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European Journal of Political Theory 2008; 7; 81

DOI: 10.1177/1474885107083405

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Personal Liberty and Political Freedom

Four Interpretations

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*European Journal
of Political Theory*

© SAGE Publications Ltd,
Los Angeles, London, New Delhi
and Singapore
ISSN 1474-8851, 7(1) 81-98
[DOI: 10.1177/1474885107083405]

ABSTRACT: By freedom, classical liberals meant *non-interference, independence from the state, the personal and proprietary liberty* of the governed. It is *negative freedom* as the antithesis both to absolutism and anarchy. In the republican interpretations, the freedom of a free political community is made possible and guaranteed by the institutionalization of the liberty of the political community. Political liberty is the medium, stage and precondition for the freedom of its members. That, in turn, is conditional upon the readiness of its members to protect the liberty of their community and themselves, i.e. upon the virtue of the free citizen. In this article I engage with four different interpretations of both kinds of liberty concepts in different discourses of the 20th-century UK and US and 20th–21st-century Hungary.

KEY WORDS: *liberalism, nationalism, normative political theory, personal liberty, political discourses, political freedom, political psychology, republicanism, self-government*

What is the relationship between personal and political liberty: antagonism, end-and-means or do they have equal values? In this article I shall reconstruct, interpret and compare the logic and contexts of four different concepts of liberty in order to identify their convergence and to draw some conclusions. Isaiah Berlin's and Hannah Arendt's interpretations have become part of the Western European and North American philosophical discourses, István Bibó's and János Kis's concepts will hopefully join them. How did they interpret personal liberty and political freedom? In what way did they conceptualize their link with each other? How did the different kinds of liberty relate to other political values by their interpretations? What does politics mean to them and how did they create the concept of political community?

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I

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

In Isaiah Berlin's discussion, the secularized, theological postulations of truth, human nature and ideal society independent of place and time promoted uniformity instead of the needs and possibilities of human autonomy. My freedom is not in my knowledge but in my opportunities; the more I am aware of those opportunities and of myself, the more I can exploit them. The basis is not human nature extracted from time and place, but the rich diversity of the possibilities and the person's inner autonomy.¹

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

The sacrifice of individual liberty on the altar of the community is an absolute loss, not enhancing the values the sacrifice was made for. This manner of thinking claims more and more victims. Isaiah Berlin sought to answer the question of how the theoretical legacy of *humanist individualism*, the *Enlightenment* and *liberalism* made the assertion of such an inhuman logic possible. He opined that, with its rigid and one-sided rationalist postulates, the main current of the Enlightenment implied the germs of a totalitarian mentality. This it did by claiming that there was one and only one solution and those who were in possession of it might force the others to follow them, for they were the ones who represented their real interests. Isaiah Berlin connected the two totalitarian systems of the 20th century with two great liberating movements of the 19th century: regarding *fascism* as the distortion of *romantic nationalism* and *Bolshevism* as the deformation of *humanist individualism*.²

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

It makes us prone to what the 'grand inquisitor' represented: the domination of Miracle, Secret and Authority. The fear of freedom of choice is replaced by stability based on blind obedience; critical thought is replaced by the spirit of the flock; happiness, freedom and righteousness are replaced by a striving for security. All this has led, and still leads, to the unlimited power of *professional revolutionaries* and *specialists* in possession of 'Knowledge' based on supernatural

authority. The utopian state of Plato and the vision of Joseph de Maistre were realized by Lenin. The model of technocratic society envisaged by Auguste Comte was brought to life by the reign of specialists.

The source of fascism was offended national self-esteem. The sufferings of the Germans during the Thirty Year's War, their inferiority complex and ambivalence towards French culture, then their response to the one-sidedness of rationalist humanism, the adaptation of the romantic myth of creation to the sphere of politics all contributed to the emergence of fascism.³

The 20th-century renaissance of nationalism – like Schiller's bent twig – is a reaction to the utilitarian, technicized approach to the rationally organized world – in which many, the young, the poor, the citizens of former colonies, did (do) not find their place. Many of those who did not (do not) want to be tokens in a game they are not playing, arrive(d) at idealizing pre-industrialized states from a dream of the happy golden age, to the creation of earthly paradise, and through turning against the utilitarian outlook that ignored their desires. What they are (were) against is the application of the techniques of the natural scientific approach to human life. They revolt(ed), as in that approach there is (was) no place for their individuality, will, emotions, beliefs, ideals, their own ways of living. Revolt is a pathological form of resistance for self-protection.⁴

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

The resultant rule is (was) fed by a branch of the theoretical legacy of the Enlightenment, the need for rigid, exclusive and finite solutions, and by the extension of the supremacy of artistic intuition advocated by romanticism to the sphere of politics.⁵

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

What the sacrifice of personal freedom leads to is not the reinforcement of the self-government of the political community, righteousness and equality, but total despotism. Its antidote is individual autonomy, personal freedom and its system of

guarantees, the distribution of power. The maintenance of political liberty itself implies the decrease of power and the protection of personal liberty.

