

Three concepts of liberty

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In this essay I shall reconstruct the internal logic, peculiarities and contexts of three different concepts of liberty in order to identify their convergence and to draw some conclusions.¹

I.

Is there a difference between the *freedom of the citizens of a free state* and the *freedom of the subjects of a despot*? In **Hobbes'** view, there isn't, provided that the despot leaves the subjects alone, while **Harrington** claims that there is.

Hobbes argues that there is no difference between the liberty of the inhabitants of Lucca and those of Constantinople: "There is written on the turrets of the city of Lucca in great characters at this day, the word LIBERTAS; yet no man can thence inferre, that a particular man has more Libertie, or Immunitie from the service of the Commonwealth there, than in Constantinople. Whether a Commonwealth be Monarchical, or Popular, the Freedome is still the same."²

¹ I am grateful to **Quentin Skinner** (University of Cambridge, UK) for his comments. I am pleased to acknowledge **Judit Pokoly** (Budakeszi, Hungary) for the translation, and **Leonard Mars** (University of Swansea, UK) for his thoughtful linguistic corrections, too.

² **Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan***. (Ed. by Richard Tuck) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991 [1651] /Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought/. p. 149. Cf. **Richard Tuck: *Natural Rights Theories. Their Origin and Development***. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979. pp. 119-42, 174-77, **Richard E. Flathman: *Willful Liberalism. Voluntarism and Individuality in Political Theory and Practice***. Cornell University, Ithaca, 1992, **Richard**

By liberty **Hobbes** means *non-interference*. He identifies the domain in which the individuals remain free from the state with the area where the state does not intervene. The monstrous state, the **Leviathan**, the sovereign does exist, he claims, and it has to exist because thereby it can prevent the worst from happening: *the fight of all against all*. The area that it leaves free for the individuals is their liberty. It is that which does not depend on the nature of the state.

Harrington, on the other hand, claims that there is fundamental difference between the situation in Lucca and that in Constantinople: "... For to say that a Lucchese hath no more liberty or immunity *from* the laws of Lucca than a Turk hath from those of Constantinople, and to say that a Lucchese hath no more liberty or immunity *by* the laws of Lucca than a Turk hath by those of Constantinople, are pretty different speeches."³

The freedom of the citizens of Lucca differs from the liberty of the subjects of the Ottoman sultan because of the political establishment of the two towns. The Lucchese know their freedom is ensured by laws that have to be protected at the cost of their lives. The subjects of the Turkish monarch accept that it is not the laws but the grace of their lord that ensures their freedom.⁴ Maybe the sultan will leave them alone if he so wishes

Tuck: *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993. /Ideas in Context/. 202-348, **Quentin Skinner: *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes***. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, **Quentin Skinner: Liberty before Liberalism**. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, **Quentin Skinner: *Visions of Politics***. 3 volumes. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002. 2. *Renaissance Virtues*, 3. *Hobbes and Civil Science*.

³ **James Harrington: *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics***. (Ed. by **J. G. A. Pocock**). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992 (1656) /Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought/. p. 20. Interpretations: **J.G.A. Pocock: *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition***. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975. pp. 333-552, Idem: *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law. A Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century*. A Reissue with a retrospect. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987 (1957). pp. 124-47, **Jonathan Scott: *The Rapture in Motion: James Harrington's Republicanism***. In: *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*. (Eds. **Nicholas Phillipson, Quentin Skinner**). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993. pp. 139-63.

⁴ Cf. **Quentin Skinner: Liberty before Liberalism**. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998. pp. 59-99.

it, but there is no guarantee that he will do so. It is up to the sultan what he does to them as there are no laws to protect them from the despotism of the ruler.⁵

Under **Harrington's** thesis, the political community as a whole and its members are free if they are not subjected to anyone's rule. Their political liberty is the precondition for their free community. It assures that their laws protect them, and they, in turn, protect the laws, at the cost of their lives if need be. First of all they protect themselves from being subjugated by others - external conquerors or the *grandi ambiziosi*, the despotic mighty. The laws protect them from being serfs in bondage so that they can live as free individuals.

The argumentation of both thinkers was preceded by the struggle between the monarch and the parliament in England about whether the king had the right to have his subjects arrested and to levy taxation upon them without parliamentary consent. If he had no right - the king claimed -, then he was not different from the doge of Venice. The legal status of the English king - the parliament responded - should not differ from that of the doge of Venice, as the doge was the prefect of free citizens, and the English ruler was supposed to become the same. He would become such when he no longer had the right to arrest his citizens and impose taxes on them without the approval of the parliament.

On January 30, 1649, **Charles Stuart** delivered a speech to those standing around the scaffolds waiting for his beheading. Among other things, he said: "For the people, truly I desire their liberty and freedom as much as anybody whomsoever. But I must tell you their liberty and freedom consists in having government - those laws by which their life and their goods may be most their own. It is not to have a share in government. That is nothing pertaining to them."⁶

Interpreting the relation between political liberty and individual freedom, the king already deprived of his throne and soon to be deprived of his head conceived it as the relation between political privilege and the security of life and goods. Under his thesis, the governors exercised sovereignty, they governed and took care of the governed, and the governed obeyed them and availed themselves of the security ensured by the governors.

⁵ **James Harrington: *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics***. (Ed. by J. G. A. Pocock). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992 [1656] /Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought./ p. 20. The *grandi ambiziosi*, of course, **Machiavelli's** phrase in his *Discorsi*.

⁶ **Hugh Ross Williamson: *The Day They Killed the King***. Macmillan, New York, 1957. p. 143. Cf. the interpretations of **Michael Walzer** and **Ferenc Fehér** concerning the trial of Louis XVI: **Michael Walzer**: (ed., introd.): *Regicide and Revolution. Speeches at the Trial of Louis XVI*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1992. pp. 1-89, 217-51.

Hobbes first published the *Leviathan* two years after the beheading of the king, in 1651, and at first he wanted to dedicate it to **Oliver Cromwell**. **Harrington** published the *Republic of Oceana* in 1656. By then, the parliament had lost its true power.

Hobbes' view about the connection between liberty and the form of the state reminds one of the king's position and contradicts the earlier reasoning of the parliament.⁷ The whole of his argumentation and interpretation of sovereignty cannot be reduced to that, however. **Harrington**, by contrast, apparently reformulated the position of the parliament during the civil war, but his institutionalist republicanism was not incompatible with a person-centric interpretation of sovereignty. He dedicated his work to the lord protector.

There are thus different interpretations of liberty in **Hobbes'** and in **Harrington's** works. By freedom, **Hobbes** meant *non-interference, independence from the state, the personal and proprietary liberty* of the governed. It is *negative freedom* ensured by the embodiment of sovereignty, the state, as the antithesis to anarchy, demise, the *fight of all against all*.

In **Harrington's** interpretation, the freedom of a free political community is made possible and guaranteed by the institutionalization of the liberty of the political community. Political liberty is the medium, stage and precondition for the freedom of its members. That, in turn, is conditional upon the readiness of its members to protect the liberty of their community and themselves, i.e. upon the virtue of the free citizen.

In the following, I shall reconstruct, review and compare the interpretations of *personal and political liberty* as proposed by three thinkers of more recent times.

II.

Do *personal freedom* and *political liberty* cancel each other out? Does the abuse of *political freedom* mean the loss of its legitimacy? Does sacrificing personal freedom

⁷ **Quentin Skinner: *Visions of Politics***. 3 volumes. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002. 3. *Hobbes and Civil Science*, **Quentin Skinner: *A Third Concept of Liberty***. *Isaiah Berlin Lecture. Proceedings of the British Academy*, 117 (2002). 237-68. I appreciate Quentin Skinner's kind help for sending me his Isaiah Berlin-lecture.

increase political freedom? How are knowledge and freedom interrelated? I seek answers to these questions by reconstructing **Isaiah Berlin's** position.

At first sight, **Berlin's** well-known position appears to be similar to that of **Charles Stuart** and the thesis of **Thomas Hobbes**, and which was termed the *negative concept of freedom, non-interference*. A closer look, however, reveals a more complex interpretation, while its context is utterly different from the England of the 1640s/50s.

The immediate source of his differentiation of the *positive and negative concepts of liberty* was **Benjamin Constant's** interpretation of the political liberty of ancient Greek and Roman city-states and the personal freedom of the citizens of the modern states, the *liberties of the ancients and the moderns*, to use his terminology (refuting the concepts of Rousseau and the Jacobins). In an interview thirty years later, he reinterpreted the argument of his famous inaugural lecture of 1958 called *Two concepts of liberty*.⁸ I take the revision as the starting point of my reconstruction.

