happiness, but I cannot command it; I wish to strive after nothing that I cannot be sure to obtain; therefore, instead of vainly striving for happiness which may elude me, I eliminate from myself all desire for it. I withdraw into my inner self. Physical and biological laws make it impossible for me to attain goals – health or success – which I should have had if I had been differently built. I determine myself not to desire these unattainable ends. The tyrant threatens me with destruction of my property, with physical imprisonment, with the exile or death of those whom I love, but if I do not feel attached to property, do not care if I am in prison or outside it, and have killed within myself my natural affections, he cannot touch me. It is as if I were to perform a strategic retreat into an inner citadel – my reason, my soul – which, do what he might, neither external blind force nor human beings can touch. There and there alone I am safe; there and there alone I am master of all that I possess.

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It is as if I were to say ‘I have a wound in my leg; if the process of curing it is too precarious and uncertain, then I can get rid of the wound by cutting off my leg, and by teaching myself not to want anything for which my leg might have provided an opportunity.’ This is the traditional self-emancipation of quietists, not only individual sages – Stoics, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, and indeed individuals dedicated to no religion: men who liberate themselves from the yoke of society or public opinion by a process of self-transformation which makes them care nothing for its values and remain isolated and independent on its edges, no longer vulnerable to its weapons. Every form of isolationism, monasticism, autarky – every form of autonomy, in short – has some element of this in it. I eliminate the obstacles on my path by abandoning the path. I retreat into the only territory of which I can be fully certain – my own inner spirit, or, in the case of groups, my own sect, my own planned economy, my own isolated territory, where no voices from outside need be listened to, [183] and no external forces can effectively reach. This is a form of the search for security, but it is also legitimately called inner freedom.

Kant, who was perhaps the most profound secular defender of this point of view, built his concept of freedom upon it. I am free because I am autonomous: I obey laws which I have invented for myself. Freedom is obedience, ‘obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves’ [Rousseau]. Heteronomy is dependence on outside factors, being a plaything of circumstances, which include such psychological causes as desires, affections – everything, in short, which I cannot fully control, everything therefore which belongs to the outside world beyond the frontier of my personality – which must *ex hypothesi* be lifted above the empirical world of causality. This is not the place in which to discuss the validity of this point of view, but the notion of freedom as autonomy in this sense has been central in politics also.

If men must be treated in the first place as authors of values, of ends in themselves, whose ultimate authority consists precisely in the fact that they are willed by men not themselves dependent upon outside factors, then the greatest crime of all is to treat them as if they were not this, but in some sense dependent upon nature or other men, as if they were incapable of choices and must be chosen for, not allowed to choose for themselves: for that is to treat them as if they were not men. ‘Nobody can compel me to be happy in his own way’, said Kant; and paternalism is ‘the greatest

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despotism imaginable'. Why? Because it is to treat men as if they were stuff for me, the reformer, however benevolently disposed, to mould in accordance with my, not their, rational purpose.

This [184] is what the Utilitarians recommended. Helvétius (and Bentham) did not object to dangling rewards and punishments before men – the acutest form of heteronomy – if by this means they might be made happier. But to manipulate men in this sense, to propel them towards goals which you see but they may not, is to deny their human essence, to degrade them. That is why to lie to men or to deceive them is in effect to treat them as slaves, to behave as if other men's ends are less absolute and sacred than my own. This is false and leads to the humiliation of other men, which is the ultimate sin. There is only one source of ends for the sake of which everything is worth doing, and that is the individual who creates values, who creates these ends. In the name of what could I force them to do that which they do not will? In the name of something higher than themselves. But there is nothing higher than themselves if all values are the creations of the human spirit. Therefore I am compelling men in the name of something lower than themselves – expediency, reasons of State, convenience, my own selfish desires. This is a contradiction of what I know myself to be. Exploitation, degradation, humiliation, because they deny what makes men men – their inner autonomy – is the worst crime committable by a human being. For if this is done, then no absolute ends will be left for the sake of which that which is done is to be done; and that would mean that rational self-mastery disappears and men are reduced to mere things; to behave as if those ultimate ends for the sake of which alone life is worth living or sacrificing do not exist. All forms of tampering with human beings, getting at them, shaping them against their will in your own form, brainwashing and conditioning, is therefore the deprivation of men of that freedom in virtue of which alone they are men.

[185] This is the heart of the humanism, both moral and political, deeply influenced by Kant in the eighteenth century. It is a form of secularised Protestant individualism in which the place of God and the individual soul which strains towards union with him is taken by the abstract conception of the rational life, and the reason of the individual who strains after total rationality, to be governed by reason and by reason alone, not to depend upon anything that he does not understand or whereby he is affected or

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deluded. Autonomy, not heteronomy: to act and not to be acted upon. Deeply different though their metaphysical doctrines were, the Stoic sage, the self-directed rational man of Spinoza, the rational will that can will only what is right and can attain what it wills, for what it cannot attain it cannot will: these are different approaches to a very similar ideal – the man who has made himself independent of chance and causality, and the malice and stupidity of men, by withdrawing, rising above it, making himself unassailable, impermeable as it were to anything that might deflect him.