Berlin claimed that the Enlightenment was not unilinear at all, but ramifying. He corrected its rigid theses by the discovery, exploration and acceptance of the views of Vico, Herder, Hamann and Jacobi. His sympathy was not so much with the mainstream (Voltaire, d'Alembert, Helvétius, Holbach and Rousseau) as that represented by Montesquieu, Hume and Kant.⁶ Berlin's critique of the Enlightenment is closer to Karl Popper's and J.L. Talmon's criticism of totalitarianism than to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. His outlook is obviously *liberal*, but sceptical, not utilitarian or perfectionist.

Isaiah Berlin shaped his views in relation to the late 19th–early 20th-century English neo-Hegelian interpretations of liberty, those of Bernard Bosanquet, T.H. Green and L.T. Hobhouse. He drew on them and polemicized with them also when elaborating his criticism of totalitarianism, because that was the context, as Quentin Skinner pointed out, in which he developed his position.⁷

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

II

What sense does politics make? What constitutes the medium of political freedom? Why did political freedom disappear from European public thinking?

Hannah Arendt was convinced that the central value of the revolutionary tradition, of participatory democracy and self-government was political freedom. Its possibility, precondition and medium was public life or politics. The foundation of self-government, direct democracy, political liberty was the political area of the Greek city-state where the free citizens of the polis gathered to argue with those of equal rank to them and take decisions. The free citizens were not subjugated by the concerns of the household, therefore they could devote their time and energies to public affairs. Everyday political practice was the basis, medium and precondition of political freedom. Freedom is a network of relations between human beings. It is an artificial institution of the dissimilarities and coexistence of people, a construct of politics, the achievement of the ancient *polis*.⁸ Something that disappeared from the practice and memory of humankind for a long time was reborn in the organization of American self-government into a republic, followed by the hopeful attempts at self-government in the Hungarian revolution of 1956

in the wake of the Commune of Paris, the Russian revolution of 1905, and the German revolution of 1918.

The original ancient Greek political interpretation of liberty and political practice of democracy were later overshadowed by the fact that, in contrast to the sophists, Plato and Aristotle as well as their disciples withdrew from the centre of the public life of the city-state, the agora, and hence from political life. Their views were discussed and spread in narrow circles; instead of the everyday practice of political liberty to which every free citizen was entitled, they restricted their activity to free scholarly dispute. Their anti-political attitude implied the devaluation of politics and political freedom, and since Christian thinkers drew on their teachings, this gave rise to the Christian interpretation of turning inward, away from the surrounding world, reducing liberty to free will. Augustine severed liberty from any external space and politics, interpreting it as an inner sphere. Free will came to be linked with transcendence and not with the political practice of the city-state and its external venue, and hence it was split completely from political freedom. Introversion, isolation from the external sphere, was diametrically opposed to the practice of polis, as the inner sphere was the sphere of *man* and not the sphere of men or people. Modern political philosophy – from Hobbes to the 20th century – upgraded individual and social security as against politics and liberty which is inseparable from it. Then both politics and liberty came to be expropriated and distorted by totalitarian regimes.⁹ Nor is consumer society intent on the restoration of self-government, the practice of politics, political freedom. The *human condition*, however, is tied up with the meaning, the essence of politics, its practice, with political freedom. The essence of politics is political freedom, no-rule, the virtue of courage, participatory democracy, republicanism.

The French revolution failed to lay the foundations of liberty because the leaders of the revolution tried to eliminate poverty with the tools of state politics, but they failed, and they also failed to restrict violence, to bridle royal absolutism with constitutional means and to create a constitutional monarchy. By attempting to solve a *social issue* politically they entered the road of centralization and absolutism, and in the centralized nation state they restored the former royal absolutism, setting a bad example for later revolutions. By contrast, the American revolution laid the foundations of liberty. The resultant federal republic provided the frame for the self-government of the citizens. The lack of abject poverty and absolutism, the amplex of land and the Protestant ethic all contributed to the *Constitutio libertatis*, while the wisdom of the founding fathers helped to implement it in practice on the basis of the existing system of self-government.¹⁰ This was overshadowed by the new image of America that disparaged the American revolution and replaced the Americans' concept of themselves with the 'promised land', a new Canaan flowing with milk and honey, the land of plenty longed for by the European immigrants. This can be described by the dichotomy of wealth and poverty, and not by liberty vs tyranny, whereas the American revolution and American republic laid the fundamentals of liberty.

