

# *Hobbes, Constant, and Berlin on Liberty*

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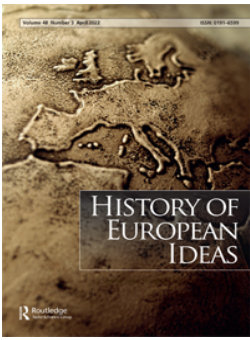
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## Hobbes, Constant, and Berlin on Liberty

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### ABSTRACT

Isaiah Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty' regards both Hobbes and Constant as supporting the negative version. Both took a favourable view of the freedom to live as one pleases. But this shared preference arose from radically different overall philosophies. Hobbes's support for freedom as 'the silence of the laws' reflected his view of happiness as preference-satisfaction. Constant's support for freedom as a sphere of absolute rights was supplemented by support for active citizenship and connected with belief in 'perfectibility' that was itself linked to religion. These theories involve altogether different understandings of the image of an 'area' preserved from interference. Berlin takes over from Constant an appeal to human nature without the idea of progress that had supported it.

### KEYWORDS

Aristotle; Hobbes; Constant; liberty; individuality; Isaiah Berlin

In every Western language, there is a word (or words) that is the agreed translation of *eleutheria*.<sup>1</sup> In most political circumstances, it is a word worth claiming; conversely, it is worth denying to one's enemies. Given that its prestige has had a natural tendency to multiply the meanings to which it is attached, the usual reason for the project of defining 'freedom' has been to restrict its proper use to certain favoured senses. Thomas Hobbes and Benjamin Constant are obvious examples of this phenomenon. Both lived in political cultures in which 'freedom' as a slogan had tremendous resonance. Both had a favourable view of the freedom to live as one pleases. Both were suspicious of the claim that freedom necessarily implies some part in ruling: they took the identification between the idea of 'freedom' and a share in rulership to be an importation of a Greco-Roman notion into a kind of polity to which it was unsuited. Though they manifestly differed about constitutional forms, they had similar conceptions of the kind of social order that any sort of constitution ought to be upholding. Both favoured a society where the industrious were rewarded, where property rights were secured through an impartial rule of law, and where governments had a bias against needless legislation. Both thought of the state, in essence, as a machinery set up to secure the enjoyment of individual rights.

From a larger perspective, however, their positions were opposed. The difference between them that Constant himself stressed was Constant's opposition to the Hobbesian idea that a rights-respecting order required 'sovereignty' – that is, the existence somewhere of an unfettered power that was itself beyond control by human institutions. This was not a little thing: Constant was well aware that his primary target – Rousseau – had adapted the Hobbesian sovereign for republican objectives.<sup>2</sup> But there were other differences that may be more important. Constant's whole moral outlook was anti-Hobbesian: those features of his use of 'freedom' that were similar arose

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from diametrically opposite positions on free will, human nature, the character of progress, and the function of religion. One virtue of straightforwardly contrasting the two thinkers is that it reveals the dependence of the preferences they shared on flatly inconsistent philosophical assumptions.

Within the English-speaking world, any such exercise is likely to be shaped by, or to react against, Isaiah Berlin's diffusely rhetorical, psychologically acute, confusingly presented, and (partly as a consequence) suggestive inaugural lecture. Berlin did not of course maintain that the 'two concepts of liberty' that he set out to discuss exhausted the range of possible concepts of freedom.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious, however, that he hoped to find in freedom some way of grounding what he called 'the great clash of ideologies that dominates our world'.<sup>4</sup> The version that he delivered in 1958 maintained that 'the war now being fought between these views expresses two complete systems of life and thought'.<sup>5</sup> This Cold War outlook tended to generate a pressure for a binary distinction that tended, in turn, to encourage the bundling of Constant with Hobbes as a proponent of the freedom he called 'negative'.