The notion of slavery to the passions is now no longer a metaphor; to rid myself of fear or love or the desire to conform is to liberate myself from the slavery to something which I cannot control. Cephalus, whom Plato reports as saying that old age alone has liberated him from passion – the yoke of a terrible master – is speaking as literally as those who speak of freedom from a flesh-and-blood tyrant or slave-owner. The psychological experience of observing myself yielding to some ‘lower’ impulse, and doing something which, at the very moment of doing it, I abhor, and reflecting later that I was not ‘myself’ when I did it; the distinction of the true self – inner, rational, pure, master of its resources – as opposed to the less real attributes, physical or emotional, which are the play of external forces; belong to this way of thinking and speaking. I am identified with my critical, rational faculty: the external results cannot matter, for they are not in my control, only motives are. Provided my motive is rational, I can ignore or even defy the outer world, and take refuge in my own integrity and independence. This is the creed of the solitary thinker, the successful rebel who has emancipated himself from the chains of things.

[187] [IV *Self-realisation*]

[2.] How am I to achieve this condition? By the use of critical reason, by understanding what is necessary and what is contingent. If I am a schoolboy, the difficult truths of mathematics present themselves as an obstacle, as theorems whose necessity I do not understand, but which are asserted to be true by some external authority, and which I must therefore mechanically learn; but when I [188] understand the function of the symbols, the axioms, the transformation rules, the logic whereby the conclusions are

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obtained – and that these things cannot be otherwise, either because they are given as part of the structure of the rational mind, or because I have invented them for myself as a game or convention which I play in accordance with rules which I myself have imposed – then it no longer presents itself to me as an external obstacle which I must accept whether I will it or not, but as something which I freely move in. To the mathematician, the rules of mathematics are part of the free exercise of his natural logical capacity; to the musician, because he has assimilated the pattern of the composer's score and has made the composer's ends his own, the play of the music is a free exercise; he does not feel bound to the score as an ox to his plough or the factory worker to his machine. He has absorbed the score into his own system, has appropriated it; and to appropriate something, to identify it with one's self, is to transform it from an obstacle into one's own texture, from an impediment to free activity into an element in that activity itself.

What applies to music or to mathematics must in principle apply to all other problems which present themselves as lumps of external stuff blocking free self-development. That is the programme of rationalism. 'Sapere aude', said Kant: 'Dare to know.' What you know, that of which you understand the necessity – the rational necessity, that is – you cannot, while remaining rational, want to be otherwise; for wanting it to be otherwise is to be pro tanto irrational. Ignorance, passion, fear, neuroses come from ignorance [*sic*]. Myths and illusions, whether they spring from the wilful activity of wicked men, who invent them in order to keep us in chains – as religion was declared to be the opium of the masses – or from the influence of psychological causes, or the unintended results of social institutions, are all forms of heteronomy, or being acted upon by the outside factors in a direction not willed by the agent. The eighteenth-century enlightened radicals thought that the study of mathematics, physics and other natural sciences, and of society on the model of the natural sciences, would make the operation of such causes transparent, and thus enabled individuals to [189] choose whether to be acted upon by them (for if they so choose they are no longer acted upon but have made them their own instruments by willing them to be their own), or alter or destroy them.

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Later thinkers in the same tradition, no matter how radically they disagreed about what true knowledge consisted in, fundamentally accepted this programme – the programme of self-knowledge. Herder and Hegel believed that earlier thinkers had not understood the part played by change in what made human beings human. To understand, it is not enough to understand mathematics or physics, one must also understand history, that is, the laws of continuous growth of individuals and groups in their interplay with each other and with nature. Not to understand this is to fall into a particular kind of delusion, namely a belief in a static nature and the possibility of creating a utopia on the assumption that men's needs are unaltering, and that the wise, wholly rational man in all ages and countries will always will the same unaltering ends. Hegel believed that his contemporaries (and indeed all his predecessors) misunderstood the nature of institutions because they did not understand the laws – the rational laws, since they spring from the operation of the human spirit – that create institutions and change human character and human action. Marx maintained that human beings were enslaved by external factors which they could not control, in the form of institutions which they had, not always consciously, created for certain purposes, but whose functioning, owing to the working of certain social and economic laws which they could not escape, they misunderstood systematically, and believed to be independent forces which must needs be obeyed as slaves obey a master (e.g. the laws of supply and demand, or property as an unaltering human category, or the division of society into rich and poor, or owners and workers), [190] simply because they did not understand that these laws and institutions were themselves the work of human minds and hands whose origins had been forgotten, whose function was misunderstood, and which were therefore falsely regarded as inexorable, external powers which it was idle to try and alter;

[Dictabelts 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; cassette 2, side A; CD 3]

[Dictabelt 8]

[and Freud] maintained that fears and obsessions and other curbs to the fully rational life were due to psychological causes, and that understanding these hitherto uninvestigated causal processes would put men in a position of either losing – discarding – their

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effects if they felt their freedom curtailed thereby, or of freely incorporating them in their purposive deliberate activity.