"There are two separate questions. One is '*How many doors are open to me?*'; the other is '*Who is in charge here? Who is in control?*' These questions are interwoven, but they are not the same, and they require different answers... Both questions, and their sub-questions, are central and legitimate. Both have to be answered. The only reason for which I have been suspected of defending negative liberty against positive and saying that it is more civilized, is because I do think that the concept of positive liberty, which is of course essential to a decent existence, has been more often abused or perverted than that of negative liberty.

Both are genuine questions; both are inescapable. And the answers to them determine the nature of a given society - whether it is liberal or authoritarian, democratic or despotic, secular or theocratic, individualistic or communitarian, and so on.

Both these concepts have been politically and morally twisted into their opposites. **George Orwell** is excellent on this. People say 'I express your real wishes. You may think that you know what you want, but I, the Führer, we, the Party Central Committee, know you better than you know yourself, and provide you with what you would ask for if you recognized your "real" needs.'

Negative liberty is twisted when I am told that liberty must be equal for the tigers and for the sheep, and that this cannot be avoided even if it enables the former to eat the latter, if coercion by the state is not to be used. Of course unlimited liberty for factory-owners or parents will allow children to be employed in the coal-mines. Certainly the weak must be protected against the strong, and liberty to that extent be curtailed. Negative liberty must be curtailed if positive liberty is to be sufficiently realized; there must be a balance between the two, about which no clear principles can be enunciated. Positive and

⁸ **Isaiah Berlin - Ramin Jahanbegloo: *Recollections of a Historian of Ideas. Conversations with Isaiah Berlin.*** Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1991. pp. 40-3. My italics. Cf. **Isaiah Berlin: *Four Essays on Liberty.*** Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979. pp. 118-72. **Isaiah Berlin: *Concepts and Categories. Philosophical Essays.*** Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980. pp. 173-98.

negative liberty are both perfectly valid concepts, but it seems to me that historically more damage has been done by pseudo-positive than by pseudo-negative liberty in the modern world. That, of course, may be disputed. A thinker whom I greatly admire is **Benjamin Constant** - his discussion of the two kinds of liberty in his essay called *De la Liberté des Anciens comparée a celle des Modernes* is one of the best I know on this topic."⁹

Unless it implies the inviolability of personal freedom, the political concept of freedom, self-determination and the sovereignty of the community give rise to the possibility of restricting, even preventing the individuals from having a private sphere unmolested by the community. As a consequence, the individual can be subjugated, his freedom can be eliminated in the name of the community. The "ancient", "positive" concept of liberty was reinterpreted, expropriated, turned upside down and distorted by the totalitarian movements and regimes, though not without precedents.

Any rigid concept of the universality of culture precludes the understanding of different cultures. The inflexible, restrictive applications of the least differentiated concepts of man adopted by the Enlightenment, the extension of the natural scientific approach to questions of the human realm requiring individual decisions lead to uniformity. All this may result in a mystique, the absolutist rule of experts, managers, technicians of power, in the idolatry of "*historical inevitability*" and consequent sacrifice of masses of people.

The projection of static and mechanic concepts of man and the scientific worldview into the sphere of the social sciences, the human realm, and especially into the area of historiography is harmful and one-sided, because the spread of the fatalistic-deterministic approach entails the suppression and erosion of individual autonomy. The *need for security* hinders critical thought and a mature behaviour, and facilitates the spread of various forms of *faith-healing* and *mumbo jumbo*. Autonomous individuals must face up to the fact that if they let others think and decide for them, they promote uniformity that suppresses the existence of autonomous individuals. They must assert their demand for autonomy again and again.¹⁰

⁹ **Isaiah Berlin - Ramin Jahanbegloo: *Recollections of a Historian of Ideas. Conversations with Isaiah Berlin.*** Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1991. pp. 40-2. Cf. **Quentin Skinner: *Liberty before Liberalism.*** Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, The precedents and reception of the *Two Concepts of Liberty* are summed up: **Michael Ignatieff: *Isaiah Berlin. A Life.*** Chatto and Windus, London, 1998. 218-263. Cf. **Benjamin Constant: *De la liberté chez les Modernes. Écrits politiques.*** Textes choisis, présentés et annotés par **Marchel Gauchet.** Librairie Générale Française, Paris, 1980. pp. 491-515. (Idem: *Political Writings.* Ed. by **Biancamaria Fontana.** Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989. pp. 307-28.).

¹⁰ **Isaiah Berlin: *Vico and Herder. Two Studies in the History of Ideas.*** Chatto and Windus, London, 1976, Idem: *Four Essays on Liberty.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979. pp. 118-72. Idem: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas.* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991. pp. 1-174.

In the president's message in the annual report of the **Aristotle Society** **Isaiah Berlin** cited the famous 8:32 verse of St John's gospel: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."¹¹

Does *knowledge* always make one free? Is the relation between knowledge and freedom as harmonious indeed as most of the Greek philosophers of antiquity, the christian theologians and modern rationalists thought? Berlin's answer was in the negative. In his discussion, the secularized, theological postulations of truth, human nature and ideal society independent of place and time promoted uniformity instead of the needs and possibilities of human autonomy. Berlin did not believe that *Knowledge* and *Freedom* were identifiable with each other. As against the deterministic and stoical interpretations of freedom, he formulated his opinion about the correlation between *Knowledge* and *Liberty* in terms of everyday freedom and value pluralism.

The paradoxical relation between causality and the moral responsibility of the individual does not mean at all that the knowledge of external determinants is equal to the freedom of choice. That is self-delusion. The other extreme is also illusion. It is an illusion that freedom is found in independence from the circumstances, in the degree to which the individual can preserve his inner freedom in the teeth of the circumstances, remain free within the prison walls. For, prison walls remain prison walls, even if we try to ignore them.

Knowledge and *freedom* are not identical either directly or indirectly, and their interplay is highly complex. In **Isaiah Berlin**'s view, our freedom is the pursuit of our activities unrestrained by obstacles. The more opportunities we have to pursue our activities unhindered, the freer we are. The fewer good chances we have to do so, the less free we are. This is at the core of the everyday concept of freedom.

Moral freedom, independence, self-determination are all important elements of liberty, but it cannot be reduced to them, as the objective world of options and possibilities is an indispensable precondition for our free decisions. We need open gates and roads to enter and tread - they are unavoidable prerequisites of freedom. To know of my opportunities is far less important than to have these options. The objective presence of my options is the basis of my liberty. My knowledge of my opportunities is an important contributory factor as to whether I avail myself of these possibilities or not, and my freedom lies in choosing from the options. I must make decisions, because my options and values do not all point at the same direction. Opting for one means rejecting another; the choice of one option opens up new possibilities but at the same time excludes others.

¹¹ **Isaiah Berlin**: *Concepts and Categories. Philosophical Essays*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980. p. 173. The quotation is half of a sentence. The whole sentence runs like this: "If you continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall knowe the truth, and the truth shall make you free." *The Holy Bible*. Meridian Books, Cleveland and New York.

My freedom is not in my knowledge but in my opportunities; the more I am aware of those opportunities and of myself, the more I can exploit them. The basis is not human nature extracted from time and place, but the rich diversity of the possibilities and the person's inner autonomy.¹²

It is harder to abuse "*negative*" *freedom*, immunity from interference than "*positive*" *freedom*, self-determination and self-rule, because positive freedom has been tied to the static and inflexible concept of human nature. This mentality made the different values of knowledge and freedom interchangeable by identifying the two. The two are different: knowledge is knowledge and freedom is freedom.

The sacrifice of individual freedom on the altar of the community is an absolute loss, not enhancing the values the sacrifice was made for. This manner of thinking claims more and more victims.

Isaiah Berlin sought to answer the question how the theoretical legacy of *humanist individualism*, the *Enlightenment* and *liberalism* made the assertion of such an inhuman logic possible. He opined that with its rigid and one-sided rationalist postulates, the main current of the Enlightenment implied the germs of totalitarian mentality. This it did by claiming that there was one and only one solution and those who were in possession of it might force the others to follow them, for they were the ones who represented their real interests. **Isaiah Berlin** connected the two totalitarian systems of the 20th century with two great liberating movements of the 19th century: regarding *fascism* as the distortion of *romantic nationalism* and *bolshevism* as the deformation of *humanist individualism*.¹³

Notably, the need for a single and exceptional solution is deeply rooted in the needs of humanity, first of all in the aspiration to replace freedom and justice with security and the harmony of values, with the royal road of thinking, via formulating or adopting all-embracing explanatory schemes, by piecing together a huge puzzle exempting ourselves from growing up and assuming responsibility for our deeds. This perpetuates our infantile state and exposes us to modern forms of mumbo-jumbo and idolatry.