While the French revolution was the most effective and least successful of the revolutions, the American was the least effective and most successful one. The majority of modern-time revolutions emulated the French model, and the revolutionaries of the modern age became professional revolutionaries. Nonetheless, it was the creation of the American federal republic that laid the foundation of liberty, of the practice of anyone's participation in the affairs of the polis, in shaping his own and his community's life.¹¹

The opposite of liberty is despotism, while the opposite of a democratic republic is not simply traditional despotism but modern despotism, the totalitarian system, which is not simply based on fear (as were the traditional tyrannies) but on ideology and terror. In Hannah Arendt's view, *totalitarian systems* create a new form of government, the rule of ideology and terror. The Nazi and Bolshevik regimes implied as an essential feature the incessant terrorization of the obedient subjects, the annihilation of legal and moral personality, the realization of hell on earth. Totalitarian systems brought about a hitherto unseen world, the world of destruction. The concentration camps were embodiments of the vision of Hades, the labour camps of purgatory, the extermination camps of hell. The essence of totalitarian rule is the replacement of reality with fiction, the forcing of the redundant masses into shadowy existence. It implies the nightmare of robots, utter loneliness, the total isolation of atomized individuals and the elimination of the private sphere. If legitimate rule is symbolized by the space between people and the illegitimate rule of traditional despotism is envisioned by a desert, then the totalitarian system is like a desert sandstorm in which individuals are standing chained to one another, in absolute solitude.¹²

The mercilessly asserted thesis of the 'struggle of races', 'struggle of classes' for endless expansion, constant motion proposed in a deductive logical procedure that is deprived of all human values and terrorizes with its demand for lack of contradiction resulted in a world in which there is *no law*, from which both external and internal freedom disappeared, where the newborn had no right, not even the *right of beginning*, where 'human rights' are annihilated, in short, a world that is contrary to human nature and extinguishes human nature.¹³

With its process of the disfranchisement of the Jews and their planned, industrialized extinction anti-Semitism is the prelude and part of the emergence of a form of government based on the ideology of the struggle between the races and classes as well as on terror.¹⁴ A form of state is added as a new formation to Montesquieu's categories: the democratic republic built on virtue, the aristocratic republic based on moderation, the constitutional monarchy relying on honour and despotism based on fear and terror.¹⁵ It is a form of government that can only be overcome by restoring to the credit and functioning of *politics*, the democratic political practice of self-government and political liberty.

Hannah Arendt's thinking offers analogies to works by Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and Walter Benjamin, as well as Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers.

illusioned but repeatedly fought for and achieved *perfectionism* can be discerned in her approach. Her notion of politics and concept of liberty are reinterpretations of the earlier republican discourse which draws on the American founding fathers, English republicanism and Florentine renaissance republicanism.¹⁶ In her opinion, politics is the specificity of the 'condition humaine', a man-made institution, no-rule, the sphere of a free communal life. It has brought about and guarantees political liberty, the virtue of courage, and self-government. It ensures, restarts and allows for the experience of compassion. It disappeared from sight for a long time and surfaced again in the revolutionary tradition, in the federal republic, the efforts aimed at self-government. It can be the counterweight to totalitarian regimes and it can, and must, be an alternative to the consumer society.

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

III

How can the non-free citizens of a non-free state become free, and how can they make their political community free?

The establishment of a free political community is principally based on the everyday experience that the members of the political community as individuals can, and do, take possession of their community. Thus they sense and comprehend that the working and construction of the political community relies on their consent and efforts. They can elect, weigh and dismiss those who are supposed to represent their will but do not do so.

However, the building of a free political community presupposes free individuals, whereas people become free if they live in a free political community. How can one break out of this vicious circle?

István Bibó (1911–79) had different occupations. He was a lawyer, a professor of political science, a librarian, the last legitimate minister of the 1956 revolution, who refused the soviet occupation, was almost hanged, sentenced to life, imprisoned for six years, and then worked as a librarian again. István Bibó did not live in a democracy. His life was spent in authoritarian and totalitarian systems. For a few years he experienced a fluid political state with elements of democracy, but dictatorship stifled them. For a few weeks he experienced the spontaneity of freedom, during the revolution of 1956. His life's goal was to lay the foundation for the free political community of free people as a programme, task and desirable human condition.¹⁷

His approach implying perfectionist elements was eclectic, empiricist and first of all contractualist, based on the method of separation of the facts and values

from each other first, then their joint consideration. Given the opportunity he would have played the role of the political therapist. His work drew on the inter-war literature of European decline, first of all Barna Horváth's philosophy of natural law, Guglielmo Ferrero's psychologically based interpretation of legitimacy, Ferenc Erdei's conception of the rise of the peasantry, István Hajnal's theses of mutual services and László Németh's utopia of a society of intellectuals. He used and modified all these sources to his system of values.¹⁸