Nothing can be shaken off if it is not understood. Freedom is to plan my life in accordance with my own will. Plans entail rules; a rule does not oppress me or enslave me if I impose it on myself or accept it freely, having understood it, even if it was invented by others. That is the heart of rationalism. And the notion of liberty contained in it [is] not that of the earlier 'negative' notion of a field without obstacles – the removal of impediments, a vacuum in which I can do as I please – but the notion of self-direction or self-control: I can do what I will with my own, I am rational. Whatever I can demonstrate to myself as being necessary, in the sense of incapable of being otherwise in a rational world – in a world directed by rational minds – towards goals such as a rational being might have, I do not wish to sweep out of the way. I assimilate it into my substance as I do the laws of mathematics, of art, of whatever I understand the purpose of, and therefore cannot want otherwise.

A socialised form of this belief has taken many contemporary forms: nationalism, Marxism, Hegelianism, authoritarianism of various types, as well as what has been called totalitarian democracy. To this I shall come in a moment.

[185] Meanwhile it is perhaps worth remarking that in its individualistic form the concept of the rational sage impervious to the slings and arrows of the world – the withdrawal in depth, the escape into the inner citadel of my true self, my rational being – has historically arisen, almost always, when the external world has proved too tyrannical and unjust. 'He is truly free', said Rousseau, 'who desires what he can perform, and does what he desires.' In a world where a man seeking virtue or justice or freedom (in whatever sense) finds that he can perform little, [186] the temptation to withdraw into himself can become irresistible. It was so in Greece, where the Stoic ideal cannot be wholly unconnected with the disappearance of the free democracies and the imposition of the Macedonian despotism. It was so for analogous reasons in early Rome. It was so among the Eastern sages during the great autocracies at periods when human beings were apt to be humiliated, or at any rate ignored, taken for granted, ruthlessly managed by those who possessed the instruments of physical coercion. And it was so in Germany in the eighteenth century, the

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period of the deepest national degradation of the small German States, in the most part small and governed by petty despots, when the external world offered little asylum to those who prized the dignity of human life. For the doctrine which maintains that what I cannot have I must teach myself not to want, for to want the impossible is to be frustrated – to be a slave to my unfulfillable desires – is, despite the noble moral consequences which the Stoics or Kant and his followers drew from it, in the end a sublime form of the doctrine of sour grapes.

Those who demanded liberty for the individual or for the nation in France never fell into this attitude, perhaps because, despite the despotism of the French monarchy, and the arrogance and irrationality of privileged groups in the French State, France was a proud and powerful nation where the reality of political power was attainable to men of talent, and where the withdrawal from battle into the untroubled heaven above it, whence it could be surveyed dispassionately by the self-sufficient philosopher, was not the only way out.

[190] I have said that the socialised [191] form of this doctrine is at the heart of the freedom that is discussed or fought for in many quarters today. This is not the place to trace the historical evolution of this situation. Let me give two familiar illustrations.

[v

The Temple of Sarastro]

[191] Those who believed in freedom as self-direction were doubtless bound to consider, sooner or later, how this was to be applied, not merely to the individual's inner life, but to his relations to other members of his society. Even the most individualist among them – and Rousseau, Kant and Fichte certainly started as individualists – were bound to ask themselves whether and how, not merely a rational life for the individual, but a rational life for society was possible. I wish to be free to live as my rational will wills; but so must others be. How am I to avoid collisions? Where is the frontier between my rights and the identical rights of others (for if I am rational, I cannot deny that what I deserve, others who are rational like me deserve for similar reasons)? A rational State would be a State the laws of which would be such that all rational men would accept them, i.e. such laws as they would themselves have promulgated had they been in a position to do so; the

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frontier would be such as we should all agree, as rational men, was the right frontier for rational beings.

But who in fact is to decide this? On the assumption which all these thinkers made (and their use of the word 'reason' led them to it), that moral and political problems, like problems in mathematics or physics or any other sphere, were in principle soluble – i.e. that there was one true solution to any problem, as opposed to the many false ones, and that the truth could be discovered by a rational thinker, and demonstrated so clearly that all other rational men could not but accept it (as is the case in, say, the natural sciences) – on that assumption political problems were soluble by [192] establishing a just order which would give to each man all the freedom that a rational being is entitled to. The rational solution of one problem cannot collide with the rational solution of another, for two true solutions cannot be incompatible. Therefore such an order must in principle exist – the ideal state of affairs, sometimes imagined as the paradise before the flood, in which all men lived happily in a state of blessedness together, sometimes as a golden age still before us, in which all men, having become rational, would no longer have desires, passions or habits which could in principle collide with that which other similarly perfect men could ever demand.

Next record.