It makes us prone to what the "**grand inquisitor**" represented: the domination of *Miracle*, *Secret* and *Authority*. The fear of freedom of choice is replaced by stability based on blind obedience, critical thought is replaced by the spirit of the flock, happiness, freedom and righteousness are replaced by a striving for security. All this has led, and still leads, to the unlimited power of professional revolutionaries and specialists in possession of "*Knowledge*" based on supernatural authority. The utopistic state of **Plato**, the vision of **Joseph de Maistre** was realized by **Lenin**. The model of technocratic society envisaged by **Auguste Comte** was brought to life by the reign of specialists.

¹² **Isaiah Berlin**: *Concepts and Categories. Philosophical Essays*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980. pp. 173-98.

¹³ **Isaiah Berlin**: *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979. pp. 1-117.

The source of fascism was *offended national self-esteem*. The sufferings of the Germans during the 30-year war, their inferiority complex and ambivalence towards French culture, then their response to the one-sidedness of rationalist humanism, the adaptation of the romantic myth of creation to the sphere of politics all contributed to the emergence of fascism.¹⁴

The 20th century renaissance of *nationalism* - like **Schiller's bent twig** - is a reaction to the utilitarian, technicized approach to the rationally organized world - in which many, the young, the poor, the citizens of former colonies did (do) not find their place. Many of those who did not (do not) want to be tokens in a game they are not playing arrive(d) at idealizing pre-industrialized states from a dream of the happy golden age to the creation of paradise on earth, and at turning against the utilitarian outlook ignoring their desires. What they (were) are against is the application of the techniques of the natural scientific approach to human life. They revolt(ed) as in that approach there is (was) no place for their individuality, will, emotions, beliefs, ideals, their own ways of living. Revolt is a pathological form of resistance for self-protection.¹⁵

Thus - following **Benjamin Constant** - **Isaiah Berlin** took a stance in the name of negative freedom, the freedom of the person, the individual, against totalitarian thinking and systems which claimed to increase positive, political liberty at the cost of sacrificing personal freedom, thus expropriating the concept of *positive freedom, political liberty*. He declared that the sacrifice of *personal freedom* did not reinforce *political liberty*, the self-government of the political community, and its annihilation was an absolute loss. In his view, the "*positive freedom*" of *totalitarian thought* and *regimes* meant the replacement of political liberty with the *need for security* and resignation from both real *personal and political freedom*. As a result of this substitution, the mystical and magical rule of the omnipotent and omniscient *absolutist elite*, the *technicians of power*, the *experts* arises (arose).

¹⁴ **Isaiah Berlin: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas.*** Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991. pp. 91-237, Idem: *The Sense of Reality. Studies in Ideas and Their History.* Chatto and Windus, London, 1996. pp. 168-93, 232-48, **Idem - Ramin Jahanbegloo: *Recollections of a Historian of Ideas. Conversations with Isaiah Berlin.*** Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1991. pp. 96-9.

¹⁵ **Isaiah Berlin: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas.*** Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991. pp. 207-37, Idem: *The Sense of Reality. Studies in Ideas and Their History.* Chatto and Windus, London, 1996. pp. 249-66.

The resultant rule is (was) fed by a branch of the theoretical legacy of the Enlightenment, the need for rigid, exclusive and finite solutions, and by the extension of the supremacy of artistic intuition advocated by romanticism to the sphere of politics.¹⁶

Its anthropological source lies in the need for protection by *man's infantilism* which postulates the harmony and unity of values as against their pluralism and conflicts. The experiences that are its fertile soil derive from *injured national pride* and the *desire for security by declining social strata* longing to prevent further deterioration. The intellectual model was offered by schemes relying on the desirability of the government of an *omnipotent elite*.

What the sacrifice of *personal freedom* leads to is not the reinforcement of the *self-government of the political community*, righteousness and equality, but *total despotism*. Its antidote is individual autonomy, personal freedom and its system of guarantees, the sharing of power. The maintenance of political liberty itself implies the decrease of power and the protection of *personal liberty*.

Isaiah Berlin corrected the rigid theses of the Enlightenment by the discovery, exploration and acceptance of the views of **Vico, Herder, Hamann and Jacobi**. He claimed that the Enlightenment was not unilinear but ramifying. His sympathy was not so much with the mainstream represented by **Voltaire, d'Alembert, Helvétius, Holbach and Rousseau** as that represented by **Montesquieu, Hume and Kant**.¹⁷ We know that the Enlightenment was not singular but plural, as there was far more than just a shade of difference between the enlightened absolutisms and Montesquieu or the Scottish age of reason, and each movement of the Enlightenment incorporated different trends.¹⁸

¹⁶ Isaiah Berlin: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991. pp. 207-37, Idem: *The Roots of Romanticism. The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965*. The National Gallery of Arts, Washington, D.C. - Chatto and Windus, London, 1999.

¹⁷ Isaiah Berlin: *Vico and Herder. Two Studies in the History of Ideas*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1976, Idem: (selected, intr., comment.): *The Age of Enlightenment. The Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979 (1956). pp. 11-29, Berlin, 1981. 1-24, 111-87, Idem: *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*. John Murray Publishers, London, 1993, Idem: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991. pp. 91-175, 207-37, Idem: *The Sense of Reality. Studies in Ideas and Their History*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1996. pp. 232-48.

¹⁸ Cf. Istvan Hont – Michael Ignatieff (eds.): *Wealth and Virtue. The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, J. G. A. Pocock: *Barbarism and Religion. I. The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, Idem: *Barbarism and Religion. II. Narratives of Civil Government*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

Berlin's *critique of the enlightenment* is closer to **Karl Popper's** and **J. L. Talmon's** *criticism of totalitarianism* than to **Horkheimer** and **Adorno's** *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. His outlook is obviously *liberal*, but not *utilitarian* or *perfectionist*, but *sceptical*.

Isaiah Berlin shaped his views in relation to the late 19th-early 20th century *English neo-Hegelian interpretations of liberty*, those of **Bernard Bosanquet**, **T. H. Green** and **L. T. Hobhouse**; he drew on them and polemicized with them, also when elaborating his criticism of totalitarianism. Because that was the context in which he developed his position.¹⁹

The core of his position is that *personal freedom* and *political liberty* do not cancel each other other, nor can one replace the other. Both have their own justification. Neither can make up for the other, the sacrificing of one does not result in the stabilization or growth of the other. Neither can be identified with anything else, hence with the other, with justice, equality, or security. However, the place of *political liberty* was, is and can be replaced by *security*, the *choice between possibilities by specialist knowledge* (actually of a magic character) which features as exclusive, *personal freedom by subordination to large organizations*.

The circle has been closed: both kinds of liberty may be squeezed out by *security*.

III.

What *sense does politics make*? What constitutes the medium of *political freedom*? Why did *political freedom* disappear from European public thinking? Why was it first replaced by the *freedom of the will*, and later by *personal security*, personal exemption from tyranny, and later by the despotism of *totalitarian systems*?

¹⁹ Quentin Skinner: *A Third Concept of Liberty. Isaiah Berlin Lecture*. Proceedings of the British Academy, 117.(2002). pp. 239-43.

Hannah Arendt was convinced that the central value of the *revolutionary tradition*, of *participatory democracy* and *self-government* was *political liberty*. Its possibility, precondition and medium was public life or *politics*. The foundation of self-government, direct democracy, political liberty was the political area of the Greek city-state where the free citizens of the polis gathered to argue with those of equal rank to them and take decisions. The free citizens were not subjugated by the concerns of the household, therefore they could devote their time and energies to public affairs. Everyday political practice was the basis, medium and precondition of political freedom.

Freedom is not an innate, implanted, inherent specificity of man, but it is a network of relations between human beings. It is an artificial institution of the dissimilarities and coexistence of people, a construct of politics, the achievement of the ancient polis.²⁰ Something that disappeared from the practice and memory of mankind for a long time; it was reborn in the organization of American self-government into a republic, followed by the hopeful attempts at self-government in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 in the wake of the Commune of Paris, the Russian revolution of 1905, and the German revolution of 1918.

"...- from the decline of the ancient to the birth of the modern world - ... political freedom was non-existent... by political freedom not a political phenomenon, but on the contrary, the more or less free range of non-political activities [were understood] which a given body politic will permit and guarantee to those who constitute it."²¹

For **Arendt**, political freedom (*positive liberty*, the *freedom of the ancients*) was freedom, while personal freedom (*negative freedom*, *liberty of the moderns*) meant exemption from politics.

