

TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY

First corrected draft

EDITORIAL NOTE

Isaiah Berlin's inaugural lecture as Oxford's Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', has its proximate origins in the text of his *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*.¹ The lecture was delivered and published² in 1958, and ever since it appeared it has been the most discussed and the most contested of his texts. Parts of it have given rise to widely differing interpretations, and parts of it (sometimes the same ones) have been found unconvincing, ambiguous, inconsistent, equivocal or otherwise unclear, despite the undoubted clarity of Berlin's prose.

Fortunately several drafts of the lecture survive. As often happens in the case of texts that have been reworked a number of times before publication (especially if, as here, they began life in dictated form), earlier drafts, if at times cruder and less elegant, can throw useful light on the meaning of later ones, since the ideas they contain are sometimes expressed more simply and directly, and are less set about with qualifications, defences and digressions. Seen through the prism of a previous version, a later one can yield more meaning than when read in isolation – or even a different meaning. This is especially true of a philosophical pointillist like Berlin, an intellectual impressionist who, in his later work, tends to communicate his thoughts with a cumulative, often repetitive, rhetorical scatter-gun rather than by providing a plain, sober, rigorous exposition, step by explicit logical step.

¹ Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*, ed. Henry Hardy, with an introduction by Joshua L. Cherniss (London and Princeton, 2006; 2nd ed., Princeton, 2014): see especially chapters 2 and 3.

² By the Clarendon Press in Oxford.

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It is certainly true in the case of this lecture, which is why I have published much of the draft material as an appendix to the second edition of *Freedom and Its Betrayal* (FIB2),³ lectures themselves based on the text published as *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*; and also, as an appendix to the second edition of the latter volume, a condensed version prepared for delivery, only half as long as the text that appears in *Liberty*.⁴ Other drafts are posted online at http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published_works/tcl/.

The text below is the original dictated version of the lecture, revised in manuscript before being redictated, not for the last time, on its way to becoming the text published by the Clarendon Press. As such it is the earliest considered text of the lecture, which gives it a special status in its development. The manuscript corrections – between the lines, in the margins, on the backs of pages, on separate sheets – are very dense, and much of the time amount to wholesale rewriting. The small spidery writing, intended for his own eyes rather than that of his secretary, is sometimes very hard (once or twice impossible) to decipher.

I have corrected Berlin's direct quotations where I can: fidelity to his text seemed here misleading rather than illuminating. Where the same quotations appear in *Liberty*, I have not repeated the references provided there; for other quotations I have added references where I can. I have silently corrected obvious linguistic slips of dictation or drafting, but have signalled conjectural amendments with square brackets. I have included the section headings from the published text, in square brackets where they do not appear in the version in progress at the relevant point. Finally, I have inserted arabic numbers, also in square brackets, to indicate (sometimes necessarily roughly) where the pages of the text published in *Liberty* begin, to facilitate comparison between the various versions of this important and celebrated work.

³ London and Princeton, 2002; 2nd ed., Princeton, 2014.

⁴ Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford and New York, 2002).

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INAUGURAL LECTURE: TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY

[166] Mr Vice-Chancellor, the studies to which the Chichele Chair of Social and Political Theory is dedicated have fallen upon evil days in this country. It is an odd and melancholy fact that in the land which has made a great, perhaps the greatest, contribution to modern political thought, among a people which still takes legitimate pride in the names of Hobbes, Locke, Burke, Mill, Green, Bradley, so few men gifted with a capacity for theoretical reasoning should today choose to deal with social or political ideas.

I do not know how to explain this phenomenon. It may be that the decline in British power has vastly increased preoccupation with the problems of survival on the part of all political parties and institutions in England, [leading] to the neglect of reflection about the ends of life; and without conscious disagreement about what these ends are, political thought, for better or worse, cannot live. It may be that our philosophers, intoxicated by their magnificent successes in more abstract realms, look with disdain upon a field in which radical discoveries are less likely to be made, and talent for minute analysis is less likely to be rewarded. It may be that the relative stability and mild climate of our social life – compared with the storms that sweep over our neighbours – are not propitious to the raising of fundamental social or political issues. But whatever the cause of this, political thought as an academic subject, is at present a peaceful backwater in English-speaking countries.

[167] And yet this is 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 so deeply 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, in universities and outside them: persons trained to think – they acquire an unchecked momentum and a power over multitudes of men that may grow to be too great and violent to be affected by rational criticism, which could certainly have altered them at an earlier

stage. Over a hundred years ago the German poet Heine warned the French, among whom he lived, not to underestimate the power of ideas: philosophical concepts nurtured in the stillness of a professor's study could destroy a civilisation. He declared that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was the sword with which the defensive walls of the old theology and the old metaphysics had been razed to the ground; and prophesied that, as the works of Rousseau had proved to be the bloodstained weapon which in the hands of Robespierre destroyed the old religion, so the doctrines of Fichte and Schelling would one day be turned, with terrible effect, by their fanatical German followers against the liberal culture in the West. Who shall say that he was mistaken? Yet if professors can wield this fatal power, it may be that other professors can disarm them.

It is only a very vulgar historical materialism that denies the overwhelming power of ideas, and says that ideals are mere material interests in disguise. It may well be that, without the pressure of social or economic forces, ideals often remain impotent; but what is certain is that these forces – which, after all, are nothing other than a way of describing men working, feeling, striving with and against other men and inanimate nature – do not achieve their full effect without attaining some degree of recognition of what they are – whether accurate or distorted – in human minds: that is, through the medium of ideas; most of all, of social and political ideas. A man's political theory, even in its most active aspect, even in its most practical and applied form as a specific doctrine or faith or policy or goal, remains a part of his awareness of himself as seeking to find his place and purpose in the world, and this commonly goes by the name of his philosophy. Despite every effort to separate them, conducted by a blind scholastic pedantry, politics has remained indissolubly intertwined with every other form of philosophical activity: more particularly with ethics, and indeed with every form of thought which enquires about the ends of life and the character and the hierarchies of human values. To neglect the field of political thought because its historically changing, unstable subject matter is not to be caught by the fixed concepts, abstract models and minute methods of analysis suitable to logic, or the philosophy of science, or linguistic

analysis or epistemology – to demand a unity of method in philosophy and reject whatever the method cannot make much of, is merely to allow oneself, quite gratuitously, to remain at the mercy of primitive and uncriticised beliefs in one of the great realms of human experience.⁵

[168] Political philosophy is a branch of moral philosophy and consists in the discovery, or application, of moral notions in the sphere of social relations. It seems to me that unless this truth is grasped the present condition of our world cannot be understood. I do not mean, as I think Hegel may have meant, that all historical movements or conflicts between human beings are reducible to movements or conflicts of ideas or spiritual forces. But I do mean that to understand such movements and conflicts must, in the first place, be to understand the clashing ideas or complete attitudes that alone make them a part of human history and experience, and not mere natural events.

The political words we use and acts we commit are not fully intelligible unless we realise that we are living at a time when the world is divided between two all-embracing sets of political ideas which, although they share common assumptions, are in violent and open conflict over what has long seemed to me the deepest of all political issues – that of obedience. Why should I (or anyone) obey anyone else? Why should I not do as I wish? This may not be the most interesting, or the most frequently discussed, topic of politics, but it seems to me to be its central question. For if we did not live in a world in which it is, at least *prima facie*, necessary or desirable that some men should obey the orders of others – if we lived in a world in which all men could do as they wished, without conflict, in some harmonious state, or somehow insulated from one another, so that whatever they did caused no friction between them (as anarchists, and they alone, think possible), the problems that give rise to political speculation could scarcely have arisen.

[168] It is plain that our world is not such: that unless some men obey others, the minimum of human organisation upon which bare life depends cannot be achieved. Who shall obey whom? How and why? Why do they think they must obey? Do

⁵ [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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they obey without knowing it, and what are the forms of the delusion and are there inevitable consequences or conditions of human nature, or history, or the government of the universe? And if they disobey, may they be coerced? And by whom and to what degree and in the name of what and for the sake of what? Upon the answer to these questions of coercion diametrically opposed views are held in vast areas of the world today. The conflict between these views is the most articulate expression of the two great systems of life and thought that are embattled against each other at this moment. It seems to me, therefore, that any aspect of this issue is worthy of examination.