In existing societies justice and equality are ideals which it is necessary to obtain with some measure of coercion, because freedom from social controls might lead to the oppression of the weaker by the stronger, of the stupider by the more energetic or unscrupulous. But it is only irrationality on the part of men (according to this doctrine) which leads them to wish to oppress or exploit or humiliate one another. Rational men will respect the principle of reason in each other and lack all desire to fight one another or seek to dominate one another. The desire to dominate is itself irrational and can be explained by rational methods. Hegel explains it in one way, Marx in another, Freud in yet a third way: some of these can perhaps supplement each other; others are not combinable. But be that as it may, in a society of perfectly rational beings the lust for power will be absent, and a rational society will not possess in it anyone desiring to oppress anyone else. The

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existence of oppression will be the first symptom that the true solution to the social problems (and it must be remembered that there is one, otherwise the problem is no problem, for all true problems must have solutions, whether they have been discovered or not) has not been reached.

[194] This is, in effect, what eighteenth-century thinkers say. Rousseau tells me that, if I freely surrender all the parts of my life to society, I create an entity which, having been built by an equality of sacrifice of all its members, cannot wish to hurt any one of them; it can in such a society be in nobody's interest to damage anyone else. In giving myself to all I give myself to no one, and I get back as much as I lose, together with enough force to preserve my new gains. Kant tells me that when the 'individual has entirely abandoned his wild, lawless freedom to find it again unimpaired in a state of dependence according to law', that is true freedom, 'for this dependence is the work of his own will, acting as lawgiver'. Liberty, so far from being incompatible with equality, cannot be made actual without it; hence the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in [195] 1789 and again in 1793 both speak of the fact that liberty consists 'in doing anything which does not conflict with the rights of one's neighbour', for 'the exercise of the natural rights of each individual has no bounds except those which are necessary to ensure the enjoyment of the same rights to the other members of the society'.⁹ These bounds can be established by any rational man, for any rational man can in principle discover the true solution to any problem, but it takes a society of wholly rational men freely to accept this solution as the truth, for only rational men can tell the truth when they meet it. The rule of such a State is that what one man can do, all men can do; thus, if anyone infringes this rule, all men are damaged thereby.

If the assumption were correct – if a solution to social problems were like a solution to those of the natural sciences, and if a society of wholly rational men could be conceived – this would no doubt be a true conclusion. Liberty would coincide with law. Autonomy would coincide with authority. Men would be wholly equal and wholly free, wholly rational and wholly just. This is the ideal of anarchism.

The thinkers who bent their energies to the solution of the problem were presently faced with the question of how men were

⁹ [The latter wording does not appear in the 1793 Declaration.]

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to be made rational in this way. Clearly they must be educated, for only the uneducated are irrational, heteronomous, and may need to be coerced to make life possible for the rational, if they are to live in the same society with them, and not withdraw to some Olympian height. Education, says Fichte quite consistently, works in such a way that 'You will later recognise the reasons for what I am doing now.' Children cannot be expected to understand why they are compelled to go to school, nor the uneducated – i.e. the majority of mankind – why they are made to obey laws which will presently make them rational and so retrospectively justify such coercion as they may have suffered. This is the task for the State. 'Compulsion is also a kind of education.' [196] I force you to be protected against smallpox though you may not wish it. Even Mill is prepared to say that a man may be forcibly prevented from crossing a bridge if there is not time to warn him that it is about to collapse, for he cannot wish to fall into the water. I, the sage, know your wishes better than you can know them yourself, for you are the victim of your passions, a slave living the heteronomous life, purblind, unable to understand your best interest. You want to be a human being; it is the aim of the State to procure this right for you. 'Compulsion is justified by education for future insight.'

Here the fatal analogies begin. Just as reason within me, if it is to triumph, must eliminate and suppress my 'lower' instincts, my passions and desires, which render me a slave, so the higher elements in society – the better educated, the more rational, those who 'possess the highest insight of their time and people' – can exercise compulsion to rationalise the irrational sections of society; for by obeying the rational man we obey ourselves – not indeed as we are, sunk in our ignorance and our passions, children afflicted by disease that needs a healer, wards who need a guardian – but as we potentially are, as we could be if we were rational, as we are now if only we would listen to the rational element which is *ex hypothesi* within every human being deserving of the name.

[197] This is the argument used by every dictator, inquisitor and bully who seeks for moral justification for his conduct. I must do for men what they cannot do for themselves and I cannot ask for their permission or consent because they are in no condition to know what is best for them, and what they will permit and consent to may mean their suicide. 'No one has [...] rights against reason.' 'Man is afraid of subordinating his subjectivity to the laws of

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reason: he prefers tradition or arbitrariness.' Nevertheless, subordinated he must be, for that is the purpose of man on earth and the only path to true freedom.

It is consistent with this to ask, as Auguste Comte once did, why, if we do not allow free thinking in chemistry or biology, we should allow it in morals or politics. [198] 'Only the truth liberates, and the only way in which I can learn the truth is by doing blindly today what you who know it order me to do in the conviction that only thus will I rise to your clear vision, and be free like you.'