"Freedom as a political phenomenon was coeval with the rise of the Greek city-states. Since Herodotus, it was understood as a form of political organization in which the citizens lived together under conditions of no-rule, without a division between rulers and ruled. This notion of no-rule was expressed by the word *isonomy*, whose outstanding characteristic among the forms of government, as the ancients had enumerated them, was that the notion of rule...was entirely absent from it. The polis was supposed to be an *isonomy*, not a democracy. The word '*democracy*' expressing even then majority rule, the rule of the many, was originally coined by those who were opposed to *isonomy* and who meant to say: what you say is 'no-rule' is in fact only another kind of rulership; it is the worst form of government, rule by the demos."²²

²⁰ **Hannah Arendt: *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass***. Hrsg. Ursula Lutz, Piper Verlag, Munich, 1993.

²¹ **Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution***. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). p. 30.

²² **Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution***. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). p. 30.

Freedom was tied up with *the absence of rule*, with a state in which there are no rulers and subjects, but there are only citizens of equal rank.

"... equality, which we... frequently see as a danger to freedom, was originally almost identical with it. But this equality within the range of the law... was not equality of condition, ... but the equality of those who form a body of peers. *Isonomy* guaranteed isotes, equality, but not because all men were born or created equal, but, on the contrary, because men were by nature (*physei*) not equal, and needed an artificial institution, the polis, which by virtue of its *nomos* would make them equal. Equality existed on in this specifically political realm, where men met one another as citizens and not as private persons."²³

Equality and liberty were *artificial constructs* for the free citizens of the Greek polis:

"... our notion [of equality is] that men are born or created equal and become unequal by virtue of social and political, that is man-made, institutions.... The equality of the Greek polis, its *isonomy*, was an attribute of the polis and not of men, who received their equality by virtue of citizenship, not by virtue of birth. Neither equality nor freedom was understood as a quality inherent in human nature, they were both not *physei*, given by nature and growing out by themselves; they were *nomos*, that is, conventional and artificial, the products of human effort and qualities of the man-made world."²⁴

People not as *human beings* but as *citizens of a city-state* were entitled to freedom.

"...freedom was understood as being manifest in certain, by no means all, human activities, and ... these activities could appear and be real only when others saw them, judged them, remembered them. The life of a free man needed the presence of others. Freedom itself needed therefore a place where people could come together - the agora, the market-place, or the polis, the political space proper."²⁵

Freedom was *political freedom* attached to the agora of the Greek city-state, the space of politics. The original ancient Greek political interpretation of liberty and the ancient political practice of democracy were later overshadowed by the fact that in contrast to the sophists, **Plato** and **Aristotle** as well as their disciples withdrew from the centre of the public life of the city-state, the agora, and hence from political life. Their views were discussed and spread in narrow circles; instead of the everyday practice of political

²³ Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). pp. 30-1. Cf. Idem: *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989 (1958). pp. 22-78.

²⁴ Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). p. 31. Cf. Idem: *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989 (1958). 22-78.

²⁵ Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). p. 31. Cf. Idem: *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*. Hrsg. Ursula Lutz, Piper Verlag, Munich, 1993.

liberty to which every free citizen was entitled, they restricted their activity to the *freedom of scientific dispute*. Their *anti-political attitude* implied the devaluation of politics and political freedom, and since the Christian thinkers drew on their teachings, this gave rise to the christian interpretation *turning inward, away from the surrounding world*, reducing liberty to the *freedom of the will*. **Augustine** severed liberty from any external space and politics, interpreting it as an *inner sphere*. The freedom of the will came to be linked with transcendency and not with the political practice of the city-state and its external venue, and hence it was torn completely from political freedom. Introversion, isolation from the external sphere was diametrically opposed to the practice of Greek city-states, as the inner sphere was the sphere of *man* and not the sphere of *men or people*.

Modern-age political philosophy - from **Hobbes** to the 20th century - upgraded individual and social security as against politics and liberty which is inseparable from it. Then both notions - politics and liberty - came to be expropriated and distorted by the totalitarian regimes.²⁶

Nor is consumer society intent on the restoration of self-government, the practice of politics, political freedom. The *human condition*, however, is tied up with the meaning, the essence of politics, its practice, with political freedom. The essence of politics is *political freedom, no-rule, the virtue of courage, participatory democracy, republicanism*.

The revolutionary tradition of humanity in the modern age is an expression of the need for self-government expressed by the spontaneous, democratic grass-roots initiatives from the 1770s/80s to the Hungarian revolution of 1956 (the revolutionary councils of Paris in 1871, of Russia in 1905, of Germany in 1918 and Hungary in 1956). The concept of *revolution* is only valid as the *foundation of liberty* in the modern age. Liberty is a political concept while *liberation, exemption from suppression* is a concept of personal implications.

The French revolution failed to lay the foundations of liberty because the leaders of the revolution tried to eliminate poverty with the tools of state politics, which they failed, and they also failed to restrict violence, to bridle royal absolutism with constitutional means and to create a constitutional monarchy. By attempting to politically solve a *social issue*, they entered the road of *centralization* and *absolutism*, and in the *centralized nation state* they restored the former *royal absolutism*, setting a bad example to later revolutions.

By contrast, the American revolution laid the *foundations of liberty*. The resultant *federal republic* provided the frame for the self-government of the citizens. The lack of abject poverty and absolutism, the ampleness of land and the protestant ethic all

²⁶ **Hannah Arendt**: *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. Penguin Books, New York, 1993. pp. 143-71. Cf. Idem: *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*. Hrsg. Ursula Lutz. Piper Verlag, Munich, 1993. See also: Idem: *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1989 (1958). pp. 22-78.

contributed to the *Constitutio libertatis*, while the wisdom of the founding fathers helped to implement it in practice on the basis of the existing *system of self-government*.²⁷ This was overshadowed by the new image of America that disparaged the American revolution and replaced the Americans' concept of themselves with the "land of promise", a new Canaan flowing with milk and honey, the land of plenty longed for by the European immigrants. This can be described by the dichotomy of *wealth and poverty*, and not by *liberty vs tyranny*, whereas the American revolution and American republic laid the groundworks of liberty.

While the *French revolution* was the *most effective and least successful* of the revolutions, the *American* was the *least effective and most successful* one. The majority of modern-time revolutions emulated the French model, and the revolutionaries of the modern age became "*professional revolutionaries*". The concepts that are used to describe revolutions are categories of the French revolution, as the unsuccessful French revolution became the *epitome*. This has gone so far that we even think of the American revolution in terms of the French one and the significance of their own revolution has faded even on the minds of the Americans themselves. Nonetheless, it was the creation of the American federal republic that laid the foundation of liberty, of the practice of anyone's participation in the affairs of the polis, in shaping his own and his community's life.²⁸

The opposite of liberty is despotism, while the opposite of a democratic republic is not simply traditional despotism but modern despotism, the *totalitarian system*, which is *not* simply based on *fear* (as were the traditional tyrannies) but on *ideology* and *terror*.

In **Hannah Arendt's** view, *totalitarian systems* create a new form of government, the rule of ideology and terror. The Nazi and bolshevik regimes implied as an essential feature the incessant *terrorization of the obedient subjects*, the *annihilation of the legal and moral personality*, the *realization of hell on earth*. Totalitarian systems brought about a hitherto unseen world, the world of destruction.

The concentration camps were embodiments of the vision of Hades, the labour camps of Purgatory, the extermination camps of Hell. The essence of totalitarian rule is the *replacement of reality with fiction*, the forcing of the redundant masses into shadowy existence. It implies the nightmare of robots, utter loneliness, the total isolation of atomized individuals and the elimination of the private sphere. If legitimate rule is symbolized by the space between people and the illegitimate rule of traditional despotism

²⁷ **Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution***. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). Cf. **J. G. A. Pocock: *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition***. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975, **Joyce Appleby: *Capitalism and a New Social Order***. New York University, New York, 1984, **Isaac Kramnick: *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. Political Ideology in late Eighteenth-Century England and America***. Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London, 1990, **Joyce Appleby: *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination***. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992, **Philip Pettit: *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government***. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

²⁸ **Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution***. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963). **Philip Pettit: *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government***. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

is envisioned by a desert, then the totalitarian system is like a desert sandstorm in which individuals are standing chained to one another, in absolute solitude.²⁹

The mercilessly asserted thesis of the "struggle of the species", "struggle of the classes" for endless expansion, constant motion proposed in a deductive logical procedure that is deprived of all human values and terrorizes with its demand for lack of contradiction resulted in a world in which there is *no law*, from which both external and internal freedom disappeared, where the newborn had no right, not even the *right of beginning*, where "human rights" are annihilated, in short, a world that is contrary to human nature and extinguishes human nature.³⁰

With its process of the disfranchisement of the Jews and their planned, industrialized extinction *anti-Semitism* is the *prelude* and part of *the emergence of a form of government based on the ideology of the struggle between the races and classes as well as on terror*.³¹ A form of state that is added as a new formation to Montesquieu's four categories: the democratic republic built on virtue, the aristocratic republic based on moderation, the constitutional monarchy relying on honour and despotism based on fear and terror.³² It is a form of government to overcome which the credit and functioning of *politics*, the *democratic political practice of self-government* and *political liberty* have to be restored.