[I]

To coerce a man is to deprive him of liberty – but what is liberty? Almost every moralist in human history has praised it: like happiness and goodness, its meaning is so vague that there is little it has not been used to cover: I have no intention of discussing the two hundred senses of this protean word recorded by historians and lexicographers; I propose to examine no more than two; but those two, central or crucial ones: with a very great deal of human history behind them, and I daresay before them too. [169] The first of these political senses (for the philosophical senses are not relevant to this topic), which I shall call the negative sense or criterion, is involved in the answer to the question ‘What is the area of freedom within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he likes, or decides to do or be, without control or interference by other persons?’ The second arises in answer to the question ‘What or who is or should be the source of control, or interference that determines someone to do or be one thing rather than another?’ can prevent someone from doing what he wishes?’ To say that there is one sense of the word ‘freedom’, but two criteria for its determination, seems to me a confusion. The two questions are clearly different, even though the answers to them may overlap.

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1. (a)⁶ *Negative Freedom*

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no human being interferes with my activity. This is the sense of liberty in which the classical English political thinkers, Hobbes, Locke, Bentham, Paine, and indeed Mill, used it.⁷ Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can do what he likes. If I am prevented by other persons from doing what I like I am to that degree unfree; and if the area within which I can do what I wish is contracted by others beyond a certain minimum, I can be described as being coerced or, in some cases, enslaved. ‘Coercion’ is not a term that covers 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 am 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 a man is described as being a slave to his passions, for instance, there is a feeling that the word is being used in a perfectly legitimate and normal but somewhat metaphorical sense. Certainly

⁶ [There are no further numbers or letters in either series implied here. The number may be not 1 but I

] ⁷ ‘A free man’, said Hobbes, ‘is he that [...] is not hindered to do what he has a will to.’ Law is always a ‘fetter’ [*De cive*, chapter 14], even if it protects you from being bound in chains that are heavier than the law’s – arbitrary despotism or chaos. Bentham says the same.

there is a sense in which he is not free; and this sense is of the greatest importance, as I hope presently to make clear. But whatever the analysis of this sense, 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 to be or do what he would not otherwise have wanted or decided to be or do. To be prevented from attaining what at any time (or, in the case of the slave to his passions, only when you are being rational) you desire is certainly to be, to that degree, unfree. But you lack political liberty or freedom (I use these terms interchangeably) only if you are prevented you from attaining your goal by human beings. Mere incapacity for attaining your goal is not lack of political freedom.

This may, perhaps, be brought out best by such current expressions as ‘economic freedom’ and ‘economic slavery’. It is argued, very plausibly, that if a man is too poor to acquire something upon which there is no legal ban – a loaf of bread, a box at the opera – he is as little free to have it as he would be if it were [170] legally forbidden him, that is, if he were threatened with legal coercion if he attempted to do so. If it were the case that my poverty is similar to a disease – that I cannot buy bread or pay for a box at the opera as I cannot see if I am blind – this would not naturally be described as a lack of freedom, least of all, political freedom. It is only because it is suspected or believed that my inability to get what I want is due to the fact that other human beings have made arrangements whereby I am prevented from having enough money with which to pay for it that I begin to speak of coercion or slavery. In other words, it is due to a particular social or economic theory about the causes of my poverty. If my lack of means is due to bad luck or accident, or the unintentional effect of social or political institutions, then, if I accept the theory, I 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 I consider unjust or unfair, I speak of oppression. The nature of things does not madden us, only ill will does, said

Rousseau.⁸ The criterion of whether I am justified in speaking of myself as deprived of liberty is the part that I believe to be played by other human beings, directly or indirectly, with or without intention, in frustrating my wishes. My inability to satisfy my wishes that was due to impersonal causes is not tantamount to lack of freedom in this sense. 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 or Bentham or J. S. Mill meant when they used this word. They disagreed about how wide this area could or should be. They supposed that it could not, as things were, be unlimited, because if it were, it would entail a state in which all men could interfere without limit with all other men; and this would lead to a social chaos in which men's minimum needs would not be satisfied, or else the liberties of the weak would be suppressed by the strong. And since they perceived that human purposes and activities do not automatically harmonise with one another, and, moreover, whatever their official doctrines, put high value on justice, happiness, security and varying degrees of equality, as well as freedom, and believed that specific areas of liberty for individuals could be secured only by curbing universal liberty of interference with it, they were prepared to curtail freedom in the interests of the minimum degree of social organisation required by the kind of human association which they thought possible and desirable.

[171] It is therefore assumed by all these thinkers that the area of men's free action must needs be limited by laws; but equally it is assumed (especially by such liberals as Locke and Mill in England, and Constant and Tocqueville in France) that there exists a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated, for if it is overstepped the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for the minimum development of his natural faculties, which alone makes life worth living, and alone confers

⁸ '[I]l est dans la nature de l'homme d'endurer patiemment la nécessité des choses, mais non la mauvaise volonté d'autrui' ('It is in the nature of man patiently to endure the necessity of things, but not the ill will of others'): *Émile*, book 2; *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin, Marcel Raymond and others (Paris, 1959–95), iv 320.

such value as they possess upon the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred. Consequently 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. 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. Still, a practical solution must and can be found.

[173] Philosophers with an optimistic view of human nature, and a belief in the harmonisation of human interests, such as Locke or Adam Smith and, in some of his moods, Mill, believed in the need for securing a large area for private life, that is to say, in a large extension of individual liberty which neither the State nor any other authority must be allowed to overstep. Hobbes and those who agreed with him, especially conservative or reactionary thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, argued that if men were to be prevented from cutting each other's throats, and making social life a jungle or a wilderness, greater safeguards must be instituted to keep them in their places, and wished correspondingly to increase the area of centralised control, and decrease that of the individual. But both sides agreed that some portion of human existence must remain independent (whether by common agreement or not) of the sphere of social control. To invade that preserve, however small, was despotism. The most eloquent of all defenders of freedom and privacy, Benjamin Constant, who had experienced the full horrors of Jacobin dictatorship, declared that at the very least the liberty of religion, opinion, expression, property must be sacrosanct and guaranteed against arbitrary invasion. Others provided other lists, but the argument for keeping authority at bay is always substantially the same. We must preserve a minimum area of personal freedom because, in Constant's words, we cannot sacrifice the 'eternal principles of justice and mercy' if we are not to 'degrade or deny our nature'. No doubt we cannot remain absolutely free, and must give up some of our liberty to preserve the rest. But total self-surrender is self-defeating, for if we give all 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 his human nature. But, it may be objected, that ‘nature’ is the vaguest of vague terms, and too many divergent views have been taken by too many equally eminent thinkers about the true nature of man. 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 their parents, or for trying to save them from the executioner, then what we do may be illegal (for Robespierre, or Napoleon, or Louis XI enacted just such laws), but nobody will be found to say that it is unnatural. A law which tells us to condemn the innocent, to commit acts of treachery, 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. If there are men who reject these standards without a qualm, or do not feel their moral force at all, they are abnormal, and correctly described as ‘inhuman’, or ‘outside the human pale’; communication with them can be as difficult as those who disbelieve the laws of physics or say they are Napoleon. 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, whether in the narrow sense given it by Bentham, or Mill’s ‘the permanent interests of man as a progressive being’, or the pronouncements of a categorical imperative, or the sanctity of the social contract, or many another concept with which men have sought to clarify and justify their convictions, ‘liberty’ in this sense means liberty *from*, absence of interference beyond a certain frontier.

“The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way”, said the most famous of all its champions, and meant by this liberty of thought, feeling, conscience, opinion, expression, tastes and pursuits, and liberty of combination. Is compulsion ever justified? Mill had no doubt that it was: in extreme cases, where a society was genuinely endangered and the institutions which themselves preserve freedom were in peril, individual liberty could be, at any rate temporarily, curtailed or suspended. Moreover, since justice demands that all individuals

be 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 such collisions: the State was reduced to what the socialist Lassalle once contemptuously described as the functions of a nightwatchman or traffic policeman, with no positive duties at all.

What made this protection of individual liberty so sacred to Mill? In his famous tract, perhaps the most famous of all essays on the subject, 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 will decline; there will be no scope for originality, genius, for mental vigour, for moral courage. Society will be crushed by the weight of ‘collective mediocrity’. Whatever is ‘rich, diversified, and animating’⁹ 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.’ The defence of liberty consists in the preservation of an area within which human personality is to have the fullest possible play. Unless a man can pursue his ends without more than the socially necessary minimum of interference, make acts of choice which, even if they are bad or lead to disaster, are nevertheless felt by him to be his own; his choices between open possibilities and not choices made for him or on his behalf; unless at least the goals which alone give his life such value as it has in his own eyes are chosen by him without pressure, without the need to account for them in terms of some law or principle or set of values imposed upon him and demanding obedience without his consent, then however lofty the principle, however conducive to his own well-being – and even if he recognises it to be so – because he could not have rejected it, or rebelled against it, he is not a fully human

⁹ *On Liberty*, chapter 2.

being, his human essence has been ignored, or degraded or destroyed. To face a man with the choice of extermination or survival on condition of exercising no choices as to goals, of blocking every door but one, no matter how noble the prospect on which it opens, how beneficent the motives of those who so arrange it, is to deny that he is a free agent, which is a lie and heinous crime. [175] That is the concept of liberty as it has been conceived by liberals in the modern world, from the days of Erasmus (some would say of Occam) to our own. Every plea for civil liberty and individual rights, every protest against exploitation and humiliation, every argument for the preservation of individual spontaneity against the encroachment of public authority and the mass hypnosis of custom or organised propaganda stems from this individualistic, by no means universally held, conception of man.