We have come full circle, for this argument, employed by Fichte and Hegel and all other defenders of authority, is what the Stoic and Kantian ethic protests against most bitterly in the name of the reason of the unoppressed individual, following his own light as best he can. The rationalist approach, on the assumption of the single true solution which the experts alone can determine, leads therefore to a Platonic authoritarian State, obedient to the directives of the sages.

[VI

The search for status]

[200] There is another approach, legitimate enough in itself, which [201] can be made to yield a very similar conclusion. Ever since the middle of the eighteenth century it has been persistently, and with increasing effect, asked: What is meant by an 'individual'? In so far as I live in society, everything that I do inevitably affects and is affected by what others do. Even Mill's distinction between the sphere of private life and that wherein I affect others breaks down under examination. Everything that I do may have effects which deeply affect other human beings and vice versa. Besides, I am social in a deeper sense than mere interaction, for am I not what I am, to some degree, in virtue of what others think that I am?

Next record.

When I ask myself what I am, and answer 'An Englishman', 'A Frenchman', 'A Chinese', 'A carpenter', 'A respected member of society', 'A criminal', I find upon analysis that to be an Englishman or a Chinese or a criminal involves me in being recognised as belonging to a particular group or class by other persons in the society in which I live and that this recognition by them is part of

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the meaning of the terms in which I describe what appear to be my most personal, most permanent attributes. I am not disembodied reason; nor am I Robinson Crusoe alone upon an island; it is not only that my material life depends upon interaction with other men, but that my ideas about myself are intelligible only in terms of the social network in which I am an element.

The freedom that a man demands is as often as not the desire for recognition: I may be seeking not for what Mill would wish me to seek, namely freedom from coercion, from arrest, from tyranny, from the deprivation of certain liberties, for a vacuum free from human obstruction of this type; what I may seek to be saved from is – from being taken for granted, from being ignored, patronised, despised; in short, from not being treated as a full human being, from having my existence unrecognised, from being classed as a member of some featureless amalgam, a statistical unit without identifiable unique human features of my own. This is the degradation that I am fighting against, not equality of legal rights, not liberty to do as I wish (although I may want these too), but for a condition in which I can feel [202] a responsible agent as a full human being, even if I am attacked and persecuted for being as I am.

This is a hankering after status: for recognition. I desire to be understood, to be recognised, even if to be unpopular and disliked, and the only people who can so recognise me, and give me the sense of being fully human which recognition alone will give, are the members of the society with which I feel bound up.

There is no need to use such similes as those of organism or growth, or other biological language, in order to convey that in large part what I am is what I see myself as, or feel [myself] to be, and that this is literally something which only other people can give me by having certain attitudes towards me, in terms of which I then think of myself as having this or that position in society. My individual self is not something which I can detach or abstract from my relationships with others, or from those attributes of myself which consist in their attitude towards me. Consequently, when I demand liberation from the status of dependency, what I demand is alteration of status.

The sense in which the members of oppressed classes or nationalities demand what they perfectly correctly describe as their liberty is not in the first place simply liberty of action, nor equality

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of opportunity, but recognition of myself (or my class or my nation, or my colour or my race) as an [203] independent source of action, something entitled to direct itself as it wishes, and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free.

This is why paternalism is ‘the greatest *despotism* imaginable’, not because it oppresses more than naked, brutal, unenlightened tyranny, but because it is an insult to my conception of myself as a human being entitled to make my own life in accordance with my own purposes, and above all to be recognised as such by others; for if I am not so recognised then I cannot recognise it fully in myself, for part of what I am is determined by what I feel and think, and what I feel and think is determined by the feeling and thought prevailing in the society to which I belong, of which, in Burke’s sense, I form, not an isolable atomic unit, but an ingredient in what may, without danger of misleading metaphor, be called a social pattern. I may feel unfree in the sense of not being recognised as a self-governing human being, as an individual; but I may feel it also as a member of a class or a nation. And then I desire the emancipation of my entire class or nation or profession. But since the other members of my nation – while we are all oppressed – recognise me as a full member of themselves, even as I am recognised as a full member of the slave class by the other slaves, I may prefer to be bullied and ordered about by another slave, or another member of my oppressed nation, to being well and wisely treated by someone who belongs to another class or another nation, because I prefer recognition by my brother human being, even if I am misgoverned by him, to non-recognition by someone whom I do not feel to be a brother, but a being from another sphere, even if he governs me well.

This is the heart of the demand for recognition on the part of individuals and groups, professions and classes, nations and races. Those to whom I look for it may be the representatives of my class or my profession or my nation; I may not get ‘negative’ liberty at their hands, and may be harried from pillar to post by them, but they are members of my own group, they understand me and I understand them, and this understanding creates within me the sense of being somebody, and not nobody or half a nobody, in the world. It is this that leads the most authoritarian democracies to be preferred by its [sc. their] members to the most enlightened oligarchies, or causes a member of some [204] newly

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liberated Asian or African State to complain less if he is unjustly imprisoned by members of his own race or nation than if he were ever so lightly displaced by some cautious, benevolent, infinitely well-meaning administrator from outside.