Hannah Arendt's thinking offers analogies to works by Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and Walter Benjamin, as well as Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. Her ideas were fundamentally influenced by the experience of the *Shoa*. A disillusioned but repeatedly fought for and achieved *perfectionism* can be discerned in her approach. Her *notion of politics* and *concept of liberty* are reinterpretations of the earlier *republican discourse* which draws on the American *founding fathers*, on Thomas Jefferson, *English republicanism*, James Harrington and even deeper on Niccolo Machiavelli also used by Harrington as his source and *Florentine renaissance republicanism*.³³ It was

²⁹ Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A Meridian Book, Cleveland, Ohio, 1958.

³⁰ Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A Meridian Book, Cleveland, Ohio, 1958.

³¹ Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A Meridian Book, Cleveland, Ohio, 1958. Cf. Idem: *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*. (Ed. intr. Ron H. Feldman). Grove Press, Inc, New York, 1978. 55-279, Idem: *Eichmann in Jerusalem. Report of the Banality of the Evil*. Viking Penguin, New York, 1964.

³² Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A Meridian Book, Cleveland, Ohio, 1958. Failing to refer to the aristocratic republic, Arendt cites Montesquieu's typology of states imprecisely.

³³ Thomas Jefferson: *Writings*. (Select, notes: Merrill D. Peterson). The Library of America, New York, 1984. Cf. J. G. A. Pocock: *The Machiavellian Moment. Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975, Joyce Appleby: *Capitalism and a New Social Order*. New York University, New York, 1984, Isaac Kramnick: *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. Political Ideology in late Eighteenth-Century England and America*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca-London, 1990, Joyce Appleby: *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*. Harvard University

Machiavelli, who in the *Discourses on The First Ten Books of Livy* enunciated that the republic had to be defended again and again from the *grandi ambiciosi*, the greedy power-holders who expropriate the sphere of politics, which allows for the existence of a free state of free and equal citizens.³⁴

In her opinion, *politics* is the specificity of the "*condition humaine*", a man-made institution, *no-rule*, the sphere of a *free communal life*. It has brought about and guarantees *political liberty*, the *virtue of courage*, and *self-government*. It ensures *restarts* and allows for the experience of *compassion*. It disappeared from sight for a long time and surfaced again in the *revolutionary tradition*, in the *federal republic*, the *efforts aimed at self-government*. It can be the *counterweight to totalitarian regimes* and it can, and must, be an alternative to the *consumer society*.

Its establishment is one of the hardest and most specific human tasks. It precedes (and in peaceful cases - presupposes) *democratic socialization* which was an individually interpreted everyday experience in Great Britain for **Isaiah Berlin** and in the United States for **Hannah Arendt**. And it preoccupied their contemporary **István Bibó** in Hungary without any direct experience of democratic socialization, as it was merely a *program* and not a given fact in Hungary.

IV.

How can the *non-free citizens of a non-free state* become free, and how can they make their political community free? The *establishment of a free political community* is principally based on the everyday experience that the *members of the political*

Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992, **Philip Pettit**: *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

³⁴ **James Harrington**: *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics*. (Ed. by **J. G. A. Pocock**). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991 (1651), **Thomas Jefferson**: *Writings*. (Select, notes: **Merrill D. Peterson**). The Library of America, New York, 1984, **Hannah Arendt**: *On Revolution*. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963), **Quentin Skinner**: *Liberty before Liberalism*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 1-57, **Philip Pettit**: *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997. Cf. **Michael Ignatieff**: *The Needs of Strangers*. The Hogarth Press, London, 1990. pp. 105-31.

community, the individuals can and do *take possession of their community*. Thus they sense and comprehend that the working and construction of the political community relies on *their consent* and efforts. They can elect, weigh and dismiss those who are supposed to represent their will but they do not do so. However, the building of a *free political community* presupposes *free individuals*, whereas people become free if they live in a free political community. How can one *break out of this vicious circle*?

"Most regrettably, we have gone so far down the wrong path that we no longer notice the awful *absurdity*...of expecting and developing the typical virtues of a free individual: spontaneous enthusiasm, conscious self-sacrifice and responsible activity for a community that does *not* guarantee the elementary conditions of the development of free individuals."³⁵

The foundations for the evolution of free human beings were laid by the greatest achievement of European political and religious development: the transformation of personal rule, based on crude violence and the subjugation of others into impersonal, professional service. It is an incomplete human undertaking, the modern-time variant of which, the grand experiment of a social organization based on liberty and the principles of democracy which has ended up in a blind alley on several counts. Points of break through must be found, first of all in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which are unable to live in free political communities because of their *fears caused by traumatic historical experiences* and not because of their "temper" as the traditional self-acquitting and superficial interpretation asserts. In the course of their 19th-20th century history, the inhabitants of Germany, Bohemia and Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary could never, or rarely, couple their mass democratic sentiments with democratic experiences, so they were overcome by fear which drove them to *political hysteria* instead of action to transform the political community democratically.

Their *fear-generated political hysteria* can and must be overcome by the *stabilization of their territory*, the independent solution to the *tasks of building up a democratic political community*, by *living through the liberating experiences of the process*. In this process former subjects can rise to become members of a free political community, free human beings. In the course of laying the foundations the still non-existent *conditions of the free political community* arise and the former subjects are taught to be *free*. This requires careful assessment of the situation, a good sense of judgment, the right behavioral

³⁵ István Bibó: *Válogatott tanulmányok*. [Selected essays. 4 volumes] (Sel. By Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 2. p. 219. Cf. Idem: *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination. Selected Writings*. Ed. by Károly Nagy, translated by András Boros-Kazai. Atlantic Research and Publications, Highland Lakes, 1991. pp. 13-324, 421-523, R.N. Berki: *The Realism of Moralism: The Political Philosophy of István Bibó. The History of Political Thought*, XIII, 3. (1992). pp. 513-34, Gábor Kovács: *Can Power be Humanized? The Notions of Elite and Legitimation in István Bibó's Political Philosophy. Studies in East European Thought*. 51, 4, (1999) pp. 307-27.

patterns, much effort, determination and resolve. It is also conditional upon sensitive, *righteous and just peace treaties, planned and limited revolution*; the *abolition of monopoly positions*, the implementation of *radical reforms, freedom of speech* and behaviour based on convincing and not defeating the opponents.

In different situations freedom means different things, but the core is the same: the *absence of rule, self-government*. It can be defined in contradistinction to *compulsion, personal rule*, incomprehensible *imperial power*, the *circulation of tyrannies*, the *concentrations of power* and *new-type monopolies based on efficiency as a goal in itself*. Liberty means *spontaneity* against compulsion, *absence of rule* as against personal domination, *political frameworks based on self-rule* as against vague imperial power and despotism, the differentiation, *separation and controlling of power centres* as against power concentrations, and new forms of the division of power, the *plurality of value-centered ways of living* as against efficiency as a value in itself. Liberty is not a transcendental endowment but the *great potentiality of the human condition*.³⁶

For it is not freedom but *fear* that has anthropological sources. It is rooted in the physically frail hence communally organized, and conscious human being having to pay for the miraculous development of his mind with fear, with the knowledge of death and with having to cope with this knowledge. An awareness of the potentiality and inevitability of becoming crippled, of suffering and death often leads to *substitutes*, to *domination over others* and thus getting rid of one's own fears, or forgetting them temporarily. That, however, only causes temporary relief, a short respite.³⁷

Most suffering of humankind is the outcome of these substitutes. This *fear-generated aggression* was bridled by the European (and in part the Chinese) attempts at social organization: first *taming personal rule* by the rule of *rank* and *wealth* restricting fear and forcing it into institutions, then by introducing the system of *mutual services*.

