

Editorial: Freedom and Power I

Ever since Livy proclaimed that ‘freedom is to be in one’s own power’, if not from long before and in other contexts, the relationship between freedom and power has been an enduring concern of social and political theorists.¹ It has withstood even Isaiah Berlin’s sharp distinction between seemingly irreconcilable forms of freedom and much of the subsequent theoretical and philosophical debates that it spawned. The history of political thought is littered with thinkers who have opposed freedom and power, arguing that liberty can only be truly attained free from power and domination (republicans) or in the absence of external impediments imposed by other human beings (liberals); but there are also many examples of arguments that identify a close and intriguing link between them, especially in the sphere of politics, that emanate from radicals and conservatives alike, thinkers such as Machiavelli, Montaigne, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Arendt and Foucault. Moreover, those in the former camp tend to think of freedom in formal and abstract terms, while proponents of the latter eschew this now normal tendency in political philosophy and instead think of freedom in fully substantive, concrete and even materialist terms. Hobbes is an unusual and unique figure as his account of freedom inspires members of both parties, that is those concerned with the formal character of freedom and those troubled by its more substantive components and conditions, which is why it is only right that we start this special issue on freedom and power with an analysis of Hobbes’ account of freedom.

In ‘Liberty, Law and *Leviathan*: Of Being Free from Impediments by Artifice’, Lena Halldenius stands on the shoulders of, in particular, Quentin Skinner’s interpretation of Hobbes’ theory of freedom, and yet provides a strong case for a comprehensive novel account of ‘freedom’ in Hobbes: that, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes allows for four ways of being free to act – corporal freedom by nature, freedom from obligation by nature, the freedom to disobey and the freedom of no-rule – each corresponding to a particular absence, some of which make sense only in the civil state. Contrary to what some have claimed, this complexity does not commit Hobbes to an unarticulated definition of freedom in tension with the only one that he explicitly offers, which is that freedom consists of nothing other than the absence of external impediments of motion. To be free from obligation is to be free from impediments. As a political subject in the state, the power that is blocked or compelled by law is a person’s power to perform artificial acts as her will directs. Laws and prior commitments are external impediments that block or compel making an artificial, institution-dependent act either impossible or unavoidable. The bonds

of law bind artificially yet corporally, given that the power that makes them is, quite literally, an external body that moves at will.

Then, in 'Democracy and the Multitude: Spinoza against Negri', Sandra Field takes issue with Antonio Negri's marshalling of Spinoza to support his conception of democracy of the multitude, in which the concrete powers of individual humans are not alienated away, but rather are added together. Amongst other things, she asks how the multitude can act without alienating anyone's power? To answer this difficulty, she submits, Negri explicitly appeals to Spinoza. However, she maintains that this is not a wise move since, as she goes on to show, Spinoza's philosophy does not support Negri's project. In contradistinction to what Negri claims, she argues that the Spinozist multitude avoids internal hierarchy through the mediation of political institutions and not in spite of them; nor do these institutions merely emanate from the multitude as it is, but rather they structure, restrain and channel its passions. In particular, the required institutions are not those of a simple direct democracy. In sum then, she submits, that although there may be other non-Spinozist arguments on which Negri can ground his theory, he cannot legitimately defend his conception of the democratic multitude by appeal to Spinoza.

In the third essay in this collection, 'Subjective Freedom and Necessity in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*', David James draws our attention back to the central role played by practical necessity in Hegel's conception of freedom. He argues that Hegel associates 'subjective' freedom with various rights, all of which concern the subject's particularity, and with the demand that this particularity be accorded proper recognition within the modern state. He shows that Hegel's account of subjective freedom can be assimilated to the 'positive' model of freedom that is often attributed to him because of the way in which the objective determinations of right (*Recht*) recognise the subject's particularity in the form of individual welfare. To this extent, the practical constraints to which individuals are subject in the modern state are not purely external ones, and the freedom which they enjoy within it is not merely subjective in kind. In exploring the role of certain practical forms of necessity in Hegel's account of civil society, he argues, however, that Hegel points to the existence of a group of people, the poor, who must be thought to lack subjective freedom, because they will arguably experience the constraints to which they are subject as purely external ones. He also suggests the existence of a form of freedom that is merely subjective in kind, because it consists in a sense of absence of constraint that fails to reflect fully the practical forms of necessity that underlie civil society and constrain an individual's actions. As highlighted in the paper, the importance of the concept of necessity in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* demonstrates, moreover, that the emphasis on freedom found in recent interpretations of Hegel's social and political philosophy needs to be counterbalanced by greater recognition of the role played in it by this concept.

Then, in 'Against Liberty: Adorno, Levinas and the Pathologies of Freedom', Eric Nelson uses the work of two twentieth-century thinkers, Theodor W.

Adorno and Emmanuel Levinas, both inspired by Hegel, amongst others, to subvert many of our common everyday and theoretical assumptions regarding freedom. He submits that Adorno and Levinas argue from distinct yet intersecting perspectives that there are pathological forms of freedom, formed by systems of power and economic exchange, which legitimate the neglect, exploitation, and domination of others. Nelson examines very fruitfully how the works of Adorno and Levinas assist in diagnosing the aporias of liberty in contemporary capitalist societies by providing critical models and strategies for confronting present discourses and systems of freedom that perpetuate unfreedom such as the possessive individualist libertarian reification of freedom.

In contrast, the final article in this issue, Ilya Winham's 'Rereading Hannah Arendt's "What Is Freedom?": Freedom as a Phenomenon of Political Virtuosity', is one possible means of resurrecting a role for freedom under modern conditions, via Arendt's conception of freedom and with special and intriguing reference to recent revolutionary events in Egypt and elsewhere. Winham notes that in 'What Is Freedom?', Arendt speaks of freedom as a 'phenomenon of virtuosity', claiming that this phenomenon is the original, hitherto under-theorised experience of freedom in ancient Greece and Rome, and that the idea of freedom began to appear in connection with the will in our philosophical tradition only *after* freedom as a phenomenon of virtuosity had in practice disappeared in the late Roman Empire – but not from all human activities in which it continued to exist in a hidden form, as the power or 'gift' or capacity of humans to begin a new line of action. His interpretation of Arendt's conception of freedom begins from and elaborates on these claims, and shows that Arendt should be taken seriously as a critic of the late antique notion that freedom consists in the decisions we make with our will. He also shows that in rejecting accounts of freedom that reduce it to a matter of the will or the intellect, Arendt relies on the notion of an inspiring 'principle' of action that functions in a manner analogous to Hegel's understanding of (moral) action as taking place against a background of unwritten rules (*sittlichkeit*) and as deriving its 'validity' and 'absolute' character from a spirit, or principle, immanent within it.

This is the first of two special issues on freedom and power to be published seriatim in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*. In this issue we have arranged the articles in terms of the intellectual historical chronology of their subject matter. Although this practice works in this case, and reveals an intriguing number of 'returns' to Hegel, it will not be repeated in the forthcoming issue, which, with one or two exceptions, will focus on more analytical and contemporary arguments regarding the relationship(s) between freedom and power.

LAWRENCE HAMILTON
ON BEHALF OF THE EDITORS

Notes

1. 'Libertas suis stat viribus', in Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Book 35, ch. 32, 11. I have modified the translation found in Livy. 2005. *History of Rome from Its Foundation: Rome and the Mediterranean*, trans. H. Bettenson. London: Penguin.