Three aspects of it may be noted. The first is that, amongst the defenders of ‘negative’ liberty – the liberty that is non-interference – Mill, as so often, here confuses two distinct ideals. One is that all coercion, in so far as it frustrates human desires, is bad as such (although it may have to be applied to prevent other, greater evils), and liberty, which is the opposite of coercion, is good as such (although it is not the only good). The other is that men should seek to develop a certain type of character of which Mill approved – original, imaginative, independent, non-conforming to the point of eccentricity, and such a character can be bred only in conditions of liberty.

Both these are noble aims, but they are not identical; and the connection between them is at best empirical. If the thesis used by James Stephen in his formidable attack on Mill,¹⁰ that bold independence and fiery individualism grow at least as often in conditions of severe repression – puritan Calvinists in Scotland or America – as in the more liberal climate of Scandinavia or modern Switzerland, were accepted, Mill’s argument for liberty as a *sine qua non* of human genius would fall to the ground. If his two goals proved incompatible, Mill would be faced with a cruel dilemma, quite apart from the inconsistency of his doctrine with strict utilitarianism, even in his own humane version of it. This is but another illustration of the natural tendency of all but a few thinkers

¹⁰ *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (London, 1873).

to believe that all things they hold good must be intimately connected or at least compatible with one another. The history of thought, like the history of nations, is strewn with examples of inconsistent, or at least disparate, elements artificially yoked together in some despotic system. In due course conflicts arise which disrupt the system, sometimes to the benefit of mankind.

[176] The second 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.¹¹ Nor has this ideal often been dominant, even in the recent history of the West. Liberty in this sense has seldom if ever form a rallying cry for the great masses of mankind, as equality or democracy or liberty in a different sense have been. It has remained the ideal of civilised men in the modern world 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 arbitrary deprivation of rights and liberties, has been a mark of high civilisation on the part of both 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 something sacred in its own right, hatred of paternalism, 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 sense, which is almost a defining notion of a large element in Western civilisation, is, for all its religious roots, in its developed state, scarcely older than the Renaissance and the Reformation. Such clusters of absolute values, for which men are ready to fight or die, may not be timeless or eternal, but their decline marks the death of an entire civilisation, the end of an entire moral system.

The third characteristic of notion of liberty is of far greater importance: it is that liberty in this sense is compatible with some

¹¹ See the very valuable discussion of this in M. Villey, *Leçons de histoire de la philosophie du droit*, who traces the embryo of the notion of individual rights and liberty to Occam.

kinds of autocracy, or at any rate the absence of self-government. Liberty in this sense is concerned with the area of control, not with its source. Just as a democracy 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 liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a wide area of personal freedom. 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 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. But even if we avoid recourse to so imaginary and perhaps improbable a situation, it is at least arguable that in the Prussia of Frederick the Great, or the Austria of Joseph II, men of imagination, originality and creative genius, whom Mill desired to encourage, felt the pressure both of institutions and of custom far less heavy upon them than in the Switzerland of their day, and minorities were persecuted far less than by many a later democracy.

[177] Freedom in this sense is not, at any rate logically, connected with democracy or self-government. Self-government may, on the whole, provide a better guarantee of the preservation of civil liberties than other regimes, and has been defended as such by libertarians. But there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democracy. The answer to the question 'Who governs me?' is logically distinct from the question 'How far does government interfere with me?' It is upon this difference that the great contrast between the two concepts of negative and positive liberty will be found to rest.¹² For the 'positive' sense of liberty is

¹² 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, perhaps even if I act from fear of losing my job, I can reasonably say that I did not act freely. Nevertheless I did of course make a choice, and could, at any rate in theory, have chosen to be tortured or dismissed.

an answer to the question not ‘What am I free to do or be?’ but ‘By whom am I ruled? Who is to say what I [178] am, and what I am not, to be or do?’ It may appear at first as if there exists the most intimate connection possible between individual liberty in the sense of an area free from interference, and democracy, in the sense of government over myself exercised not by some outside body which uses me as a means and thereby robs me of my opportunity of choice, but by me and others like me with whose interests mine are intertwined – the government of ourselves by ourselves, or at any rate by our representatives, to fulfil our purposes. Yet upon examination, and in particular in view of the historical evolution of the two notions, the connection may turn out to be a good deal more tenuous than at first it seemed. 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 for a free area for action, perhaps more so. But it is not a desire for the same thing. So different, indeed, as to have led in the end to the great clash of ideologies of which I spoke earlier.

The mere existence of alternatives is not therefore enough to make my action free – although it is voluntary – in the normal sense of the word. The extent of my freedom seems to depend at the very least on (*a*) 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 to actualise; (*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 magnitudes must be ‘integrated’, and a 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. Nevertheless provided we do not demand precise measurement, we can give reasons for saying that the average subject of the King of Sweden is on the whole a good deal freer today than the average citizen of the Republic of Romania today. The total patterns of life can be directly compared as wholes, although the truth of the conclusion may be difficult to demonstrate.

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For it is this – the ‘positive’ conception of liberty: not freedom from, but freedom to – which the adherents of the ‘negative’ concept represent as being, at times, no better than a specious disguise for total slavery.

[II]¹³

The ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ stems from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own Master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself and not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not other men’s, acts of will; 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; a doer, deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature, or by other me, as if I were an inanimate object, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human part, i.e. of conceiving goals and policies of my own 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 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 to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realise that it is not true.

The definitions of freedom as consisting in being one’s own master, and as consisting in not being prevented from choosing as I do by other men – the positive and negative notions of freedom respectively – may seem *prima facie* to be at no great logical distance from each other. Yet close as they are at their source, they [179] developed in divergent directions until, in the end, they came into direct conflict with each other. This will become clear when one considers the two major forms which the desire to be self-directed has, historically, taken: the first that of self-denial in order

¹³ [A section number is present here, but it has been crossed out.]

to attain independence; the second that of the conquest of obstacles, to attain the selfsame end.

[III] *The Retreat to the Inner Citadel*

1.¹⁴ 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 accident, or the deliberate activities or unconscious behaviour of men, or the effect, often 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 them in order to reduce the area of vulnerability. I desire happiness or power or knowledge of the attainment of some specific object. But I cannot command them. I wish to avoid defeat and waste: and therefore decide to strive for nothing that I cannot be sure to obtain. Instead of vainly striving for happiness or power or the creation of the masterpiece, which may elude me, I eliminate in myself all desire for it. Physical and biological laws make it impossible for me to attain certain goals – health or success – which I might have enjoyed if I had been differently made. 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 no longer feel attached to property, no longer care whether or not I am in prison, if I have killed within myself my natural affections, then he cannot touch me. It is as if I had performed a strategic retreat ‘in depth’ into an inner citadel – my reason, my soul – which, do what they might, neither external blind force nor human malice can touch. I have withdrawn into myself; there, and there alone, I am secure; there, and there alone, I am master of all that I possess.

It is as if I were to say, ‘I have a wound in my leg. There are two methods of freeing myself from pain. One is to heal the

¹⁴ [There are no further numbers in this series.]

wound. But if the cure is precarious and uncertain, there is another method. I can get rid of the wound by cutting off my leg; and must train myself to want nothing to which the possession of my leg was indispensable.’ This is the traditional self-emancipation of ascetics and quietists; of Stoics, or Buddhist sages, Jews, Christians, Moslems who have fled the world, and equally of individuals dedicated to no religion – men who escape the yoke of society or public opinion by some process of deliberate self-transformation that enables them to care no longer for any of its values, and renders them isolated and independent dwellers on its edges, no longer vulnerable to its weapons.¹⁵ All isolationism, monasticism, autarky, ascetic self-absorption, every form of autonomy, has some element of this attitude in it. I eliminate the obstacles on my path by abandoning the path, I retreat into the only fortress which I know to be impregnable – my own inner spirit, or, in the case not of individuals but 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 have effect. This is a form of the search for security, but it is has also been called the search for inner freedom.