³⁶ Cf. Philip Pettit: *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997.

³⁷ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr.). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 3. pp. 11-8. The source of the argumentation: Guglielmo Ferrero: *Pouvoir. Les génies invisibles de la cité*. Le livre de poche, Paris, 1988 (1945). pp. 30-8. Cf. István Bibó: *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination. Selected Writings*. Ed. by Károly Nagy, translated by András Boros-Kazai. Atlantic Research and Publications, Highland Lakes, 1991. pp. 13-324, 421-523, R.N. Berki: *The Realism of Moralism: The Political Philosophy of István Bibó. The History of Political Thought*, XIII, 3. (1992). pp. 513-34, Gábor Kovács: *Can Power be Humanized? The Notions of Elite and Legitimation in István Bibó's Political Philosophy. Studies in East European Thought*. 51,4, (1999) pp. 307-27. .

Converting personal rule into *professional and impersonal* service means the domestication of domination and the control of underlying fear.³⁸

Human history includes experiments, principles, techniques, political cultures, moral standards of social organization away from personal rule towards impersonal service, as well as individual and collective experiences of these as a reinterpretable and renewable tradition and potential future tasks. In space and time, however, this is the *exception* and not the *rule*. There is no natural law that can guarantee the success of this experiment, hence it requires continuous revision. The more so, as the shift away from traditional rule to a social organization based on freedom and democracy may easily entail a *vacuum* that can be quickly filled with earlier and new forms of despotism when *self-government* is not the everyday experience of the individuals living in the society. The declaration of human rights is well founded when it is guaranteed by the practice of everyday life.³⁹

These attempts were not the outcome of sterile theoretical ratiotinating. The *public life of ancient Greek city-states* was the first experimental ground of politics where *constitutionalism, political self-government and political liberty* first appeared against tyrannies. The *republican tradition of ancient Rome* contained both the *aristocratic and the democratic principle* and a *mixed form of state*. It represented an unusually long, *stable*, so-far the most lasting *legitimacy*, but during the *dominatus* it was also devoured by the despotism of ancient oriental emperors. In the early Middle Ages, on the ruins of the Western Empire the clerical intellectuals of a christian schooling and representing moral criticism came into the position of organizing society, and could establish the basics of a system of *mutual services* and introduced the need for *moral responsibility for power*.

This need was made prevalent by modern West European societies, first of all the English society's vocation, mass strength, opposition to authorities and the experience by more and more of its members of the relativity of power. A *balance* evolved between the

³⁸ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr.). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 3. pp. 13-5, 18, 23-9, 30-9, 40-3, 47-67. Cf. Guglielmo Ferrero: *Bonaparte en Italie*. Editions de Fallois, Paris, 1994 (1936), Guglielmo Ferrero: *Talleyrand au Congrès de Vienne*. Editions de Fallois, Paris, 1996 (1940), István Bibó: *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination. Selected Writings*. Ed. by Károly Nagy, translated by András Boros-Kazai. Atlantic Research and Publications, Highland Lakes, 1991. pp. 13-324, 421-523, R.N. Berki: *The Realism of Moralism: The Political Philosophy of István Bibó. The History of Political Thought*, XIII, 3. (1992). pp. 513-34. Gábor Kovács: *Can Power be Humanized? The Notions of Elite and Legitimation in István Bibó's Political Philosophy. Studies in East European Thought*. 51, 4, (1999) pp. 307-27.

³⁹ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr.). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 4. 741- 45.

agencies and possessors of power, and this experience and demand for the rule of laws was coupled by **Locke** with the principles of man's *personal freedom and dignity*. **Montesquieu** defined a facet of the English model - the confrontation of several powers - as the thesis of competing powers, the principle of *separating the branches of central power*. The American founding fathers adopted **Montesquieu's** thesis for the wording of the constitution not out of some dogmatic consideration but because **Montesquieu's** scheme fitted their political organization, historical precedents and the routine techniques of their institutions better than any other model.

The late 18th century formulation of *liberty* and *equality* was not an abstract thesis and exclusive principle. Underlying the wording of the principle of liberty was **Montesquieu's** definition of the offsetting and balancing of the foci of power as the main lineament of the English exercise of power, which he generalized and declared to be a constitutional requirement against the concentration of power, despotism. Equality based upon his experience of the aristocratic self-government of Geneva in **Rousseau's** teaching of popular sovereignty.⁴⁰

The discrediting of the two principles was caused by their separation during the derailment of the French revolution. The *division of power* was set aside, leading to the "popular" despotism of *popular sovereignty* which concentrated, not separated the powers. The context in which the issue of liberty and equality cropped up was concrete: in war time, should food prices be limited or should they be allowed to fluctuate freely?⁴¹

At the beginning, the French revolution asserted the principles of *popular sovereignty, representation, plurality of parties, division of power and the codification of human rights*. As long as it defined itself in opposition to monarchic and aristocratic legitimacy, it liberated enormous energies. When, however, it adopted the practice of *centralizing absolutism* in its efforts to subordinate the clergy and the provinces to its authority, it came into conflict with the sentiments and loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the population, unleashing immense amounts of fear and violence. It denied its declared principles, *popular sovereignty* and the *separation of powers*, as it eliminated the decentralisation of power, created power concentration and turned into despotism, bequeathing harmful patterns (the roles of the *professional revolutionary* and the *confirmed reactionary*) upon posterity. These became the germs of the totalitarian movements and powers of the 20th century.⁴²

⁴⁰ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 4. pp. 745-50, 762-65, 772-78, 796-97. Cf. Guglielmo Ferrero: *Pouvoir. Les génies invisibles de la cité*. Le livre de poche, Paris, 1988 (1945). pp. 5-38, 50-67, 144-85.

⁴¹ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 4. pp. 745-58, 761-72, 796.

⁴² István Bibó: *Selected essays*.] (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 2. 367-397, 4, pp. 741-58, 759-82, 796-98. Cf. Isaiah Berlin: *Four*

In István Bibó's interpretation, both nazism and bolshevism are the negation of European development. While the German and other fascisms had no theoretical foundation, with *resentment* and *political hysteria* being their essence, Marxism-Leninism led to a despotism on a par with fascism, but there was irreconcilable contradiction between its social political goal and tenets on the one hand and means on the other. The program of social liberation underlying the theses and goals of Marxism was connected to the power humanizing process of European social development. The contradiction between the ultimate goal and the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, and its Stalinist practice made it possible that the youth, the intellectuals and workers brought up in the communist system revolted and called the power-holders to account for the annulled principles. This program was falsified, and discarded by Marxism, the essence of which is the *doctrine of class struggle* and *revolutionary violence*. The logical consequence of this indoctrination was Leninist one-party rule and the privileged organ of oppression. The total suppression and terror introduced by Stalin was the logical outcome of Leninism, and it was identical with fascism in its means.⁴³

Fascism is the utter annihilation of the human personality and its subordination to the community's real or illusory interests, the separation and confrontation of the cause of liberty with the cause of the community. Fascism refers to traditional aristocratic values and, at the same time, denies the whole European heritage, appeals to reactionary forces and destroys their social prestige, mobilizes democratic mass sentiments and leads them into a blind alley, generates a revolution and solves nothing. It connects and annuls the right to self-rule with the cult of power, democracy with the rule of the leader, equality with racism. It leads the energies of a democratic revolution into *collective madness*, generating *collective hysteria* and destroying everything. The source for this development is the *disorder of the community's self-confidence* and its believed *incapacity of action*.⁴⁴ Fascism is the product of the distortion of democratic development.

Bibó, as has been seen, found the essence of totalitarian systems identical, but he differentiated their bases. Totalitarianisms are the modern forms of despotism, their counterpoint is a society established on the principles of liberty and democracy.

Essays on Liberty. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979. pp. 118-72, **Hannah Arendt**: *On Revolution*. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963), **Isaiah Berlin**: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Chapters in the History of Ideas*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1991. pp. 95-174, **Isaiah Berlin**: *The Sense of Reality. Studies in Ideas and Their History*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1996. pp. 168-93.

⁴³ **István Bibó**: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by **Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr.**). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 4. pp. 141-56.

⁴⁴ **István Bibó**: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by **Huszár Tibor – István Bibó, Jr.**). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 1. p. 466.