When Berlin referred to 'the classical English political philosophers' as prominent supporters of 'negative liberty' – by which he meant liberty understood as 'an area of non-interference' – he appended a footnote quotation of a Hobbesian definition: 'A free man is he that ... is not hindered to do what he has a will to'. From this, he concluded that 'law is always a fetter, even if it protects you from being bound in chains that are heavier than those of the law ...'.<sup>6</sup> He also explicitly stated that 'no one saw the conflict between the two types of liberty better, or expressed it more clearly, than Benjamin Constant'.<sup>7</sup> In drawing on ideas derived from two such different sources, it is not perhaps surprising that he ran into some problems that he was both aware of and unable to resolve. But the difficulties encountered have an interest and importance extending beyond reconstruction of Cold War attitudes. When the contrasts between Hobbes and Constant are adequately grasped, they yield a fresh perspective on what might be involved in valuing distinctively 'negative' freedom.

## 1.

Hobbes's preoccupation with the term 'liberty' pre-dated the political works for which he is remembered. As early as 1620, a 'discourse' about Tacitus composed by his employer about which it is reasonable to think he was consulted resisted the view that 'liberty' requires a republic.<sup>8</sup> In his translation of Thucydides (published in 1629, though written somewhat earlier), the marginal notes draw attention to the idea that 'freedom' is an attribute of cities in their relationship with other cities.<sup>9</sup> Lastly, in *A Briefe of the Art of Rhetorique* (1637) – his English-language digest of Aristotle's book – he took note of the opinion that 'the End of Democracy, or the Peoples government, is Liberty'.<sup>10</sup> It was not at all surprising that worries about the misuse of the term became a prominent feature of the philosophy that he elaborated from the 1630s onwards.

As Hobbes was extremely reluctant to cite his predecessors, it is of some significance that each of the main versions of his political thought refers to and quotes the same passage from Aristotle's works.<sup>11</sup> In *The Politics*, Book Six, Chapter Two, Aristotle had reported that 'the basis of a democratic state is liberty; which, according to the common opinion of men, can only be enjoyed in such a state'. They think so on the grounds that it is a 'principle of liberty that all should rule and be ruled by turns'. It follows that majority rule is one 'note of liberty' while 'another is that a man should live as he likes. This, they say, is the mark of liberty, since, on the other hand, not to live as a man likes is the mark of a slave'.<sup>12</sup> Needless to say, his purpose in the association of democracy with freedom was not to praise democracy but to discredit it. On any plausible reading of his political thought, both of the marks of freedom that he identified – political power enjoyed irrespective of virtue and an unrestricted license to choose one's way of life – were signs of a radical failure in a community whose proper object was to help its citizens live well.<sup>13</sup> As it turned out, however, one of the paradoxes of the long later history of use of the term 'freedom' is that his sharply-edged critique of democratic thinking preserved a record of ideas of which he disapproved. At all events, Hobbesian thinking was shaped by Aristotle in focusing attention on these signs of liberty.

There was, however, a key difference. One of the reasons ‘freedom’ resists analysis is that invocation of freedom has seldom been wholly divorced from the ascription of a social status; the glamour attaching to freedom and the shame to lack of freedom are connected with the lurking, strictly binary, distinction between non-slaves and slaves. In a thinker like Hobbes who is hostile to this socially-grounded distinction, Aristotle’s signs of freedom (that is, markers of the status of being a non-slave) are transformed into concepts of freedom (that is, to understandings of a purely abstract term with no particular reference to cultural institutions). In breaking the link between freedom and ascription of a status, Hobbes was of course discouraging a powerful rhetoric that (as he saw it) misdescribed subjection as enslavement. But he was also working out one of the implications of a philosophy disclaiming an appeal to a fixed concept of the good.

All Hobbes’s discussions of freedom were responsive to two pressures. The first and more important was philosophical. In the context of his rigorously deterministic system, a ‘good’ was simply something that caused an appetite (in other words, an entity that, when perceived, gave rise to an incipient motion to encounter and enjoy it). An ‘evil’, conversely, was something causing an ‘aversion’ (that is, an incipient motion to avoid encountering it). As human beings look ahead, they are, moreover, attracted not only by goods but by ‘power’ (that is, by the capacity to obtain a future good). As power quite often takes the form of a belief by others that one possesses it, it may have an important reputational component. When human beings interact, the power that is possessed by any given individual is relative to the power that is possessed by other people.