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

In different situations freedom means different things, but the core is the same: self-government, the absence of personal and impersonal power.¹⁹ For it is not freedom but fear that has anthropological sources. It is rooted in the physically frail, hence communally organized and conscious, human being, having to pay for the miraculous development of his mind with fear, with the knowledge of death and having to cope with this knowledge.²⁰ Most suffering of humankind is the outcome of these substitutes. This fear-generated aggression was bridled by the European (and in part the Chinese) attempts at social organization: first taming personal rule by the rule of rank and wealth, restricting fear and forcing it into institutions, then by introducing the system of mutual services. Converting personal rule into professional and impersonal service means the domestication of domination and the control of underlying fear.²¹ There is no natural law that can guarantee the success of this experiment, hence it requires continuous revision; the more so as the shift away from traditional rule to a social organization based on freedom and democracy may easily entail a vacuum that can be quickly filled with earlier and new forms of despotism when self-government is not the everyday experience of the individuals living in the society. The declaration of human rights is well founded when it is guaranteed by everyday practice.²² The late 18th-century formulation of liberty and equality was not an abstract thesis and exclusive principle. Underlying the wording of the principle of liberty was Montesquieu's definition of the offsetting and balancing of the foci of power as the main line-

ament of the English exercise of power, which he generalized and declared to be a constitutional requirement against the concentration of power, despotism. Rousseau's concept of equality was based on his experience of the aristocratic self-government of Geneva.²³

The discrediting of the two principles was caused by their separation during the derailment of the French revolution. The division of power was set aside, leading to the 'popular' despotism of popular sovereignty which concentrated, rather than separated, powers. The context in which the issue of liberty and equality cropped up was concrete: in wartime, should food prices be limited or should they be allowed to fluctuate freely?²⁴

At the beginning, the French revolution asserted the principles of popular sovereignty, representation, plurality of parties, division of power and the codification of human rights. As long as it defined itself in opposition to monarchic and aristocratic legitimacy, it liberated enormous energies. When, however, it adopted the practice of centralizing absolutism in its efforts to subordinate the clergy and the provinces to its authority, it came into conflict with the sentiments and loyalty of the overwhelming majority of the population, unleashing immense amounts of fear and violence. It denied its declared principles, popular sovereignty and the *separation of powers*, as it eliminated the decentralization of power, created power concentration and turned into despotism, bequeathing harmful patterns (the roles of the professional revolutionary and the confirmed reactionary) upon posterity. These became the germs of the totalitarian movements and powers of the 20th century.²⁵

In Bibó's interpretation, both Nazism and Bolshevism were the negation of European development. While German and other fascisms had no theoretical foundation, with resentment and political hysteria being their essence, Marxism–Leninism led to a despotism on a par with fascism, but there was an irreconcilable contradiction between its social political goals and tenets on the one hand and means on the other. The programme of social liberation underlying the theses and goals of Marxism was connected to the humanizing process of European political development. This programme was falsified and discarded by Marxism, the essence of which is the doctrine of class struggle and revolutionary violence. The logical consequence of this indoctrination was Leninist one-party rule and the privileged organ of oppression. The total suppression and terror introduced by Stalin was the logical outcome of Leninism, and it was identical with fascism in its means.²⁶

Fascism is the utter annihilation of the human personality and its subordination to the community's real or illusory interests, the separation and confrontation of the cause of liberty with the cause of the community. Fascism refers to traditional aristocratic values and, at the same time, denies the whole European heritage, appeals to reactionary forces and destroys their social prestige, mobilizes democratic mass sentiments and leads them into a blind alley, generates a revolution and solves nothing. It connects and annuls the right to self-rule with the cult of

power, democracy with the rule of the leader, equality with racism. It leads the energies of a democratic revolution into collective madness, generating collective hysteria and destroying everything. The source for this development is the disorder of the community's self-confidence and its believed incapacity of action.²⁷ Fascism is the product of the distortion of democratic development.

Bibó, as has been seen, found the essence of totalitarian systems identical, but he differentiated their bases. Totalitarianisms are the modern forms of despotism, their counterpoint is a society established on the principles of liberty and democracy. In his opinion, the precedent for modern liberty was privilege, the self-government of the minority, the privileged, and was valid in small circles (ancient city-states, aristocratic and village communities and medieval nations). Modern liberty evolved from their earlier variants of self-rule, and primarily means that political power is not independent of the ruled but depends on their consent. It is not personal rule but impersonal service. The sovereign people, the nation, has not a single subject and is not one and indivisible as Rousseau presumed. Consequently, it may – and often does – happen that there is *despotism* with reference to the people. The community's omnipotent control, its monopoly over products, the lack of a private sphere make it impossible for the individual to be free.²⁸

Liberal democracy is not limited to a particular era, but a valuable legacy and valid achievement of humankind, which needs correcting and improving. Its distortions are consequences of left-over personal and impersonal power, power of wealth, inherited property that was not based on one's own work.²⁹ It is linked to the ideals of human dignity, equality and justice. Human dignity presupposes the concepts of equality and justice, each referring to liberty and to one another. Liberty has a patriotic character: the *nation* is not a fictitious entity or a system of privileges encoded in collective rights, but the framework of political liberty, and the precondition, venue and network of individual liberty. A free political community is one in which the cause of liberty and the cause of the community are synonymous. The modern democratic nation is a conscious political community consisting of free people based on the experience of a joint venture, capable of solving their problems.

Bibó's interpretation of liberty was determined by the political concept of freedom implying the demand to modernize the traditional anti-absolutistic liberal guarantees for the division of power, the republican ethos of the *citoyen*, the democratic principle of popular sovereignty, the admittedly valid achievements of liberal democracy, the correction of their distortions, and radical peasant democratic and 'petty bourgeois socialist' ideas as well.