Perhaps the proper term for this is not 'liberty' but 'fraternity', but as words are used it is liberty that such individuals and groups demand. This is liberty in the positive sense of self-direction, and the perversions of the meaning of the word which occur when fallacious analogies are made between reason, which directs the lower emotions in the individual, and the governing elite, which has a similar right to despotic rule over the 'lower' members of a society – these very fallacies are intelligible only on the assumption that one of the central meanings of the word 'liberty' is self-direction, whether by a man over himself or by a group over its members. This alone makes it possible for men to call for leaders and claim that this in some sense liberates them.

[205] It is a shallow view that assumes that the analogies between a person and a nation, or organic metaphors, or several senses of the word 'liberty' are simply fallacies, either of comparing entities which are fundamentally

[Cassette 2, side B]

either of comparing entities which are in relevant respects unlike, or of simple semantical confusion. What men who are prepared to barter liberty of individual action for the status of their group, and their own status within the group, want is not to surrender liberty for security, or for some assured place in a harmonious hierarchy, as they conceive it, in which every man and every class knows its place and is prepared to surrender the painful necessity of choosing, 'the burden of freedom', for the peace and comfort and mindlessness of an authoritarian or totalitarian structure. No doubt there are such, and no doubt such surrenders of liberty can occur and have occurred; but it is a profound misunderstanding of the temper of our times to assume that this is what makes nationalism or Marxism attractive to nations which have been ruled by foreign masters, or classes whose lives were directed by other classes in some feudal or otherwise hierarchical regime. What they desire is what Mill called 'Pagan self-assertion'. Indeed much of what he says, with excellent insight, about what it is that makes men desire

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liberty – the craving for non-conformity, for the assertion of their own values in the face of the prevailing opinion, for bold self-reliant personalities, for liberation from the leading-strings of the official [206] lawgivers and instructors of society – has little enough to do with his conception of freedom as mere non-interference, but a great deal with the desire of men not to have their personalities set at too low a value, assumed to be incapable of autonomous, original, ‘authentic’ (to use a fashionable modern existentialist term) behaviour, even if such behaviour is to be met with social restrictions or inhibitive legislation.

This kind of liberty is the answer to the question, not ‘What is to be the area of authority?’ but ‘Who is to govern me?’ – governed well or badly, liberally or oppressively, but the question being ‘Who?’ And such answers as ‘My representatives elected by my untrammelled choice’, or ‘All of us gathered together in regular assemblies’, or ‘The best’, or ‘The wisest’, or ‘The nation as embodied in this or that person or institution’, or ‘The divine leader’, or whatever it may be, are answers logically – and often politically and socially – independent of what extent of ‘negative’ liberty I demand for my own personal activities. Provided the answer to ‘Who shall govern me?’ is somebody or something which I can represent as ‘my own’, as something which belongs to me or to which I belong, I can in the other sense of the word ‘freedom’ claim this to be some kind of free life. ‘Whose service is perfect freedom’ can be secularised, and the State or the nation or the race, or an assembly or a dictator, or the family or I myself substituted for the Deity without thereby rendering the word ‘freedom’ meaningless.

[A1 and A3 inserted here]

[208] It is the non-recognition of this fact which perhaps blinds some contemporary liberals to the world in which they live.

[VII

Liberty and sovereignty]

The French Revolution was just such an eruption of the desire for self-government, even if it restricted individual liberty. Rousseau had spoken of the fact that the laws of liberty might prove to be more austere than the yoke of tyranny, for his liberty does not in the first place refer to the freedom of the individual to do as he

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pleases within a delimited area, but to what Constant had called the liberty of the Ancients, where liberty means the sharing of public power by everyone in the society, but where this public power can interfere with every aspect of every citizen's life. The liberals of the first half of the nineteenth century must be given the credit for foreseeing that liberty in this sense could easily destroy all liberty in the sense in which they desired it, the space within which a man might live his life as he pleased, without control, interference, social pressure.

They pointed out quite correctly that the sovereignty of the people can destroy that of individuals. Mill had explained patiently and unanswerably that those who govern are not necessarily the same 'people' as those who are governed – that some government is not the government 'of each by himself' but 'of each by all the [209] rest'. For him caution was an evil in itself (unlike the seekers after 'positive' liberty, who would admit coercion within the community if it improved its status vis-à-vis other communities, or if it was an inevitable means to the rational State, as Communists and other believers in 'democratic centralism' maintain). He spoke of the 'tyranny of the majority' and 'the tyranny of the prevailing feeling and opinion', and saw no difference between that and any other kind of tyranny which interferes with men's lives beyond the unalterable limits of private life.