All these ideas are present in all three formulations of Hobbes’s politics: ‘The Elements of law’ (an English-language manuscript composed in 1640); *De cive* (1642); and *Leviathan* (1651). For present purposes, their main importance is that they imply that success in life is nothing but continually getting what one wants, that is, gratifying appetites without impediment. In the earliest of these writings, ‘The Elements of law’, he presented this conception through the image of a race – an unusual race, however, in that it was a contest without a finishing post: with no goal beyond staying in the race and ‘being foremost’.<sup>14</sup> Given the absence of a goal beyond amassing power (that is, relative capacity to gratify one’s wishes – whatever they happen to be), it is to be expected that we should wish to maximise our freedom from obstruction. This is the sense of ‘freedom’ that Hobbes treats as primary. *De Cive* (1642) notes that there can be two different types of obstruction: a simple external obstruction such as a prison wall, but also what Hobbes calls an ‘arbitrary impediment’, by which he means an obstacle deriving from the choice (*arbitrium*) of some particular course of action when another course of action was not physically excluded. Though one could perhaps imagine an impediment created by the attractions of a good, he focused upon choices arising from a fear. To use his own example, a man on a ship faces an ‘arbitrary impediment’ to jumping in the sea.<sup>15</sup>

*Leviathan* presents things a little differently, perhaps because Hobbes came to feel, as it turned out correctly, that ‘arbitrary impediment’ was a confusing phrase. Freedom is famously defined as the absence of ‘external Impediments to motion’, by which he means to motions that would in fact occur if the impediment were absent. Thus water confined in a vessel ‘that otherwise would spread it selfe into a larger space’ is not ‘at Liberty’. Conversely, ‘a stone lying still’ or a man ‘who is fastned to his bed by sicknesse’ are not said to lack freedom but to lack the ‘power’ to move.<sup>16</sup> When carefully read, this passage has an important feature that has usually been missed. In Hobbesian physics, the ‘power’ of an agent is also a motion.<sup>17</sup> Strictly speaking, then, a body is not said to be unfree unless an actual motion has encountered an actual obstruction (it follows, incidentally, that Hobbes differs from Berlin, who likes to speak of ‘open doors’ as images of freedom, whether or not the opening is actually used).<sup>18</sup> In the context of human behaviour, this understanding generates the well-known definition that ‘a FREE-MAN, is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindred to doe what he has a will to’.<sup>19</sup> In consequence, ‘Felicity’ (at least as obtained in this life) is nothing but ‘Continuall successe in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth’.<sup>20</sup> As life is ‘but Motion, and can never be without Desire’, it is evident that felicity

consists (other things being equal) in a succession of desires encountering no obstruction: in other words, that happiness requires liberty.

Hobbes therefore took it for granted that freedom in its primary sense is something that everyone wants. In *The elements*, he noted that though the inconveniences of government were slight, one of the ‘general grievances’ that might be objected against it was ‘loss of liberty’, by which he meant that ‘a subject may no more govern his own actions according to his own discretion and judgment’.<sup>21</sup> This kind of liberty was indeed so obviously attractive that nobody would give it up unless his life were threatened, ‘for who would lose that liberty nature hath given him, of governing himself by his own will and power, if they feared not death in the retaining of it?’<sup>22</sup> The problem with the freedom of the Hobbesian state of nature is not, then, that natural freedom is undesirable, but that the associated costs are unacceptable. Fortunately, however, the political condition permits extensive areas of natural liberty; other things being equal, there are indeed good reasons to prefer a government that is, so far as possible, reluctant to invade them. The duties of the sovereign encompass the promotion of ‘liberty and wealth’, the former implying that there ought to ‘be no prohibition without necessity of any thing to any man, which was lawful to him in the law of nature.’<sup>23</sup>

In consequence, the Hobbesian system taken as a whole is characterised by a bias that favours liberty. Though it explains why rationally self-interested beings would have a motive to impose a limit on their freedom, it also implies an absolute bar against some obligations and a presumption against many others. The state is a contraption created by the will (that is, by a motion responding to an object classed as ‘good’). Although it is at liberty to harm or kill its subjects, it is powerless to oblige them to do things to themselves that they, as individuals, could not possibly have willed: that is, to pursue objectives that could not plausibly be classed by anyone as ‘good’. It cannot oblige its subjects to kill or harm themselves.<sup>24</sup> It cannot even oblige them to do military service unless the very existence of the commonwealth is threatened.<sup>25</sup>