It is the foundation of Kant’s concept of moral freedom. I am free because and in so far as I am autonomous. I obey laws, but I have invented them for myself. Freedom is obedience, but, [in Rousseau’s words,] ‘obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves’. Heteronomy is dependence on outside factors, liability to be a plaything of the external world, which includes such psychological causes as desires, affections, passions – everything that I cannot myself fully control and which pro tanto controls and therefore enslaves me. I am free only to the degree to which my reason is fettered by nothing which obeys laws over which I have no control – my free activity must, therefore, *ex hypothesi*, be lifted above the empirical world of causality. This is not the place in which to discuss the validity of this ancient and famous doctrine, only to remark that the notion of freedom as autonomy in this

¹⁵ ‘A wise man, though he be a slave, is at liberty, and from this it follows that though a fool rule, he is in slavery’, said St Ambrose: but this might equally well have been said by Epictetus or Kant.

sense has played a central role in politics no less than ethics or metaphysics.

For if men must be treated as autonomous beings – as authors of values, of ends in themselves, the ultimate authority of which consists precisely in the fact that they are willed ‘freely’, that is by beings not themselves conditioned by outside factors, and able therefore to discern and commit themselves to rational ends by the pure act of a non-empirical self which cannot err or be deflected by forces in the empirical world – then the greatest crime of all is to treat them as if they were not this at all, but at the mercy of nature or other men, as if they were natural objects, played on by causal influences, whose wills were determined by forces not in their own control, whose choices could be manipulated by their rulers, whether by threats of force or offers of rewards: for that is to treat them as if they were not free, not men. ‘Nobody can compel me to be happy in his own way’, said Kant; and paternalism is ‘the greatest despotism imaginable’. It is so because it is to treat men as if they were mere human material for me, the benevolent reformer, to mould in accordance with my, not their, rational purpose.

This [184] is precisely the policy the Utilitarians recommended. Helvétius (and Bentham) believed not in resisting but in using men’s tendency to be slaves to their passions; they wished to dangle rewards and punishments before men – the acutest possible form of heteronomy – if by this means the ‘slaves’ might be made happier. But to manipulate men in this sense, to propel them towards goals which you – the social reformer – see, but they may not, is to deny their human essence, to treat them as objects, to degrade them. That is why to lie to men, or to deceive them, that is to use them as means for my, not their own independently conceived, ends, even if it is for their own benefit, as I or even they conceive them, is, in effect, to treat them as subhuman, to behave as if their ends are less ultimate and sacred than – are raw material for – my own. But this is false, and the adoption of it as a principle leads to the exploitation and humiliation of others, than which there is no greater sin. There is only one author of ends who can never be the means to a further end, and that is the individual himself, who creates all values, wills all ends. In the name of what

am I justified in forcing men to do what they have not willed? Only in the name of some value higher than themselves. But there is no value higher than themselves if all values are the creations of the human spirit, and called values only for that reason. Therefore I must be coercing men in the name of something less ultimate than themselves – someone’s notion of happiness, or expediency, or reasons of State, or convenience, or my own selfish desires. But this is a contradiction of what I know men to be. To manipulate is to exploit, humiliate, debase human beings; because thereby I deny that in men which makes them men what makes men men – that is the worst crime that anyone can commit. To do this is to behave as if the ultimate ends for the sake of which alone life is worth living or sacrificing were not self-proposed by men to themselves by a free act of choice, which is the mark of rational self-mastery, of choosing rather than mere reacting to stimuli. It is to treat men as things. All forms of tampering with human beings, getting at them, shaping them against their will in your own pattern, 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 both Kant and Rousseau in the eighteenth century. It is a form of secularised Protestant individualism, in which the place of God, and of the individual soul which strains towards union with him, is taken by the conception of the rational life and the individual endowed with reason, straining to be governed by it and it alone, not to depend upon anything that he has not fully understood, which might deflect him or delude him by engaging his irrational nature. 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 similar ideal. The ideal is that of the man who has made himself – his ‘inner self’ – 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 to those who think in these terms is more than a metaphor. To rid myself of fear, or love, or the desire to conform is to liberate myself from the despotism of something which I cannot control. Cephalus,¹⁶ whom Plato reports as saying that old age alone has liberated him from passion – the yoke of a cruel master – is reporting an experience as real as those who speak of freedom from a human tyrant or slave-owner. The psychological experience of observing myself yielding to some ‘lower’ impulse, acting from a motive that I detest, and doing something which at the very moment of doing it I may 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 at the mercy of the mere play of external forces; belong to this way of thinking and speaking. I identify myself with what I am when I am critical and rational. ‘External’ results do not matter, for they are not in my control. Only my 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. In this form the doctrine is primarily an ethical creed, and scarcely political at all: but its political implications are clear: and it enters into the tradition of liberal individualism at least as deeply as the ‘negative’ conception of freedom.

It is perhaps worth remarking that in this individualistic form the concept of the rational sage, who has escaped in to the inner citadel of his ‘true’ self, to be impervious to the slings and arrows of the world, has historically arisen almost always when the external world has proved exceptionally 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 happiness or justice or freedom (in whatever sense) finds too many avenues of [186] action blocked to him, the temptation to withdraw into himself can become irresistible. It may have been so in Greece, where the Stoic ideal cannot be wholly unconnected with the fall

¹⁶ [In fact in Plato’s *Republic* (book 1, 329c) Cephalus reports Sophocles to this effect. Corrected in later versions.]

of the democracies before Macedonian despotism. It was certainly so in Rome, for analogous reasons, after the end of the Republic. It is not far-fetched to assume that the quietism of the Eastern sages was a response to the despotism of the great autocracies, and flourished most at periods when individuals were apt to be humiliated, or at any rate ignored and ruthlessly managed by those who possessed the instruments of physical coercion. It arose in Germany in the eighteenth century, the period of the deepest national degradation of the German States that followed the Thirty Years War, when the public life of small princely States forced those who prized the dignity of human life, not for the first time, into a kind of inner immigration. 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, if I am not to be frustrated – a slave to the desire for the unattainable – is in the end a sublime, but unmistakable, form of the doctrine of sour grapes.

What I cannot have I cannot truly want. I only imagine that I want it, and can cure myself of this delusion. It is difficult to see how ascetic self-denial, a policy of abandonment and retreat for the sake of the security of the little that is left, can be called the enlargement of liberty. I may save myself by retreating and locking every door and crevice before my adversary. I may remain freer than if I had been captured, but I am not freer than if I had defeated and captured him. And if I go too far, contract myself into too small a space, I shall suffocate and die. The logical culmination of the process of destroying everything through which I could possibly be wounded is suicide. While I exist in the natural world I can never be wholly secure. Total liberation (as Schopenhauer perceived correctly) can come only in death.

Those who demanded liberty for the individual or for the nation in France did not fall 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 real political power was not beyond the grasp of men of talent, and where the withdrawal from battle into some untroubled heaven above it,

whence it could be surveyed dispassionately by the self-sufficient philosopher, was not the only way out.¹⁷

[187] If the pursuit of freedom by self-abnegation leads to self-annihilation, the pursuit of it by the removal of obstacles leads to wholly different results. Faced with obstacles to my will, I can yield before them and alter the direction of my will; but I can also transform them by using them as means to my ends. How can I achieve this? Those who are wedded to the ‘negative’ conception of freedom may perhaps be forgiven if they think that the only method of overcoming obstacles is by removing them: in the case of non-human objects by physical action; if I am obstructed by men, by force of persuasion, as when I induce someone to make room for me in his carriage, or conquer a country which threatens the interests of my own. This may be unjust – it may involve violence, cruelty or enslavement of others – but it can scarcely be denied that the increase of freedom of the agent does take place. But these negative aims and empirical methods are rejected by the philosophical and, later, political adherents of the ‘positive’ conception of freedom. It is their view that dominates half our world: if for no other reason, its metaphysical basis must be examined seriously.

[IV *Self-realisation*]

The only true method of attaining freedom is 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 to the free functioning of my mind, 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 formation and transformation rules – the logic whereby the conclusions are obtained – and grasp that these things cannot be otherwise, either because they follow from the laws that govern the thought of the

¹⁷ [Here Berlin inserts a section heading (‘III’), but the section break after the next paragraph is the one that appears in the published text.]

rational mind, or because I have invented them for myself, 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 now freely will as a fulfilment of my own rational activity. To the mathematician these theorems 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 playing of the music is not obedience to external laws but a free exercise. The player 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, by understanding it, 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 obstacles which present themselves as so many lumps of external stuff blocking free self-development. That is the programme of enlightened rationalist rule. *Sapere aude*.¹⁸ 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 than what it must be – must, given the premisses, the laws that govern the world – is to be pro tanto irrational. Ignorance, passion, fear, neuroses spring from ignorance [*sic*], and take the form of 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 so much dust cast in the eyes of the masses to keep them from knowing dangerous truths – or from the influence of psychological causes, or the unintended results of social institutions; they are all forms of heteronomy, of being acted upon by outside factors in a direction not willed by the agent. The *lumières* of the eighteenth century thought that the study of the

¹⁸ ['Dare to know.' Horace, *Epistles* 1. 2. 40; quoted by Kant in 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' (1784), *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1900–) viii 31: '*Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your *own* understanding! is therefore the motto of Enlightenment.']

exact sciences of nature, and of society on the model of these sciences, would make the operation of such causes transparently clear, and thus enable individuals to [189] choose whether to be acted upon by them (for if they so choose they are no longer blind victims of them but have made them their own instruments by an act of conscious will) or to alter or destroy them.