IV

90 What does democratic politics led by principles mean if the politics of interests cannot be excluded from it? How can members of pluralist, culturally and ideo-

logically subdivided societies form a political community? Can political claims be based on the fact that in a constitutional democracy the distribution of material resources is unjust?

After his university studies, inspired by and struggling against the Budapest School rallying around György Lukács, János Kis (b. 1943) joined two of his colleagues in facing up to the questions of Marx's economic theory in the early 1970s.³⁰ As political retaliation they were dismissed from their jobs. He then lived on translating, and became one of the founding fathers of the human rights opposition, and editor and regular contributor of the illegal periodical *Beszélő*.³¹ In a philosophical essay he looked at the question of whether we had human rights, and answered in the affirmative.³² From then on, his position has been liberal, reflecting the Rawlsian discourse. The essay appeared in the same year that Kis wrote in *Beszélő*: 'Kádár must go'.³³ He was one of the mentors and contributors of the consensual regime change, the founding president of the Alliance of Free Democrats, who refused to act as a politician after the first free parliamentary elections but resumed his career as a writer and teacher of political science and philosophy at the Central European University. He also teaches in New York. When in 2002 it turned out that the newly elected prime minister of the coalition of the socialist-free democrats was a secret political officer in the old regime, Kis wrote an article titled 'Medgyessy must go'.³⁴ When his party retreated from a position of principle formerly professed, he quit the party and two years later published a fundamental philosophical book clarifying the issue.³⁵ His work still awaits due discovery, together with István Bibó's oeuvre: they are not yet included in the mainstream of international political theory and philosophy discourses.

Kis argued that the struggle for the redistribution of domination over the state and for the advantages attainable through the state cannot and must not be abolished, but it can and must be tamed. The state is based on the respect for and guarantee of the fact that each individual has a single life which is of value in itself, which he has the right to live autonomously. No one's life is more important than anybody else's. However, one person's choices restrict the possibilities of others, since not all choosable values and ways of life are available to all, and utilizable resources are limited. It is, however, the individual who disposes over his life. His moral rights are not created by institutions, but derive from being human. No political establishment is acceptable unless it guarantees the rights of the individual against the excessive power of the state and anarchy, and ensures that in social interactions nobody can injure the individual's basic rights, and that the system of interactions should not make anyone defenceless.

In the private sphere the individual is free when he is exempt from the interference of the state. In the public sphere we are free when we can take part in decisions about the state under adequate conditions: when as equal members of the political community we have the power – shared with others – to influence the state. A necessary precondition and constituent of the individual's autonomy, independence, dignity and equality is to have an area in which nobody can inter-

ferre. In parallel, the individual should dispose over the conditions that enable him to utilize his potential. Contrary to the conservative concept of the free market, indigence must be recognized as a source of individual values as against the community. At the same time, the claims of the indigent are not individual rights, as the welfare socialist conception declares, but they impose the duty upon the state – of a culturally and ideologically divided, pluralist society – to seriously strive to moderate the total mass of unjust disadvantages. The state's ideological and cultural neutrality and affirmative action towards the disabled can be flexibly determined on the basis of politics led by principles.³⁶

The revision of the old liberal views on distributive justice leads to the recognition of the justification and need of affirmative action. The liberal view of the modern moderate state – compared to the viewpoints of the minimal and maximal states – differs from the traditional classic liberal conception not only concerning its tasks stemming from the unjust distribution of resources. Another difference is that it regards democracy both as the instrument of personal freedom and as a value in itself, the self-government of the political community. It is a positive (political) freedom that implies the possibility and need for cooperative self-restriction.

In a constitutional democracy based on the protection of personal rights, laws can only be enacted by the elected representatives of those whose lives the laws influence. At the same time, democratic politics is a continuous exchange of ideas about what goals the society should set and by which principles it should be governed. The separation of state powers, the mutual balancing effects of the governing majority and opposition minority interested in peaceful changes of power, is the venue of the peaceful reconciliation of interests, of bargaining. That is the realm of the deputies of the citizens of the state. Parallel with that and with repercussions upon it, the public debate about the good and just society takes place. The participants in the bargaining exchange proposals, the participants in the debate exchange arguments. The participants in the bargaining focus on their separate interests; the participants in the dispute have to find the stance that can be mutually accepted as true and correct. Communication in a bargain allows the parties to treat each other as strangers; the debate is conditional upon the postulate that the participants are tied by the common effort to find the true and right position. Those who pursue a public debate about what can better our society and what can make our state just constitute a political community or at least strive to create one. Hence, the subordination of power to moral goals, the restriction of power, the balancing of the institutions is paired with the self-governing effort of the political community. This is the politics of principles, since the institutional application of the principles alleviates the power struggle while there is constant dispute about the principles themselves. Democratic politics thus implies the institutionally tamed variant of a power struggle as well as the continuous, never-ending discourse about the good and just society, the public discussion about principles. That is what repeatedly constitutes the political community.³⁷

Underlying negative liberty and the principle of equality is equal human dignity. Positive freedom – the self-government of the political community – is not only its tool, but a value in itself. The two kinds of liberty are preconditions and generators of the rest of the political values, added to human dignity, equality and righteousness.³⁸ The values are not natural rights independent of time and place, nor are they arbitrary decisions without considerable ground, but flexible and repeatedly reviving elements of the liberal ethic, of ethical individualism.