Hobbes was, moreover, happy to accommodate the thought that there is a much wider sphere within which personal freedom is at least desirable. All three of his major political works accommodate this point in the context of discussion of the duties of the sovereign. Modern readers are admittedly quite likely to be struck by the extent of intervention that he took for granted: ‘The Elements’ envisaged that sovereigns would make laws with a view to ‘the well ordering of trade, procuring of labour, and forbidding the superfluous consuming of food and apparel.’<sup>26</sup> But the framing of the question had a bias towards freedom: the duties of the sovereign were shaped by the presumption that ‘there be no restraint of natural liberty, but what is necessary for the good of the commonwealth’.<sup>27</sup> *De Cive* chose to illustrate this with a simile: ‘water enclosed by banks in all directions stagnates and is corrupted; when it is open on all sides it spreads, and the more ways out it finds the more freely it flows.’<sup>28</sup> *Leviathan*’s favoured image was slightly different: the purpose of laws was not ‘to bind the People from all Voluntary actions; but to direct and keep them in such a motion, as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness, or indiscretion; as Hedges are set, not to stop Travellers, but to keep them in the way.’<sup>29</sup> But though this seems to license a paternalist approach, it also implies that the only legitimate purpose of law is to discourage conduct that is actually harmful. The sovereign’s legislation is never an end in itself.

The second, convergent, pressure on Hobbesian attitudes resulted from the prominence of the idea of freedom among the values dominating English politics. It was common ground between the early Stuarts and their critics that Englishmen were freemen and that the kings of England were therefore distinctively rulers of freemen and not slaves.<sup>30</sup> A patriotic tradition laid stress upon the virtues – valour and industry – encouraged by security for private property. It was for this reason, for instance, that the moderate royalist *Answer to the Nineteen Propositions* (1642) – a text presenting England as a mixed monarchy – remarked that ‘the Good of Democracy is Liberty, and the Courage and Industry which Liberty begets.’<sup>31</sup> To some extent, Hobbes consciously inverted this tradition, insisting, in the best-known passage of *Leviathan*, that in the state of nature ‘there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain’.<sup>32</sup> In consequence, he discouraged the use of the word ‘slave’ for those who were not actually physically restrained.<sup>33</sup> In one sense,



he insisted, nobody is unfree except for a handful of people who are literally in bonds. In another, every subject is equally unfree: to be a subject simply *is* to be controlled by laws.<sup>34</sup>

It is against this backdrop that one should interpret his views about the phrase ‘the liberty of the subject’. Though his general political purpose was plainly to discourage appeals to ‘liberty’, he carefully refrained from asserting that this phrase was meaningless. Moreover, his thinking developed so as to find a sense that fused it with the liberty of doing as one wills. In his earliest formulation, in ‘The Elements of Law’, he supplied an explanation of love of liberty that traced it to competitive desire for social status: ‘Aristotle saith well (lib. 6, cap. 2 of his *Politics*), *The ground or intention of a democracy is liberty*; which he confirmeth in these words: *For men ordinarily say this: that no man can partake of liberty, but only in a popular commonwealth.*’ His analysis was simple: within the context of a monarchy, an aspiration to be ‘free’ could mean one of two things: a wish to have a share in the sovereignty itself; or else, more modestly, to be put ‘into employment and place of subordinate government, rather than others that deserve less’.<sup>35</sup> To be a ‘freeman’ was to have ‘equality of favour’ – which was the basis of an expectation that the freeman would be offered ‘employments of honour’ ahead of servants – ‘and this is all that can be understood by the liberty of the subject’.<sup>36</sup> The closely related *De Cive* took roughly the same line, quoting exactly the same passage in *The Politics*, while remarking that those who complained that liberty was taken from them under monarchy ‘are angered at this only: that they are not summoned to the helm of the commonwealth.’<sup>37</sup>