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 liberation by 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 this it is not enough to understand, and argue by analogy from, mathematics or physics. One must also understand history, that is the peculiar laws of continuous growth that govern individuals and groups in their interplay with each other and with nature. Not to understand this is, according to these thinkers, to fall into a particular kind of delusion, namely a belief that human nature is static, that its essential properties are the same everywhere and at all times, that it is governed by Natural Law whether in its theological or materialistic interpretation, and that consequently it is in principle possible to create a perfectly harmonious society by education and legislation, because the wise, wholly rational man in all ages and countries must always demand the same unaltering satisfactions of the same unaltering basic needs. 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 human reason – that create and alter institutions and change human character and human action. Marx maintained that the paths of human beings were obstructed not only by natural forces or imperfections of their own character, but even more by the workings of their own social institutions, which they had created (not always consciously) for certain purposes, but whose functioning they came to misunderstand systematically. He formulated social and economic laws which, he maintained, made such misunderstanding inevitable: and led to the illusion that the man-made arrangements were so many independent forces, as

inexorable as those of nature, to be obeyed as slaves obey a master; and gave instances of such pseudo-objective forces – the laws of supply and demand, or property as an unalterable human category, or the division of society into rich and poor, or owners and workers. [190] To gain freedom from such burdens and obstructions it was necessary to understand that these laws and institutions were themselves the work of human minds and hands, historically needed in their day, whose origins and purposes had been forgotten, whose functioning was necessarily – for sociological reasons which he tried to give – misunderstood, and which were therefore falsely regarded as inexorable, external powers which it was idle to try and alter; only when enough men were conscious of this hoax could the old world be destroyed and more adequate – and liberating – social machinery created.

Freud on his side maintained that fears and obsessions and other obstacles to a 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 consequences, if they felt their freedom curtailed thereby, or of freely incorporating them in their conscious, purposive, deliberate activity.

We are imprisoned by masters – institutions or beliefs or neuroses – which can be removed only by being analysed and understood. We are enslaved by evil spirits which we ourselves have – albeit not consciously – created, and can, by becoming conscious, and acting accordingly, exorcise. I am free if and only if I 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 consciously, 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, as unable to be otherwise in a rational world, that is in a world directed by rational minds towards goals such as a rational being might have, I cannot, being rational, wish to sweep out of the way.

I assimilate it into my substance as I do the laws of mathematics, the rules of art or of whatever I understand the purpose of, and therefore cannot want to be otherwise than as it is.

This is the positive doctrine of liberation by reason. A socialised [191] form of it is at the heart of many of the nationalist, Marxist, authoritarian and totalitarian creeds of our day. It may, in the course of its evolution, have left its rationalist moorings. Nevertheless it is this type of freedom that, whether in democracies or dictatorships, is discussed and fought for in many parts of the earth. Without attempting to trace in detail the historical evolution of this idea, I should like to attempt to offer an explanation of some of its vicissitudes.

III [V *The Temple of Sarastro*]

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 a man's inner life, but to his relations to other members of his society. Even the most individualistic 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 commands; but so must others be. How am I to avoid collision with their wills? Where is the frontier that lies 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 frontiers would be such as we should all agree, as rational men, were the right frontiers for rational beings.

But who in fact, was to decide what they are? On the assumption (which all such thinkers made, for their use of the word 'reason' led them to it) that moral and political problems, like problems in mathematics or physics or in any other field, were in principle soluble, that is to say, 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 was largely the case already in the natural sciences) – on that assumption, political problems were soluble by [192] establishing a just order that would give to each man all the freedom that a rational being was entitled to. Prima facie my claim for unfettered freedom can often not be reconciled with your equally unqualified one. But the rationally arrived at, and therefore true, solution of one problem cannot collide with the true solution of another, for two truths cannot logically be incompatible. Therefore such an order must in principle be discoverable. This ideal, harmonious state of affairs was sometimes imagined as a paradise before the Flood, sometimes as a Golden Age still before us, in which all (or at least the great majority of) men, having become rational, will no longer have desires, passions or habits which could in principle collide with one another.

In existing societies justice and equality are ideals which it is still necessary to obtain with some measure of coercion, because premature lifting of social controls might lead to the oppression of the weaker and the stupider by the stronger and abler and 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 or dominate one another. The desire to dominate is itself a symptom of irrationality, and can be explained (and cured) by rational methods. Spinoza offers one kind of explanation, Hegel another, Marx and Freud yet other ones. Some of these theories may perhaps to some degree supplement each other; others are not combinable. 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 existence of oppression will be the first symptom that the true solution to the problems of social life (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.

This can be put in another way. Freedom is self-mastery, the elimination of obstacles to my will, whatever these obstacles may be – the resistance of nature, of my own ungoverned passions, of irrational institutions, of the opposing wills of others. Nature I can mould by technical means, and impose my will upon it: but how am I to treat recalcitrant human beings? I must, if I can, impose my will on them too, ‘mould’ them to my pattern, cast parts for them in my play. But this will this not mean that I am free, while they are slaves? They are if my plan has nothing to do with their desires and values, [193] only with my own. All true solutions to all genuine problems must be compatible; more than this, they must coincide; for that is what is meant by calling them all rational. Each man has a specific character, abilities, aspirations, ends: if I grasp what these ends and natures are, I can, at least in principle, if I have the knowledge and the strength, satisfy them all. Rationality is to know things and people for what they are: I must not use stones to make violins, nor try to make born violin-players play the flute. If the universe is governed by reason – that is, if a pattern is discoverable in which everything and everyone plays the part it is meant to play by its own inner nature – there will be no need for coercion. A planned life for all will coincide with full freedom – the freedom of rational self-direction – for all: provided, that is, that the plan is the true plan, the one unique pattern which alone fulfils the claims of reason. Laws then are the rules which reason prescribes: they will only seem irksome to those whose reason is dormant – who do not understand their own ‘true’ needs. If each player plays the part which his reason – which understands his true nature and discerns his true ends – sets him, there can be [no] conflict. Each is a liberated, self-directed actor in the cosmic drama. When Spinoza says that children, although they are coerced, are not slaves, because they obey orders given in their own interests, and the subject of a true commonwealth is no slave because a common interest must include his own; or when Locke says, ‘Where there is no law there is no freedom’, because rational laws are directions to his proper interests or ‘general good’ and what ‘hedges us from bogs and precipices’ ‘ill deserves the name of confinement’, and calls any desire outside this irrational – ‘license’ or ‘brutish’ etc.; when Montesquieu, forgetting his ‘negative’

moments, speaks of political liberty as a power of doing what we [194] ought to will', and Kant comes near to echoing this; they assume that the rational ends of our 'true', i.e. rational, natures coincide, and to make them coincide, against all the violent resistance of our poor empirical selves, is no tyranny but liberation.¹⁹

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; for 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, with enough new 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'.²⁰ These bounds can be established (this seems to be the latent assumption) 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 see it. The fundamental rule of such a State is that what one man may do, all men may do. Thus, if anyone infringes this rule, all men are damaged thereby.

¹⁹ On this Bentham seems to me to have said the last word: 'The liberty of doing evil, is it not liberty? If it is not liberty, what is it then? [...] Do we not say that liberty should be taken away from fools, and wicked persons, because they abuse it?'

²⁰ [The latter wording does not appear in the 1793 Declaration.]

TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY: FIRST CORRECTED DRAFT

If the underlying assumption were correct – if solutions to social problems were like the solutions 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. Rational liberty would coincide with rational law. Autonomy would coincide with authority. Men would be wholly equal and wholly uncoerced, free, wise, strong, happy and just. Only one movement was bold enough to make this assumption quite explicit and accept its full consequences: that of the Anarchists. But all liberal rationalism holds less or more watered-down versions of this ideal.