The political community is created by the incessant debate about the good and just society, whereby the members of society may feel the state is theirs, not only because the political institutions are subordinated to the principle of individual rights so as to ensure that the state is an instrument in the assertion of this principle, but also because the debate over the principles keeps recreating the political community whose self-government is thereby practised.

The frames, questions and answers of Kis's normative political theory were influenced by the Dworkinian interpretation of the link between the fundamental constitutional value of human dignity and the mechanisms of the liberal democratic constitutionalism. He adopted and rethought them in the context of the challenge of the constitutionalist theoretical foundations for a newly arising liberal democracy, its politics and identity building.

V

Of the four thinkers Berlin and Arendt met twice, in New York in 1941 and a decade later. Berlin had a low opinion of Arendt's works. He regarded her thinking as a chain of free associations lacking profound historical knowledge, and he ascribed her influence on intellectuals to fashion. For all this, he relied on the opinion of Gerschom Scholem.³⁹

It is possible, even probable, that István Bibó read one of the editions of Arendt's book on totalitarianism, but there is no proof of this. But Hannah Arendt had heard – on one of her holidays in Ancona in the early 1960s from Károly Kerényi, the famous philologist and expert on Greek antiquity⁴⁰ – about the last persevering minister inspiring the establishment of workers' councils during the Hungarian revolution that she had followed with such eager hope.

Berlin and Bibó never met. Yet the names of these two advocates of freedom (of utterly different life-paths) came close to each other when Berlin was one of those who sent a telegram to Ferenc Münnich on 14 March 1961:

On the eve of the anniversary of the Hungarian revolution of 1848 we should like to express our conviction that the Hungarian government would act wisely and generously if it let the *outstanding scholar Professor István Bibó* free on the forthcoming anniversary of Hungary's liberation from fascism.

We can find his name among others who cabled the following message to János Kádár on 22 February 1962:

Scholars and scientists in Britain are grieved by news of failing health of eminent legal historian István Bibó imprisoned since early 1957. May we point out to your excellency that his early release would contribute to establishing friendly links between Western and Hungarian intellectuals and would be greatly appreciated by peaceloving people all over the world.⁴¹

Bibó and Kis did not know each other personally, though Kis took part in Bibó's funeral which turned into an opposition demonstration and he is one of the authors of the volume *In Honour of Bibó* which united the different opposition forces.⁴² It is obvious from his works that he deemed several of Bibó's questions justified, but his answers to them differ from Bibó's. Kis used and criticized Berlin's interpretation of the two concepts of liberty, as well as Arendt's arguments on the link between truth and politics.⁴³

Berlin regarded both kinds of liberty as justified, but he argued against the elimination of personal freedom, saying that its sacrificing did not lead to the growth of any other value, but was an absolute loss. Arendt based the realm of politics on the values of political freedom, on self-government. She argued that its degradation into a tool, and later disappearance, was the precondition for the emergence of totalitarian systems. Bibó found an interrelation between the two kinds of liberty, claiming that in the process of creating a political community both were in harmony with different political values. In his opinion, the inconsistencies of the attempt to organize a modern society on the foundations of liberty and democracy led it to derail at several points and – especially in Central and Eastern Europe – to political hysteria. Therefore, with his careful diagnoses based on social psychological insights and his therapies, he tried to relax them and promote the foundation and consolidation of democracies. The international circumstances brought about by the great powers were adverse to his efforts. János Kis, who has in most of his writings published so far expounded a normative political theory of liberal democracy, could and did become a real founding father.

The channels the four political thinkers used to communicate their ideas are the lecture and the essay. Their oeuvres are part of different discourses. They all opined that the relation between personal and political freedom is not like that between end and means, but both are values, and two thought that they mutually presupposed each other and the rest of the democratic political values. None of them regarded the possibility and choice of personal and political liberty as natural rights independent of place and time but thought that they depended on a particular cultural and political system. True, in Hannah Arendt's view political freedom and politics were the hidden treasure of the ancient Greek polis that flared up from time to time. Isaiah Berlin tried to protect personal freedom from the distortions of humanist individualism and romantic nationalism, as well as from the extension of the scientific worldview beyond its boundaries. István Bibó regarded the values of personal and political freedom as the achievements of a democratic political system, and János Kis regarded them as the achievements of

liberalism and modernity, which have to be supported by politics led by principles and by constantly renewed, flexible techniques.