Constant rightly pointed out that mere shifting of unlimited authority (sovereignty) from one set of hands to another does not increase liberty but merely alters the burden of slavery. What care I whether I am crushed by popular government or a monarch? Or even a set of laws? He quite correctly perceived that the problem for those who desire individual freedom is not who wields the authority – for anyone who wields it may become oppressive – but how much authority is to be placed in any set of hands, for unlimited authority in anybody's grasp will crush somebody. Usually men protested against this or that set or governors as unjust, but it is not that that is the cause of oppression, it is the mere mass of power centralised anywhere: it is the very notion of absolute sovereignty itself. 'It is not against the arm that one must rail,' Constant observes, 'but against the weapon. Some weights are too heavy for the human hand.' Democracy may disarm a given oligarchic class, a given privileged individual or set of individuals, but it can still crush individuals as much as any previous ruler.

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Equality of oppression is not equivalent to liberty. Nor does universal consent to interference cease to make it interference; if I consent to be oppressed, am I the less oppressed? If I sell myself into slavery, am I the less a slave? If I commit suicide, am I the less dead because I have taken my life freely myself?

Next record.

[A4 inserted here]

‘Popular government is a spasmodic tyranny, monarchy a more centralised despotism.’ Rousseau’s thesis, that by giving myself to all [210] I give myself to no one, is founded on the assumption that a sovereign is literally everybody. Firstly, even so, this ‘everybody’ may oppress one of its numbers; I may prefer to be deprived of my liberties by an assembly in which I am a perpetual minority; it may give me an opportunity, one day, of persuading others to do for me that to which I feel I am entitled; but to be deprived of my liberty at the hands of everyone save myself deprives me of it just as effectively. But of course in practice it is not ‘everybody’ who rules, but its agent, i.e. a power which can rob you of all you have left. Rousseau knew this, hence the protests against delegation and representation. What he wanted was a continuous plebiscite. Hobbes was at any rate more honest. He does not pretend that his sovereign does not enslave. He justifies this slavery but does not call it freedom.

Throughout the nineteenth century liberal thinkers correctly maintained the doctrine that if by liberty was meant a limit upon the powers of anyone else to force me to do what I did not wish to do, whether in the name of reason or State, my own good or the good of unborn generations, or in the name of God or man, history or class, or the rights of a man of genius to mould inferior beings to his pattern (for thus they too shall share in his free creative activity and be raised to a higher level), absolute sovereignty must be declared to be a tyrannical doctrine in itself. If I wish to preserve my liberty, it is certainly not enough to say that it must not be violated unless someone or other – a sovereign, or the popular assembly, or the king in parliament, or the judges, or all these persons together, or even the laws (for they may themselves be oppressive) – authorise this. I must establish a society in which there must be some interferences which nobody

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should ever be able to authorise. I may call such frontiers natural rights; I may found them upon what philosophy I please, I may call them the word of God or the demands of the ‘deepest interests of man’; I may believe in their validity a priori, or simply declare them to be subjective ends, but sufficiently widely believed and grounded in empirical human nature as it has developed through history to be part of the definition of what a human being is, so that those who do not recognise it are rightly regarded by me as having so different a view of what men are as to be justly called abnormal, morally deficient, deranged; but however I view it, unless some such stand is taken, individual liberty will not remain inviolable, self-government will not be sufficient. In theory, no doubt, in a democracy the majority of its citizens govern themselves, but historically no government has found much difficulty in forcing its subjects to generate the will that the government wants. The triumph of despotism is to force the slaves to declare themselves free.¹⁰

How is this to be prevented? Many devices have been suggested, but the principal safeguard of a democracy resides in retaining political rights with which to protect individual rights, in an exercise of these rights, and in the preservation of an enlightened public opinion. If it is believed widely enough and repeated often enough that no powers can be absolute – only a right can be that, in the sense that I have an absolute right to refuse to behave inhumanly – that ‘natural’ frontiers exist in the sense that there are some principles so widely accepted that they have entered into the definition of what it is to be a human being; rights and corresponding laws of which it would be absurd to say that they could be abrogated by some formal procedure of some absolute sovereign; if this is sufficiently often repeated, it is difficult for the worst governments to proceed publicly against it. That is the status, for instance, of the punishment of men not proved guilty even by some semblance of a trial, or indiscriminate

¹⁰ [This sentence was placed in quotation marks by Berlin, but I have not been able to find a published source for it. It might possibly be a garbled version of Goethe’s ‘Niemand ist mehr Sklave als der sich für frey hält ohne es zu sein’ (‘No one is more enslaved than he who believes that he is free without being so’). *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Tübingen, 1809) ii 202 (part 2, chapter 5, ‘From Ottilie’s Diary’). I am indebted to Jaap Engelsman for this hypothesis.]

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destruction of lives and liberties by the arbitrary will of a despot. This causes horror even in this hardened day; and this horror of despotism is precisely this implicit recognition of the existence of barriers to interference. If public opinion does not operate, the tyrants find it only too easy to pay homage to the power of the people, and speak for it even while muzzling it, and crush it in its own name.