The thinkers who bent their energies to the solution of the problem on these lines came to be faced with the question of how men were to be made rational in this way. Clearly they must be educated, for only the uneducated are irrational, heteronomous, and need to be coerced if only to make life tolerable for the rational, if they are to live in the same society with them, and not withdraw to some Olympian height. But the uneducated cannot be expected always to understand the purposes of their educators: that is, indeed, part of their lack of education. Education, says Fichte, perhaps the most eloquent advocate of rational education, and the most typical representative of this school of thought, must work 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, that is, at the moment, 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 had to suffer. This is the task for the State. ‘Compulsion is also a kind of education.’ If you [196] cannot understand your own interests as a rational being, I cannot be expected to consult you or abide by your wishes in the course of making you a rational being. I force you to be protected against smallpox though you may not wish it. Even Mill is prepared to say that I may forcibly prevent a man from crossing a bridge if there is not time to warn him that it is about to collapse, for I know that he cannot wish to fall into the water, whatever his behaviour indicates. 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 true goals. You want to be a human being. It is the aim of the State to satisfy your wish. Let me quote Fichte again: ‘Compulsion is justified by education for future insight.’

Fichte cannot avoid the fatal analogy to which every adherent of the doctrine has recourse sooner or later. It is argued that 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 could be if we were rational, as we are even now, if only we would listen to the rational element which is *ex hypothesi* within every human being deserving of the name of man.

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. I quote from Fichte again: ‘No one has [...] rights against reason.’ ‘Man is afraid of subordinating his subjectivity to the laws of reason: he prefers tradition or arbitrariness.’ Nevertheless, subordinated he must be, for that is the purpose of man on earth, reason is the only path to true freedom.

It is perfectly 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. Why indeed? If it makes sense to speak of political truths – in the sense of the true social ends which all rational men would agree to be such when they are discovered – and if scientific methods can reveal them, there is no case for freedom for its own sake, either for men or groups, or for any conduct unauthorised by scientific experts. Comte put bluntly what had been implicit in the rationalist theory

of politics from its ancient Greek beginnings: there can, in principle, be only one correct way of life; the wise lead it spontaneously, else they would not be [198] wise; the unwise must be dragged towards it by all the social means in the power of the wise, for why should demonstrable error be tolerated? The immature and untutored must be made to say to themselves: ‘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 – if need be, coerce me – to do, in the conviction that only thus will I rise to your clear vision, and be free like you.’

We have wandered indeed from our beginnings. This argument, employed by Fichte and Hegel, and after them by all other defenders of authority, from Marx to the latest nationalist or Communist dictator, is precisely what the Stoic and Kantian ethic protests against most bitterly, in the name of the inner reason of the free individual, following his own light as best he can. The rationalist argument, with its assumption of the single true solution which the relevant experts alone can determine, leads therefore from an unpolitical doctrine of individual self-perfection to an authoritarian State, obedient to the directives of a Platonic elite of guardians. The argument is impeccable in itself: attempts to escape its conclusion while retaining the premiss[es?] [*rest of sentence hard to read: the sense is apparently that such attempts fail at the bar of logic*].

[200] Can it be that some at least of the basic assumptions – that all men as such [have the one true] purpose of rational self-direction; that all their goals must harmonise in one universal harmonious pattern; that all conflict is due to the clash of reason with the irrational or insufficiently rational; that when everybody has been made rational [they will all be] free, for they are one – can it be that these assumptions are somehow at fault?

IV [VI *The search for status*]

There is another approach to this topic, often adopted today, which can, by confounding liberty with her sisters, equality and [201] fraternity, be made to yield a very similar conclusion. Ever since the issue was raised by Burke and Herder towards the end 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 strenuous efforts to mark a 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 a social being in a deeper sense than that of mere interaction. For am I not what I am, to some degree, in virtue of what others think and feel me to be?

When I ask myself what I am, and answer ‘An Englishman’, ‘A Chinese’, ‘A poet’, ‘A carpenter’, ‘A man of importance’, ‘A pauper’, ‘A convict’, I find upon analysis that to possess these attributes entails being recognised as belonging to a particular group or class by other persons in my society, and that this recognition is part of the meaning of the majority of the terms which denote some of my most personal and 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 some – perhaps all – of my ideas about myself – my sense of my own moral and social identity – are intelligible only in terms of the social network in which I am (the metaphor must not be pressed too far) an element.

The lack of freedom about which a man or a nation complains demands is, as often as not, the lack of proper recognition: I may be seeking not for what Mill would wish me to seek, namely security from coercion, from arbitrary arrest, from tyranny, from the deprivation of certain opportunities of action, for a space within which I am legally accountable to no one for my acts. Equally I may not be seeking for a rational plan of life, or the self-perfection of a dispassionate sage. What I may seek to be saved from is being ignored, or patronised, or despised, or from being taken too much for granted; in short from not being treated as a unique human being, from having my humanity insufficiently recognised, from being classed as a member of some featureless amalgam, a statistical unit without identifiable, specifically human, features of my own. This is the degradation that I am fighting against – not equality of legal rights, nor liberty to do as I wish

(although I may want these too), but for a condition in which I can feel that I am, [202] because I am treated as, a responsible agent whose will is taken into consideration as being entitled to it, even if I am attacked and persecuted for being as I am and choosing as I do.²¹

This is the hankering after status and recognition. I desire to be understood and recognised, even if this means to be unpopular and disliked. And the only people who can so recognise me, and thereby give me the sense of being someone, are the members of the society to which, historically, morally, economically, I feel that I belong. This has obvious affinity with the Kantian doctrine of human freedom; but it is a socialised and empirical version of it, and therefore almost its opposite. Kant's free man needs no public recognition for his inner freedom. If he is treated as a means to some external purpose, that is wrong on the part of his exploiters, but his own 'noumenal' status is untouched; and he is fully free and fully a man in isolation. The need of which speak here is bound up wholly with my relation to others: I am nothing if I am unrecognised; I cannot ignore the attitude of others with Byronic disdain, fully conscious of my own intrinsic worth and vocation, or escape into my inner life. I am in my own eyes as others see me: I identify myself with the point of view of my milieu. I feel myself to be somebody or nobody in terms of my position and function in the social whole; it is the most heteronomous condition imaginable. 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, let us say, the status of political or social dependency, what I demand is an alteration of status.

The sense in which the members of oppressed classes or nationalities demand their rights is neither simply unhampered liberty of action, nor necessarily equality of economic or social

²¹ This is vividly brought out in the celebrated words of the leveller Rainborough in 1647: Adler p. 336. [Major Thomas Rainborough's 'the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he' is cited by Mortimer J. Adler, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conceptions of Freedom* (New York, 1958), 336.]

opportunity, still less assignment of a place in a frictionless organic State devised by the rational lawgiver, but simply recognition of themselves (or their class or nation, or colour or race) as an [203] independent source of human activity, as an entity entitled to direct itself as it wishes, and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free.

It gives a different sense to Kant's remark that paternalism is 'the greatest *despotism* imaginable'; it is despotic 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 (not necessarily rational or benevolent) 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 in large part 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, to use a perilous but indispensable metaphor, must be called a social pattern. I may feel unfree in the sense of not being recognised as a self-governing individual human being; but I may feel it also as a member of an unrecognised or insufficiently respected class or nation. Then I wish for emancipation of my entire class, or nation, or race or profession. So much can I desire this that I may prefer to be bullied and misgoverned by the members of my own oppressed group – by whom I am nevertheless recognised as a man and an equal – to being well and tolerantly treated by someone from some higher and remoter group, who does not recognise me for what I wish to feel myself to be.

This is the heart of the great cry for recognition on the part of individuals, but especially, in our own day, of professions and classes, nations and races. Although I may not get 'negative' liberty at the hands of the members of my own society, yet they are members of my own group; they understand me as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me the sense of being somebody in the world. It is this desire for reciprocal recognition that leads the most authoritarian democracies to be, at times,

consciously preferred by their members to the most enlightened oligarchies, or sometimes causes a member of some [204] newly 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, just, gentle, well-meaning administrator from outside. Unless this phenomenon is grasped, the ideals and the behaviour of entire peoples who, in Mill's sense, suffer deprivation of elementary human rights, and who, with every appearance of sincerity, speak of enjoying greater liberty than when they possessed a wider measure of these rights, becomes an unintelligible paradox.

And yet it is not with liberty, in either the 'negative' or in the 'positive' sense of the word, that those who demand status and recognition are fighting for: it is something no less passionately desired, an equally profound necessity for human beings – solidarity, fraternity, mutual understanding, need for association on equal terms, which is sometimes – but misleadingly – called social freedom. Social and political terms are necessarily vague: to attempt to make its vocabulary too precise may render it useless; but it is no service to the truth to loosen usage beyond necessity. The desire for liberty is the desire from freedom from something or someone – other men – or one's own obsessions, fears, neuroses. The desire for recognition is a desire for the very opposite: for union, closer understanding, amalgamation of interests, a life of mutual dependence and mutual sacrifice. It is this, in conjunction with the notion of liberty as self-direction – where the self is not the individual, but the social whole – that makes it possible for men to submit to the authority of oligarchs or dictators and claim that this in some sense liberates them.