In his opinion, the precedent for modern liberty was *privilege*. It first of all denoted the *self-government* of the minority, the privileged and was valid in small circles (ancient city-states, village community, aristocrats' and medieval national communities). Modern liberty evolved from their earlier variants of self-rule, and primarily means that *political power* is not independent of the *ruled* but depends on *their consent*. It is not personal rule but *impersonal service*. The sovereign people, the nation has not a single subject and is not one and indivisible as **Rousseau** presumed. Consequently, it may - and often does - happen that there is *despotism* with reference to the people. The community's omnipotent control, its monopoly over products, the lack of a private sphere make it impossible for the individual to be free.⁴⁵

European political development means primarily the unified system of the valid achievements of liberal democracy and its inner coherence, and that none of the constituents can be removed without fundamentally damaging the whole system.

Popular sovereignty implies *democratic, legitimate constitutionalism* based on the parliament, an *executive power depending on the people, equality before the law*, and a *set of rights* preventing the appropriation of the concept of "people". This system guarantees the existence and functioning of an *opposition*. It is realized in the *representative system*; the guarantees for political and personal freedom, the prevention of the expansion of power and its corrupting nature are ensured by the *division of the state powers*, of the old and new branches or foci of power. The system of institutional guarantees of the human rights (to life, liberty, property as the result of work, as well as the freedom of the press and assembly) is ensured by an *independent judiciary*. The *prevention of modern concentrations of power* in economic, intellectual, informational and technocratic-managerial areas requires new forms of the deconcentration of power shaped by man's instinctive need for freedom.

Liberal democracy is not limited to a particular era, but a valuable legacy and valid achievement of mankind, which needs correcting and improving. Its distortions ("the fetish of property, the myth of the bourgeoisie, the monster of capitalism, the aberrations of share-holding companies, and the fairy-tale of workers' capitalism") show that as a vestige of order by the grace of God, besides, instead of or after the system of privileges by birth, of inherited rank (the classic variant of conservative authoritarianism) there exists the power of inherited property (not based on work).⁴⁶

The reconstructed interpretation of freedom is linked to the ideals of human dignity, equality and justice. *Human dignity* presupposes the concepts of *equality* and *justice*, each referring to liberty and to one another.

⁴⁵ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 1. pp. 183-201. Cf. Michael Ignatieff: *The Needs of Strangers*. The Hogarth Press, London, 1990. pp. 105-31.

⁴⁶ István Bibó: *Selected essays*. (Sel. by Tibor Huszár – István Bibó, Jr). Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986-90. 4. pp. 778-82, 796-97.

The concept of liberty had a patriotic character: the *nation* is not a fictitious entity or a system of privileges encoded in collective rights, but the framework of political liberty, and the precondition, venue and network of individual liberty. A *free political community* is one in which the *cause of liberty* and the *cause of the community* are synonymous. The modern democratic nation is a conscious political community consisting of free people based on the experience of a joint venture, capable of solving their problems. In the 1940s the cited example was often the revolutionary France, then from the 1960s/70s it became England, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian states.

István Bibó did not live in a democracy. His life was spent in authoritarian and totalitarian systems. For a few years he experienced a fluid political state with elements of democracy, but dictatorship stifled them. For a few weeks he experienced the spontaneity of freedom, during the revolution of 1956. His life's goal was to lay the groundworks for the free political community of free people as a program, task and desirable human condition.⁴⁷

His approach implying perfectionist elements was eclectic, empiricist and first of all *contractualist*, based on the method of separation of the facts and values from each other first, than their joint consideration. Given the opportunity he would have played the role of the political therapist. His work drew on the interwar literature of European decline, first of all **Barna Horváth's** philosophy of natural law, **Guglielmo Ferrero's** psychologically based interpretation of legitimacy, **Ferenc Erdei's** conception of the rise of the peasantry, **István Hajnal's** theses of mutual services and **László Németh's** utopia of a society of intellectuals. He used and modified all these sources to his system of values.

His interpretation of liberty was determined by the *political concept of freedom* implying the demand to *modernize the traditional anti-absolutistic liberal guarantees for the division of power*, the republican *ethos of the citizen*, the democratic principle of *popular sovereignty*, the admittedly valid achievements of liberal democracy, the correction of their distortions, and radical peasant democratic and "petty bourgeois

⁴⁷ The above summary was influenced by two outstanding monographs: **Iván Balog: Politikai hisztériák Közép- és Kelet-Európában. Bibó István antiszemitizmusról, nacionalizmusról, fasizmusról.** [Political hysterias in Central and Eastern Europe. István Bibó on nationalism, anti-Semitism, fascism]; **Gábor Kovács: Az európai egyensúlytól a kölcsönös szolgáltatások társadalmáig. Bibó István, a politikai gondolkodó.** [From the European equilibrium to the society of mutual services. István Bibó, the political thinker] Eszmetörténeti Könyvtár /Library of the History of Ideas 2, 3./, István Bibó Szellemi Műhely - Argumentum Kiadó, Budapest. 2004. Cf. **Gábor Kovács: Can Power be Humanized? The Notions of Elite and Legitimation in István Bibó's Political Philosophy. Studies in East European Thought.** 51, 4, (1999), pp. 307-27.

socialist" ideas as well.⁴⁸ This approach as a whole does not fit either of the two major and mistaken political discourses in today's Hungary": the narratives of "*adopting European models*" versus "*national self-centeredness*", the self-justification of the *oligarchy* versus *tyrannical ochlocracy*.⁴⁹

V.

Of the three thinkers only **Berlin** and **Arendt** knew each other personally. They met twice, in New York in 1941 and a decade later, probably there again. This is known from the book of conversations with **Berlin**. It also reveals that Berlin had a poor opinion of Arendt's works. In his judgment, the analysis of the nazi system was correct in the *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, but it lacked originality. In his view, the part on the Soviet regime was mistaken. The basis theses of the *Human Condition* were, to his mind, false. He regarded as simplistic that the Greeks did not hold work in esteem and the Jews did. In the Greek authors, with very few exceptions, there is no depreciating thesis about work. For the Jews, on the other side, labour was a punishment, a curse. And although the Talmud says that earning one's bread by manual labour does not prevent anyone from being an excellent rabbi, that does not mean that labour as such is honorable. The ideal of the drive to work, that working is praying, is a typical christian tenet. And Eichmann's wickedness was not at all banal. On the whole, Berlin regarded Arendt's thinking as a chain of free associations lacking profound historical knowledge, and he ascribed her influence on the intellectuals to a fashion-trend. For all this, he relied on the opinion of **Gerschom Scholem**.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Cf. **Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution***. Penguin Books Ltd. Harmondsworth, 1979 (1963), Idem: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A Meridian Book, Cleveland, Ohio, 1958, Idem: *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*. Hrsg. Ursula Lutz, Piper Verlag, Munich, 1993.

⁴⁹ **Iván Zoltán Dénes: *Európai mintakövetés – nemzeti öncélúság. Értékvilág és identitáskeresés a 19-20. századi Magyarországon***. [Adoption of European models versus national self-centeredness. System of values and search for identity in Hungary at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries] Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2001, Idem: *Önrendelkezés, nemzet, nacionalizmus. Egy értelmezés kontextusai*. [Self-determination, nation, nationalism. The contexts of an interpretation] **Regio**, 2002/4. pp. 58-78.

⁵⁰ **Isaiah Berlin-Ramin Jahanbegloo: *Recollections of a Historian of Ideas. Conversations with Isaiah Berlin***. Charles Scribner's Son, New York, 1991, pp. 81-5.

It is possible, even probable, that **István Bibó** read one of the editions of **Arendt's** book on totalitarianism, but there is no such proof. But **Hannah Arendt** has heard about him, the last persevering minister inspiring the establishment of workers' councils during the Hungarian revolution that she followed with eager hope, during one of her holidays in Ancona in the early '60s via Károly Kerényi, the famous philologist and expert on Greek antiquity.⁵¹

Isaiah Berlin and **István Bibó** never met. Yet the names of these two advocates of freedom (of utterly different life-paths) came close to each other on one occasion. Isaiah Berlin was one of those who sent Hungarian prime minister Ferenc Münnich a telegram on March 14, 1961, which read: "On the eve of the Hungarian revolution of 1848 we should like to express our conviction that the Hungarian government would act wisely and generously if it let the **outstanding scholar Professor István Bibó** free on the forthcoming anniversary of Hungary's liberation from fascism."⁵²

In his writings, first of all his inaugural lecture, **Isaiah Berlin** argued that the sacrificing of personal freedom for other values, including political liberty does not lead to the enhancing of other values including political liberty, but results in the discarding personal freedom. Individual freedom and political liberty are jeopardized by the same uniform, reductionist view of man, the all-embracing need for security and the total power of the omnipotent elite or experts.