*Leviathan* again referred to *Politics* 6.2, this time adding that ‘by reading of these Greek, and Latine Authors, men from their childhood have gotten a habit (under a false shew of Liberty,) of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their Sovereigns’.<sup>38</sup> These peppery monarchist comments did not, however, imply that the expression was nonsensical. In his carefully argued chapter ‘Of the LIBERTY of Subjects’, Hobbes starts off by examining the ‘proper’ sense of freedom (the absence, that is, of external obstructions to motion). The effect was, as it were, to spatialise freedom: an unfree body ‘cannot move, but within a certain space, which space is determined by the opposition of some externall body, we say it hath not Liberty to go further’.<sup>39</sup> *Leviathan*’s achievement was to associate the phrase ‘the liberty of the subject’ with an intelligible extension of this proper sense. The liberty of the subject was freedom from what *De Cive* had called ‘arbitrary’ obstruction (that is, freedom from impediments arising from a fear): it is freedom not from natural, but ‘Artificiall chains, called *Civill Lawes*’, that is, from bonds that ‘may ... be made to hold, by the danger, though not by the difficulty of breaking them’.<sup>40</sup> It is a residual area – a field left ungoverned by the silence of the laws – but one that Hobbes expects to be surprisingly expansive:

The Liberty of a Subject, lyeth therefore only in those things, which in regulating their actions, the Sovereign hath praetermitted: such as is the Liberty to buy, and sell, and otherwise contract with one another; to choose their own aboad, their own diet, their own trade of life, and to institute their children as they themselves think fit; & the like.<sup>41</sup>

Constant too would have defended all these freedoms. But the liberty Constant imagined was not a residual space, an area provisionally left free of state encroachment. Its boundaries were established as it were from the inside by reference to rights that he supposed to be ‘eternal’.

## 2.

If the account just offered is basically correct, the very nature of the Hobbesian system imparted a strong bias in favour of ‘liberty’ understood as a lack of obstruction to doing as one wills. Hobbes was, however, suspicious of the use of the term as a slogan. Constant, by contrast, was a friend of ‘the friends of liberty’ (a term that he used casually for people he approved of);<sup>42</sup> he had a strong commitment not just to the thing but the word. It is of some significance that ‘liberty’ was probably the most important term through which he sought to understand his own experience. The consciousness recorded both in his secret journals and in his semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical narratives is powerfully driven by a search for ‘independence’ (often, of course, ironically and critically presented). The hero of *Adolphe* seeks ‘liberty’ from Ellénore;<sup>43</sup> when Constant himself considered

his relations with Mme de Stael, he repeatedly resorted to talk of liberty.<sup>44</sup> The madcap trip to England ironically recorded in the so-called *Cahier rouge* was prompted, in part, by the chance remark that ‘it is a beautiful country and one is quite free there’.<sup>45</sup>

Precisely because the idea was such a presence in his thought, it may well be unrealistic to hope to extract a wholly unambiguous position from the confusing mass of Constant’s statements about freedom.<sup>46</sup> His best-known single treatment – his 1819 oration ‘Of the liberty of the ancients compared to that of the moderns’ – is usually read in conjunction with similar discussions in two earlier published texts: *On the spirit of conquest and usurpation* (1814) and *Principles of politics* (1815) – as well as a draft of the latter produced in 1806.<sup>47</sup> But these overlapping writings – in which identical sentences acquire a different force by being copied out in different contexts – were composed at different times, with different enemies in mind, by an author with a habit of rhetorical concession. It would be most surprising if their ambiguities could be resolved by reference to a handful of quotations.

It is, however, possible to document the presence in his thinking as a whole of three quite general contrasts with the thought of Thomas Hobbes. The first is an entirely different anthropology. Although politically an Anglophile, Constant despised the mainstream of English empiricist thought. When criticising Godwin, he scorned what he described as ‘the principles of Locke’, which ‘represented man as the passive plaything of external impressions’.<sup>48</sup> All human beings were subject to a natural tendency to sacrifice present ‘sensations’ in favour of ‘ideas’ (the latter being lasting combinations of sensations that had, and ought to have, a greater motivational force). This was the primary reason why history was the history of ‘perfectibility’ with a long-term trajectory towards equality.<sup>49</sup> In consequence, he was hostile to any theory that laid an undue stress on a self-interested impulse: ‘Nature, which has given man self-love for his personal preservation, also gave him sympathy, generosity, pity so that he would not destroy his fellows.’<sup>50</sup> Even the life of commerce depends on motivations beyond those stimulated by mere self-interest.<sup>51</sup> Bentham’s utilitarianism is objectionable because it ‘awakens in the human spirit the hope of a gain and not the sentiment of a duty.’<sup>52</sup>