Enough has been written on the glaring fallacy of speaking of social groups as being literally persons or selves whose control and disciplining of their members is no more than self-discipline, voluntary self-control which leaves the individual agent free. Perhaps no more need here be said than that if I have voluntarily refrained from doing what I might, I have not therefore grown less free: but if I have restrained you from doing so, no juggling with words can show that your freedom has not been curtailed. But it is perhaps more important to note that the analogy between

individual and group has been so successful a source of fallacies, and in its consequences so disastrous, precisely because solidarity and fraternity are basic human cravings, and, when they are satisfied, lead to patterns of collective behaviour and feeling which lend themselves easily to analogy with the feelings and thoughts of individuals. The collective desire for the liberation of my social group from the yoke of some outside body is, at the very least, similar enough to the individual's wish to rid himself of controls for the word 'liberty' to be used for both phenomena: and the collective desire of a community to assert itself as an independent source of power is sufficiently analogous to that of the individual seeking 'positive' freedom to make the same word as applied to both shed at least as much light as darkness on the situation it seeks to denote.

[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 mere fallacies, due either to comparison of entities which are in relevant, i.e. moral or political, respects unlike, or of simple semantic confusion. What men who are prepared to barter the liberty of individual action for the status of their group, and their own status within the group, want is not simply to surrender liberty for security – for some assured place in a harmonious hierarchy – in which every man and every class knows its place, and is prepared to surrender the painful privilege of choosing – 'the burden of freedom' – for the peace and comfort and mindlessness of an authoritarian or totalitarian structure. No doubt there are such men and such desires: and no doubt such surrenders of liberty can occur and indeed have often 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 to classes whose lives were directed by other classes in a semi-feudal, or some other hierarchical, regime. What they desire is what Mill called 'Pagan self-assertion', but in a collective, socialised form. Indeed much of what he says, with excellent insight, about what it is that makes men desire 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 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’ behaviour, even if such behaviour is to be met with social restrictions or inhibitive legislation.

This wish to assert the ‘personality’ of my class or group or nation has little to do with the answer to the question ‘What is to be the area of authority?’ but much with ‘Who is to govern us?’ – govern well or badly, liberally or oppressively, the central 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 these or those persons or institution’, or ‘The divine leader’, or whatever it turns out to be, are answers logically – and often politically and socially too – independent of what extent of ‘negative’ liberty I demand for my own personal – or my group’s – 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, by mingling fraternity and solidarity with the positive sense of the word ‘freedom’, speak of it as a form of freedom; ‘whose service is perfect freedom’ can in this way 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.

[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. No society literally suppresses all liberties; a being who is prevented by others from doing literally 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 a physiologist or a biologist, or even a psychologist felt inclined to classify him as a man. 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 seems unlikely 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. 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 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 that they participated, in the legislation and administration of their collective lives. And men who have made revolutions have as often as not meant by liberty no more than the establishment of the rights of a given group of believers in a doctrine, thereby frustrating their opponents; sometimes a [208] claim to the universality of their ideals as those which the ‘real selves’ of those who resist them also seek, although, unaware of their origin in their own deeper natures, they may be unaware of it. It has little to do with Mill’s liberty as the opportunity to do what I wish provided it does not affect others. It is the non-recognition of this political fact – which lurks behind the semantic fact – which perhaps blinds some contemporary liberals to the world in which they live. Their plea is clear, their case is just: but they do not allow for the variety of human wishes.

V [VII *Liberty and sovereignty*]

The French Revolution – as indeed all great revolutions – was just such an eruption of the desire for the ‘positive’ freedom of collective self-direction by a large body of Frenchmen, who felt liberated as a nation even though the result was the restriction of

individual liberty. Rousseau had spoken exultantly of the fact that the laws of liberty might prove to be more austere than the yoke of tyranny. For he does not by 'liberty' mean the 'negative' freedom of the individual not to be interfered with within a defined area, for no one may be free to do what the appropriate censor forbids: the censor may speak as conscience, within his own breast, or as rational perception of the common good, embodied in the general will; but in any case freedom coincides with what the law dictates. Like the Greeks, like Calvin or the English puritans, by 'liberty' he means the sharing of public power by everyone in the society, where this public power can interfere with every aspect of every citizen's life. The liberals of the first half of the nineteenth century correctly foresaw that liberty in this 'positive' sense, especially in its socialised form as self-direction by a group of persons acting like a single whole, could easily destroy all liberty in the 'negative' sense in which they held it sacred – the preservation of a space within which a man might live his life as he pleased, without control, interference, social pressure. Self-government of an individual by himself was at least not interference with his freedom in the usual sense: popular sovereignty certainly curtailed it. Laws might be necessary to secure happiness or equality or power or sheer survival; but their function was to restrict freedom: thus was not identical with freedom; but its precise opposite.

Mill explained, patiently and unanswerably, that those who govern are not necessarily the same 'people' as those who are governed, and self-government is not the government 'of each by himself' but at best 'of each by all the [209] rest'. He spoke of 'the tyranny of the majority', and 'the tyranny of the prevailing feeling and opinion', and saw no great difference between that and any other kind of tyranny which encroached on men's lives beyond the forbidden frontiers of private life.

No one saw the conflict between the two types of liberty better or expressed it more clearly than Benjamin Constant. 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

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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.

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.

Constant pointed out that mere passing of the unlimited authority of sovereignty from one set of hands to another does not increase liberty, but simply shifts the burden of slavery. He reasonably asked why a man should care deeply whether he is crushed by popular government or a monarch, or even a set of laws. He saw that the problem for those who desire ‘negative’ individual freedom is not who wields authority, but how much authority is to be placed in any set of hands. For unlimited authority in anybody’s grasp is bound sooner or later to crush somebody. He maintained that usually men protest against this or that set or governors as oppressive, but the real cause of oppression lies in the mere fact of accumulation of power itself, wherever it is centralised – that liberty is endangered by the mere existence of absolute authority itself. ‘It is not against the arm that one must rail, 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. Equality of the right to oppression is not equivalent to liberty. Nor does universal consent to loss of liberty somehow miraculously preserve it. 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 own life freely?

‘Popular government is a spasmodic tyranny, monarchy a more centralised despotism.’ Constant perceived in Rousseau the worst enemy of liberty. Rousseau’s famous thesis, that by giving myself to all [210] I give myself to no one, is founded on the assumption that the sovereign is literally everybody. 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 that I am entitled. But to be deprived of

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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 unavailing protests against delegation and representation. What he wanted was a continuous plebiscite, which he knew to be a meaningless demand. Hobbes was at any rate more honest: he did not pretend that a sovereign does not enslave. He justified this slavery, but at least did not call it freedom.

Throughout the nineteenth century liberal thinkers correctly maintained that if by 'liberty' was meant a limit upon the powers of any man to force me to do what I did not wish to do, or to refrain from doing what I do wish to do, whether in the name of reason or State, of my own good or of the good of unborn generations, in the name of God or man, progress of nation, history or class, or the rights of a great leader to mould inferior beings to his pattern and raise them to a higher level of consciousness, 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 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 assert them to be my own ends or the ends of my society or culture; what will be common to all these cases is that the rules in question are accepted so widely and grounded so deeply in the actual nature of men as they have developed through history, as to be, by now, a part of our notion of what a human being is, with the corollary that those who do not in practice accept them diverge from me so widely in their conception of man and human relationships that I am bound to look on them – according to our standards, that I am living by – as being abnormal, morally deficient, deranged. It seems clear that unless some such stand is

taken, individual liberty will be endangered. Democracy as such can never be sufficient to protect it. For, historically at least, no government has found much diffi[211]culty 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.²²

Consequently the chief value of political – ‘positive’ – rights, those of participating in the government, is for liberals as a means for protecting ‘negative’ liberty. A free society is then one that accepts at least these principles: firstly, that no *powers* can be absolute – that only rights can be that, in the sense that anyone has an absolute right to refuse to behave inhumanly; secondly that there are natural frontiers within which men are inviolate, frontiers defined in terms of rules so widely accepted that their observance has entered into the definition of what it is to be a human being; rules of which it would be absurd to say that they could be abrogated by some formal procedure on the part of some court or sovereign body. It is such universaally accepted rules as these that are broken when a man is punished without being proved guilty even by some semblance of a trial; or when men are tortured or murdered indiscriminately by the arbitrary will of a despot. This causes horror even in this hardened age; and springs from the recognition of the moral existence of some absolute barriers to the imposition of one man’s will on another. The freedom of a society or a class or a group in this sense of freedom is measured by the strength of the barriers and the number and importance of the paths which they keep open before each of their members. This is widely different from the ambition of those who believe in liberty in the ‘positive’ – self-directive – sense. [212] The former want to curb authority as such. The latter want it placed in their own hands. These are not two different applications or interpretations of a single concept – but two profoundly different and

²² [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 derive from 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 Otilie’s Diary’). I am indebted to Jaap Engelsman for this hypothesis.]

irreconcilable attitudes to the ends of life. It is as well to recognise this, even if it is necessary to strike a compromise between them. Each of them makes absolute claims: just as each has an equal right to be classed among 'the deepest interests of mankind'.