Hannah Arendt regarded political freedom as the indispensable precondition and essence of the human state, and defined its content as self-rule. It is not known how she defined the interrelation between individual and political freedom, or whether political liberty implied personal freedom. What is certain is that the suppression and disappearance of political freedom was paired by her with the growing need for security gaining ground in the name of personal freedom, negative liberty, non-interference.

⁵¹ I am grateful to Ms. Zsuzsa Szőnyi for this information who gave it to me in Rome during the *Serata Commemorativa, István Bibó, pensatore europeo*, Accademia d'Ungheria in Roma in 18 May 2004.

⁵² *István Bibó (1911-1979). Életút dokumentumokban*. [A life in documents] (Sel. **Tibor Huszár**). 1956-os Intézet-Osiris, Századvég, Budapest, 1995. p. 543. **Michael Ignatieff: Isaiah Berlin. A Life**. Chatto and Windus, London, 1998. p. 231. The telegram was signed by: **A. J. Ayer, Isaiah Berlin, Maurice Cranston, Dennis Gabor, Max Gluckmann, Michael Polanyi, Hugh Seton-Watson, Edward Shils, T.S. Simey, Richard Titmuss, C. V. Wedgwood, Elizabeth Wiskemann**. There are some interesting, undiscovered parallels between István Bibó's and Hubert Butler's thoughts. Cf. **Hubert Butler: Independent Spirit. Essays**. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1996, *Unfinished Ireland. Essays on Hubert Butler*. Ed. by **Chris Agee**. Irish Pages in association with The Butler Society, Belfast, 2003.

István Bibó regarded self-government interrupting the circulation of tyrannies, that is political liberty, as the school, medium and value that propelled the emergence, assertion and experience that the rulers could only rule with the approval of the ruled, their power must be justified and accounted for. Political liberty is the precondition of individual freedom which is also implied by it.

Despite their differences, there are many analogies, points of intersection and similarities between **Isaiah Berlin's**, **Hannah Arendt's** and **István Bibó's** concepts of liberty. Isaiah Berlin's and István Bibó's meet at the points of interpreting the division of power, of opposing despotism, in the position they took against rigid schemes - both inflexible nationalism and political romanticism -, in their interpretation of fascism, opposition to utilitarianism, magical thought and the rule of omnipotent politics and the elite of specialists. There are several meeting points in Hannah Arendt's and István Bibó's interpretation of politics and political liberty, as both understood self-government and absence of rule by political freedom.

Though arguing for *personal freedom*, **Isaiah Berlin** did not share Charles Stuart's position which said that the rulers should rule and ensure the security of the lives and property of the ruled, and the ruled should get along within the roles ascribed to them by the rulers and not interfere with the business of the rulers, i.e. with politics. Hannah Arendt and István Bibó firmly opposed this stance, as they conceived of politics as a condition without rule and of political freedom as self-government.

When the source of their concepts of liberty is sought, one does not find the answer in linguistic or rhetorical aspects, but in contents, structure, genre and their roles. Though all the three thinkers wrote books, their main genre was the lecture or the essay written as a lecture. All three spoke to fictitious or real audiences, so the explication of their trains of thought, the linguistic form, their arguments, the mobilization of the rhetorical arsenal all aimed to directly convince their audiences, rather than to exert indirect influence, to elaborate the theme monographically. Of course, the latter can also be exemplified, but it is the exception, not the rule. They spoke to different audiences and were parts of different discourses.

In his writings, first of all in his inaugural lecture, **Isaiah Berlin** argued that sacrificing personal liberty on the altar of other values such as political liberty does not lead to the boosting of the other values including political liberty, but it merely means the waiving of personal freedom. Personal freedom and political liberty are threatened by the same homogeneous, rigid, reductionist image of man, the overpowering need for security and the power of an omnipotent elite or group of specialists. In confronting the totalitarian use of the concepts with their roots, with what they referred to and what they falsified, Berlin relied on the *British empirical tradition* and referred to the *neo-Hegelian discourse in Oxford* which was then almost half a century old. The credit and persuasive force of his argumentation stem primarily from the connection he established between the appropriated concept and its spiritual roots, from the - almost conceptual nominalist - inner articulation of the dichotomous concepts and mutual cross-references.

Hannah Arendt confronted the contentious present with a former, and now lost world, the world of politics. She thought that the need for politics was present like an underground stream, covered up with oblivion, lack of courage and expropriation. In the course of her argumentation, she carried out three operations. First, she offered an explanation as to why politics had been devalued. Second, she explained why what had been lost was a current and valid value. Last, but not least, she confronted this loss of value with its tragic consequences in such a way that the maintenance or restoration of the human condition became pitted against the possibility and experience of the loss of the human condition. The convincing force of her argumentation lies in the common experience of the tragic antinomy and in her explanation, which touched on, and sometimes transgressed the boundary separating politics as a science from politics as a vocation. The *republican pathos of virtue* was coupled with *Jewish prophetism*, and both gained their penetrating force from the experience of the *Shoa*.

István Bibó applied the method of synopsis. According to this method, the peculiarities of two theoretically different worlds cannot be compared if the two worlds are confused with one another. The incompatible must not be reconciled but first they must be clearly separated, and viewing the distinct phenomena together, one may find a manner of approach to both. This method usually leads to proposals for a "*tertium datur*", to the role of the political psychotherapist in the face of two evils, false extremes, hysterical polarizations, some fear-inspired, artificially fuelled menace. Bibó's sober recommendations devoid of sham pathos were meant to convince the opposing parties of the advantages, necessity and possibilities of quitting the zero-sum game. They also tried to propose a smallest common denominator and make the opposite parties realize that agreeing was in the interest of both of them. It is obviously the behaviour and psychology of the judge intent on bringing about a compromise, and the therapeutical role of the political psychologist. He attempted this in situations of political crisis, in connection with the possible partners of a critical situation. His attempt to handle the crisis was also an attempt to consolidate the embryonic and vulnerable democracy.

Isaiah Berlin's, **Hannah Arendt's** and **István Bibó's** interpretations of liberty - which differ on several points – converge on others. Most conspicuously they converge on the thesis advocated by all three of them that individual and political freedom do not cancel each other out. It is a moot question to this days.

Detailed studies were published on the relationship between the two concepts of liberty by **György Márkus** and **János Kis** in Hungary in 1997.⁵³ Among other things, **János Kis** says:

⁵³ **György Márkus: A szabadságról.** [On liberty] *Beszélő*, 1997/8-9. 18-29, **János Kis: A szabadságról – Márkus Györggyel vitázva.** [On liberty - polemizing with György Márkus] *Beszélő*, 1997/8-9. 30-53, **György Márkus: Illúziók és reáliák.** [Illusions and realities] *Beszélő*, 1997/8-9. 54-71, **János Kis: Marginaliák.** [Marginalities] *Beszélő*, 1997/8-9. 72-82. Cf. Idem: *Constitutional Democracy. Three Essays.* Central European University Press, Budapest-New

"In general, the liberals of old were no democrats, or if they accepted democracy, they only understood it as a form of government that was best suited to guaranteeing the liberal rights. They opined that negative liberty could only be protected from the state if the illusions about the positive liberty of political participation were given up. Unlike them, I agree with Rousseau who claimed that democracy is valuable in itself (and not only as a means for external ends). Further, I find that Rousseau is also right in saying that democracy has value in itself if it means the self-government of the political community. ... the idea of self-government entails the interpretation that by the laws of a democratic state the citizens put restrictions on themselves to make their ordered cooperation possible. ... Positive (political) liberty as the concept of cooperative self-restriction is to be distinguished from Rousseau's mistaken - and dangerous - theses."⁵⁴

The discourse in which the above position was formulated differs from the discourses of **Isaiah Berlin**, **Hannah Arendt** and **István Bibó**. It is apparently based on the conclusions of the *Rawls-discourse* and **Ronald Dworkin's** interpretation of *equality*, on the thesis of *positive discrimination*. Its conclusion is similar - at least at one point - the interpretation offered by Isaiah Berlin, Hannah Arendt and István Bibó: their concepts of liberty, *the liberty of the human actions* and *the status of the unbounded, free human beings* /versus the slavery of the bounded slaves/, do not cancel each other out.⁵⁵

York, 2004, Idem: *A politika mint erkölcsi probléma* /The politics as a moral problem/. Irodalom Kft, Budapest, 2004.

⁵⁴ **János Kis: *Margináliák***. [Marginalities] *Beszélő*, 1997/8-9. 82.

⁵⁵ This distinction came to my mind as the most important outcome of **Quentin Skinner's** remarks to an earlier version of my article.