[212] What liberals demand, therefore, is the limitation of sovereignty as such; what believers in 'positive' liberty demand is the placing of it in their own and not in others' hands. These views are ultimately not reconcilable. But it is a profound lack of social and moral understanding not to recognise the absolute claims for [sc. of] each of these types of liberty as being among 'the deepest interests of mankind'.

[VIII

The One and the Many]

In the end, what is responsible for despotism and the crushing of individuals in the names of ideals – distant ends such as ultimate felicity or their own 'real' selves, of which they may not be aware, or the claims of such embodiments of themselves as the destiny to which they are called, their historical mission, or their 'self-transcendence' in a 'higher' level, nation, race, class, tradition, Church, humanity, progress, liberty itself, all the great altars upon which human sacrifices have been brought – is the belief that somewhere in the past or the future, in divine revelation or the mind of the individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or the simple heart of an uncorrupt good man, there is a final solution. It is an ancient belief founded upon the assumption that all positive values in which men have believed must in principle be compatible, and perhaps even entail one another. 'Nature binds truth, happiness and virtue together by an indissoluble chain', said Condorcet, perhaps the most enlightened representative of this view.

[213] But is this true? We know that equality is not compatible with individual liberty, with unrestricted laissez-faire, as things are; that always to tell the truth will not necessarily conduce to universal happiness; that rigorous justice is not compatible with generosity or unrestricted liberty. But somewhere, we shall be told, somehow, a state of affairs must exist in which these virtues can

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coexist, otherwise the universe is not a cosmos, not a harmony. The conflict of values – tragedy – is an intrinsic part of it.

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No situation is conceivable even in principle, let alone realisable in practice, in which men are wholly wise, good, just, free, happy. The very notion of a rational ideal, the total harmony of all values and all interests, is seen to involve incompatibilities. This is a mortal blow to the very nature of a reasonable universe.

There are two things to be said about this. The first is that unless we are armed with some a priori guarantee, as the philosophers of antiquity thought that they were, that a total harmony is possible, and that tragedy is mere error, misunderstanding of ends or the choosing of the wrong means towards them, which omniscience could eliminate, we are left with the ordinary resources of empirical observation and ordinary human knowledge, and this certainly gives us no warrant for supposing that all good things (or all bad things for that matter) are compatible. They exhibit the world as a field in which agonising choices must occasionally be made between ends [214] one of which must perforce be sacrificed. Indeed, it is because this is the situation that men place such immense and justified value upon liberty to choose; [but] in whichever senses of the word 'liberty', there is certainly no a priori reason for supposing that painful choices are avoidable or that goals will not for ever be many and conflicting.

Secondly, whether it is true or false – and I have no doubt of the answer – it is the monistic view of life, whereby all problems are regarded as at any rate in principle being capable of reduction to some one central issue which can be settled one way or the other by some one final infallible method, that is responsible for the deep, serene, assured conviction in the minds of some of the world's most savage and effective despots and persecutors that what they did was fully justified by its purpose.

I do not say that the positive ideal of human freedom which consciously animated some of these men, and the movements which they have led, is false, or the result [of] a deliberately fraudulent use of language or confusion of thought, still less of the deliberate or accidental misuse of words. Indeed, I have tried to

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show that this positive notion of freedom is at the heart of those demands for recognition which animate the great social and political movements of our time; and that not to understand this is to blind oneself to the most vital facts and ideas of our age. But equally it seems to me that the recognition that whatever might be the case in an ideal universe, to believe and act as if there was some single method of reconciling the different ends of different human beings or groups of men – or indeed the ends of the same human beings in differing circumstances and at various times – is to believe something that is conspicuously false, and to be led by this fallacy into action that is often gratuitously brutal and iniquitous. If, as I believe, the ends of men are many and not all of them compatible with each other, the possibility of conflict can never be eliminated from human life, either personal or public. The power of choosing between incompatible, equally absolute alternatives is one of the characteristics that make human beings human. The value of the act of choosing lies in itself, not as a means to something else.

[215] The extent of my liberty to choose as I desire must be weighed against the claims of other values – equality or justice, or happiness, or whatever other ends men or societies may have set their hearts upon. Moreover it will be curtailed by the claims of other persons to an equal measure of liberty, which must be respected not because of some logical principle whereby liberty for one man necessarily entails belief in the liberty of others, but as a claim for justice or equality of similar claims, a moral end in itself. The need to calculate and weigh and compromise, and adjust and test and experiment, and make mistakes and never reach certain answers or guarantees for rational action, must irritate those who seek for clear and final solutions, and yearn for unity and symmetry, and all-embracing answers. Nevertheless it seems to me the inescapable task of those who, with [216] Kant, believe that ‘Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.’

The liberty that they [sc. those who agree with Kant about ‘the crooked timber of humanity’] seek to realise, and the world as they conceive it, seems to me, in comparison with that of the absolutists, more rational, more humane and more nearly realisable, because they alone are [sc. it alone is] compatible [217] with what most human beings have found the facts to be.

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That's all. Sorry it's such a muddle, very sorry about all that, but I think you'll get the end all right, anyhow it's the end of the piece.