VI [VIII *The One and the Many*]

In the end, what is responsible for the crushing of human beings in the names of great ideals, such as human happiness, or a just order, or the progress of civilisation, or the historical mission of a nation, a race or class, or the demands of men's own 'real' selves, of which they may, in their benighted, fallen state, themselves not be aware until awakened by someone or something which lifts them to a 'higher' level, and finally in the name of liberty itself, which demands the sacrifices of individuals for the freedom of the society itself – all the great altars upon which sacrifices have lately 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 uncorrupted good man, there dwells a final solution. It is an ancient belief, founded upon the assumption that all positive values in which men have believed must in the end be compatible, and perhaps even entail one another. 'Nature binds truth, happiness and virtue together by an indissoluble chain', said Condorcet, and elsewhere he adds liberty, equality and justice.

[213] But is this true? We have long known know that political equality is not, at any rate on earth, compatible with more than a modicum of individual liberty, and certainly not with unrestricted laissez-faire – equality of liberty is not identical with maximum liberty – that to tell the truth in all circumstances will not necessarily conduce to universal happiness; that rigorous justice is compatible with neither generosity nor mercy nor unrestricted freedom. But somewhere, we shall be told, and in some way it must be possible for all these values to live together, otherwise the universe is not a cosmos, not a harmony. Unless this is so the conflicts of values – tragedy – is an intrinsic element in human life and perhaps beyond it. But – so every rationalist metaphysician

from Plato to the last disciples of Hegel and Marx has maintained or implied – reason rejects the possibility that conflict cannot be eliminated, that the fulfilment of all our ideals is in principle unattainable, a union of contradictory elements, a logical chimera.

And yet it seems no less clear that no situation is conceivable in which men, however enlightened, can be at once wholly good and just and equal and happy and free. The very notion of a total harmony of all values and all interests, so long as we understand by them what we do understand when we discuss them with each other, must involve incompatibilities. For unless we are armed with some a priori guarantee, as some of the philosophers of antiquity thought that they were, that a total harmony of values is in principle possible, and that tragedy must be mere error, due to misunderstanding of ends or the choosing of the wrong means towards them, which knowledge could eliminate, we are left with the ordinary resources of empirical observation and ordinary human knowledge; and these give 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 we are faced with agonising choices equally ultimate, the [214] realisation of one of which inevitably entails the sacrifice of the other. Indeed, it is because this is the situation that men place such immense and justified value upon the freedom to choose; for if we had assurance that in some perfect state, realisable by men on earth, the ends pursued by men would no longer be in conflict, the need for choice and for freedom of choice, in either of the two senses of the word, would in this state no longer arise; freedom, on this view, ceases to be an end in itself: any method of bringing the final state nearer would be justified by its purpose – no matter how much freedom it sacrificed in its advance.

It is, I have no doubt, this kind of a priori monism (for it has no empirical justification), whereby all problems are regarded as, at any rate in principle, capable of some one, final, universal solution, that has been responsible for the deep, serene, unshakable conviction in the minds of some of the most bloodstained tyrants and persecutors in history that what they did was fully justified by its purpose. I do not say that the ideal of self-perfection for themselves or other nations or Churches or classes which

consciously animated some of these men, and their followers, is to be despised as such, or that the language of freedom which they used was the mere result of confused or fraudulent use of words, of a lack of moral or intellectual understanding. Indeed, I have tried to show that it is the notion of freedom – in its positive sense – that is genuinely at the heart of those demands for national or social self-direction which animate the great public movements of our time; and that not to understand this is to remain blind to the most vital facts and ideas of our age. But equally it seems to me that the belief that (whatever might be the case in an universe wholly unlike our own) there must exist – and will presently be found – some single formula whereby all the diverse ends of different human beings or groups of men, and indeed the ends of the same human beings in differing circumstances and times, or at any rate their ‘real’ ends, or the ends of their ‘real’ selves, whatever they may think and say they want, will all be harmoniously realised; and that whatever resists this process is, for that very reason, to be sacrificed as unreal and unworthy – that is to believe something 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 – and of tragedy – can never be eliminated from human life, either personal or public. The power of choosing between irreconcilable,²³ equally absolute claims is one of the characteristics that make human beings human. The value of the act of choice lies in itself, not necessarily as a means to something else.

[215] The extent of a man’s or a people’s liberty to choose as they desire must be weighed against the claims of many other values – equality or justice, or happiness, or security or public order, or whatever other ends men or societies may have set their hearts upon. Moreover it will be curtailed much or little, according to the circumstances, by the rights of other persons or groups to an equal, or at any rate not too unequal, measure of liberty. ‘Freedom for the pike is death for the minnows.’ We are rightly reminded by Prof. Tawney that the liberty of the strong is oppression for the weak, whether their strength is physical or economic, and must be restrained. This maxim must be respected

²³ [The last page of the manuscript, reproduced on p. 51, begins here.]

not because of some Kantian maxim whereby the respect for liberty for one logically entails respect for the liberty of others, but, like him, because respect for the principles of justice or equality is as basic in men as we know them as the desire for liberty. Burke's plea for the need to calculate and weigh, compromise, balance and adjust conflicting claims, Mill's plea for experiments in living, with its trials and errors, in the knowledge that we will never reach wholly clear or wholly certain answers or a priori guarantees of rationality or truth, must madden all those who seek for clear and final solutions, and yearn for unity and symmetry and single, all-embracing systems guaranteed to be eternal. Nevertheless, that is the inescapable lot of those who, with [216] Kant, have learnt the lesson that 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' and are doomed to piecemeal operations.

The 'negative' liberty that they seek to realise seems to me a more humane ideal than that of those who seek for the great disciplined authoritarian structures that incarnate 'positive' self-mastery by classes or peoples or mankind, because it destroys far less of what most men, sometimes by bitter experience, discover to be indispensable [217] to them as human beings. But in the end one chooses as one chooses, because one's life and thought are determined by fundamental moral categories and concepts that are as much part of one's being and one's world as one's most essential natural characteristics; and one would lose one's identity if they were altered.

It may be that the need for personal liberty is historically conditioned – at remote times or in more primitive societies men untouched by capitalist culture do not know it – and that posterity will look upon it as a passing phase. This may be so, but we are who we are, made as we are: principles are no less sacred because their duration cannot be guaranteed – the very search for eternal guarantees is a return to childish illusions. I can only quote the words of one of the best and most enlightened social critics of our time: 'To realise the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguishes a civilised man from a barbarian.' I see no reason to wish to go further.

TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY: FIRST CORRECTED DRAFT

Posted 23 November 2013

TWO CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY: FIRST CORRECTED DRAFT

incompatible ^{incompatible} equally absolute ^{claims} authorities, 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. The extent of ^{liberty} (liberty) to choose as I desire, must be weighed against the claims of ^{many} 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} claims of other persons to an equal measure of liberty, which must be respected not because of some logical principle whereby liberty for one ^{is necessary} entails ^{respect for} the liberty of others, but because ^{of the need to calculate and weigh, and compromise and adjust, and test and experiment and make mistakes, and never reach certain answers or guarantees of} for justice or equality or similar claims, a word end in itself is a basic principle. The need to calculate and weigh, and compromise and adjust, and test and experiment and make mistakes, and never reach certain answers or guarantees of ^{for rational action, must invite 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, as Kant, believe that out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made, the liberty that they seek to realize, and the ^{world} as they conceive it seems to me, in comparison with that of the absolutists, more rational, more ^{human} and more nearly realizable, because the ^{alone} are compatible with what most human beings ^{mean} mean by liberty and humanity, and with what most human beings ^{find} find the facts to be. ^{because by doing for her of what her men; independent to her; because of the desire to help her as human beings & to be treated with respect; the fact to be. No one can be treated with respect unless she is free to choose as she chooses.}

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