In spite of the fashionable but unreflected and outdated *East–West, civic–ethnic, core–periphery* canons, liberalism and nationalism were intertwined and almost inseparable from the 1820s to the 1870s in most parts of Europe, from Scotland to Bulgaria, West, Central, East, and South.⁴⁴ From the 1870s they became opposed in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, especially during the interwar period with its autocratic systems, under the totalitarian regimes, and after 1989–90. Of course, Berlin’s cold war role as *defensor libertatis* and Arendt’s anti-totalitarian new republicanism, Bibó’s synthesis of liberalism, socialism, republicanism and patriotism, and Kis’s anti-nationalist liberal democratic political philosophy are different from each other. They all display the antagonism between liberalism and nationalism, while defining their positions with growing openness towards other, non-nationalist modernist democratic political ideologies.⁴⁵

Notes

1. Isaiah Berlin (2002) *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, with an essay on Berlin and his critics by Ian Harris, pp. 252–79. Oxford: OUP.
2. *Ibid.* pp. 55–93.
3. Isaiah Berlin (1991) *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy, pp. 91–237. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Berlin (1996) *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed. Henry Hardy, with an intro. by Patrick Gardiner, pp. 168–93, 232–48. London: Chatto & Windus. I. Berlin and R. Jahanbegloo (1991) *Recollections of a Historian of Ideas: Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 96–9. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
4. Berlin (1991, in n. 3), pp. 207–37. Berlin (1996, in n. 3), pp. 249–66.
5. Berlin (1991, in n. 3), pp. 207–37. Berlin (1999) *The Roots of Romanticism*. The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965, The National Gallery of Arts, Washington, DC, ed. Henry Hardy. London: Chatto & Windus. Berlin (2006) *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*, ed. Henry Hardy, with an intro. by Joshua L. Cherniss. London: Chatto & Windus.
6. Berlin (1981) *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. with a bibliography by Henry Hardy and an intro. by Roger Hausheer, pp. 1–24, 111–87. Oxford: OUP. Berlin (1991, in n. 3), pp. 91–175, 207–37. Berlin (n. 4), pp. 232–48. Berlin (2000) *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy. London: Pimlico. Berlin (n. 1). Berlin (2000) *The Power of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Berlin (2003) *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy. London: Pimlico. Berlin (2006, in n. 5).
7. Quentin Skinner (2002) ‘A Third Concept of Liberty: Isaiah Berlin Lecture’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117: 237–68, pp. 239–43. Cf. M. Ignatieff (1998) *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*. London: Chatto & Windus.
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- Condition, pp. 22–78. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1st publ. 1958.
10. Hannah Arendt (1979) *On Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin; 1st publ. 1963. Cf. J.G.A. Pocock (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. P. Pettit (1997) *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: OUP. M. Gelderen and Q. Skinner (eds) (2002) *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. Cambridge: CUP.
 11. Arendt (n. 10). Pettit (n. 10). Gelderen and Skinner (n. 10).
 12. Hannah Arendt (1958) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Cleveland, OH: Meridian.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Ibid. Cf. Hannah Arendt (1978) *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. and intro. Ron H. Feldman, pp. 55–279. New York: Grove Press. Arendt (1964) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Report of the Banality of Evil*. New York: Viking.
 15. Arendt (n. 12).
 16. Pocock (n. 10). Pettit (n. 10). Gelderen and Skinner (n. 10). Cf. E. Young-Bruehl (1982) *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press. M. Canovan (1992) *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*. Cambridge: CUP. S. Benhabib (1996) *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. C. Calhoun and J. McGowan (eds) (1997) *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. G. Kovács (2004) ‘Kultúrkritika és republikanizmus’, in I.Z. Dénes (ed.) *A szabadság értelme–az értelem szabadsága: filozófiai és eszmetörténeti tanulmányok*, pp. 367–83. Budapest: Argumentum. Z. Bretter (2004) ‘A jó (köztársasági) polgár’, *ibid.* pp. 399–410. J. Kis (2004) *A politika mint erkölcsi probléma*. Budapest: Irodalom Kft.
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 19. Cf. Pettit (n. 10). Gelderen and Skinner (n. 10).
 20. István Bibó (1991) *Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination: Selected Writings*, ed. Károly Nagy, tr. András Boros-Kazai, pp. 425–31, with its context: 421–523. Social Science Monographs. Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic Research and Publications. Cf. G. Ferrero (1972) *The Principles of Power: The Great Political Crises of History*. New York: Arno Press; 1st publ. 1942. See also R.N. Berki (1992) ‘The Realism of Moralism: The Political Philosophy of István Bibó’, *History of Political Thought* 13(3): 513–34. Exeter: Imprint

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21. Bibó (n. 20), pp. 13–324, 421–523. Cf. Ferrero (1941) *The Reconstruction of Europe: Talleyrand and the Congress of Vienna, 1814–1815*. New York: Putnam's; 1st publ. 1940. Ferrero (1961) *The Gamble: Bonaparte in Italy 1796–1797*. New York: Walker & Co.; 1st publ. 1936. Berki (n. 20). Balog (n. 17). Kovács (nn. 20, 17).
 22. Bibó (n. 20), pp. 447–68.
 23. Ibid. pp. 325–523. Cf. Ferrero (n. 20).
 24. Bibó (1986–90, in n. 18), vol. 4, pp. 741–58, 759–82, 796–8.
 25. Ibid. vol. 1, pp. 183–201, vol. 2, pp. 367–97, vol. 4, pp. 741–58, 759–82, 796–8. Bibó (1991, in n. 18). Bibó (1993, in n. 18), pp. 7–125. Bibó (1994, 1997, 2004, in n. 18). Cf. Berlin (n. 1), pp. 166–217. Berlin (2006, in n. 5), pp. 155–207. Arendt (n. 10). Berlin (1991, in n. 3), pp. 95–174. Berlin (1996, in n. 3), pp. 168–93.
 26. Bibó (1986–90, in n. 18), vol. 4, pp. 141–56. Bibó (1991, in n. 18). Bibó (1993, in n. 18), pp. 7–201. Bibó (1994, 1997, 2004, in n. 18).
 27. Bibó (1986–90, in n. 18), vol. 1, p. 466. Bibó (1991, in n. 18). Bibó (1993, in n. 18), pp. 7–125. Bibó (1997, in n. 18).
 28. Bibó (1976, in n. 18), pp. 35–52. Bibó (1986–90, in n. 18), vol. 1, pp. 183–201. Bibó (1991, in n. 18). Bibó (1993, in n. 18), pp. 7–125. Bibó (1994, 1997, 2004, in n. 18). Cf. M. Ignatieff (1990) *The Needs of Strangers*, pp. 105–31. London: Hogarth Press.
 29. Bibó (1986–90, in n. 18), vol. 4, pp. 778–82, 796–7.
 30. Bence, J. Kis and Márkus (1992) *Hogyan lehetséges kritikai gazdaságtan?* Budapest: T-Twins; 1st publ. 1972.
 31. J. Kis (1989) *L'égalité: Essai sur les fondements des droits de l'homme*. Paris: Seuil; Hungarian original: 1987, 2003.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Ibid. pp. 143–52.
 34. János Kis (2002) 'Medgyessynek mennie kell', *Magyar Hírlap* (19 June).
 35. Kis (n. 16).
 36. Kis (n. 31). Kis (1993) *Egyenlőtlenség és kizsákmányolás. In Lehetséges-e egyáltalán? Márkus Györgynek – tanítványai*, ed. János Háty, pp. 261–341. Budapest: Atlantisz. Kis (1997) *Az állam semlegessége*. Budapest: Atlantisz. Kis (1999) 'On Liberty: A Dispute with György Márkus', *Constellations* 3: 290–322. Kis (2003) *Constitutional Democracy*. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press; Hungarian original: 2000. Kis (n. 16).
 37. Kis (n. 31). Kis (1997, in n. 36). Kis (n. 16).
 38. Kis (1999, in n. 36).
 39. Berlin and Jahanbegloo (n. 3), pp. 81–5.
 40. I am grateful to Ms Zsuzsa Szőnyi for giving me this information in Rome at the 'Serata Commemorativa, István Bibó, pensatore europeo', Accademia d'Ungheria in Rome, 18 May 2004.
 41. British scholars' and scientists' telegram to PM Ferenc Münnich, Oxford, 14 March 1961. The telegram was signed by: A.J. Ayer, Isaiah Berlin, Maurice Cranston, Dennis Gabor, Max Gluckmann, Michael Polanyi, Hugh Seton-Watson, Edward Shils, T.S. Simey, Richard Titmuss, C.V. Wedgwood, Elizabeth Wiskemann. *The Times*, 17 March 1961, Paul Ignotus' letter to Isaiah Berlin, London, 24 January 1962, Berlin's reply, 26 January 1962, British scholars' and scientists' telegram to PM János Kádár, Oxford, 22 February 1962. The cable was signed by: A.J. Ayer, Isaiah Berlin, Maurice Cranston, Julian Huxley, A.L.P. Norrington, Bertrand Russell, Hugh Seton Watson, Leonard Schapiro, T.S. Simey, Richard Titmuss, C.V. Wedgwood, Elizabeth Wiskemann. Copy

of the cable, Bodleian Library, Isaiah Berlin Collection, University of Oxford. I am grateful to Henry Hardy for his kind information. Cf. Ignatieff (n. 7), p. 231.

42. Bence and J. Kis (1991) 'Határolt forradalom, megszorított többpártrendszer, feltételes szuverenitás', in P. Rész (ed.) *Bibó-émlékkönyv*, 2 vols, vol. 1, pp. 386–403. Budapest and Berne: Századvég and Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem; Samizdat publ. 1979.
43. Kis (n. 38). Kis (1999, in n. 16), pp. 110–14.
44. I.Z. Dénes (ed.) (2006) *Liberty and the Search for Identity: Liberal Nationalisms and the Legacy of Empires*. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press.
45. M. Freedon (2005) *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.