In any case, both heart and mind are naturally religious. The book about religion that he saw as his life’s work was organised round a distinction between ‘religious sentiment’ and mere ‘religious forms’. In 1815, he recorded that he understood religion as ‘intimately connected with all the noble, delicate, and deep passions’ – including romantic love, the thirst for fame, ‘the pleasure we find in devotion, a pleasure opposed to the normal instinct of our egoism’, and even pleasurable melancholy. All these mysterious feelings ‘are favourable to the development of morality; they stimulate man to step beyond the narrow circle of his interests’.<sup>53</sup> As these remarks imply, his view of human nature and his general moral outlook could reasonably be characterised as counter-Hobbesian: self-interest was an obstacle to morally laudable conduct, not (as for Hobbes) its motor; non-rational moral sentiment was to be celebrated. One consequence (with implications that we shall return to) was that he did not recognise the Hobbesian presumption against the regulations that obstruct our appetites: In his critique of Godwin, he vigorously rejected the latter’s principle that government should be thought of as a necessary evil.<sup>54</sup>

A second general contrast, connected with the first, was that his views were shaped by a sense of history. Hobbes understood his sovereign as the answer to a problem set by unchanging features of human character. The notion that ‘liberty’ is or involves having a share in ruling is seen as characteristic of the Greco-Roman world, but his objections to this way of thinking do not include the charge that it is simply out-of-date. Constant by contrast presupposed that human nature changes: his analysis was based partly on a psychology that he was at pains to present as distinctively modern. This is strikingly true of the chapter in *Of the Spirit of conquest and usurpation* (1814) discussing ‘The kind of liberty offered to men at the end of the last century’. Here it is said that the French Revolution had offered a form of liberty that ‘consisted in active participation in the collective power rather than in the peaceable enjoyment of individual independence’.<sup>55</sup> But this well-intentioned offer ignored the effects of commerce upon psychology. The ancients had been ready to



give up their independence for the sake of enjoying their share in the exercise of power. The advantage their liberty brought them was the intense enjoyment of a share in governing.<sup>56</sup> But commercial society has multiplied 'the means of individual happiness', with the result that modern men need only to be left in independence to be happy: no modern people would endure the hardships of the Spartans.<sup>57</sup>

This was not to say, however, that the modern stress on purely individual independence has had no implications for modern politics. The 'advantage' that is brought by this form of liberty is not that of being a ruler, but 'of being represented, and of contributing to that representation by one's choice'.<sup>58</sup> Although the pleasure of being represented is at best a relatively feeble 'pleasure of reflection', modern conditions furnish a new source of motivation for resisting the oppressions of arbitrary power. The reason that representation can count as an advantage is that it is a guarantee of private happiness.<sup>59</sup> The English are the people most attached to liberty because they understand it as securing their enjoyments (*jouissances*).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the self-consciousness of modern human beings has made human nature less malleable by social institutions. In one of Constant's interesting resorts to the first person plural, he remarked that 'we have lost in imagination what we gained in knowledge' and that 'we are always watching ourselves even in our most violent thoughts' (a generalisation that tallies with the behaviour repeatedly described in the novels and journals).<sup>61</sup> The result was that the legislator pictured by Rousseau was fundamentally anachronistic ('no more Lycurguses, no more Numas'). Political transformation was unachievable unless the legislator worked through 'opinion'.<sup>62</sup>

There was much to be regretted in the new self-consciousness, but the role played by opinion was politically constructive. Elsewhere, he took the view that 'the opinion of a people' can be understood as 'the result of each individual opinion, separated from private interests which falsify it in the case of each individual, and which, meeting in this common centre, struggle against and mutually cancel each other out'.<sup>63</sup> In other words, the claims he made about 'opinion' resembled those that Rousseau made about the General Will.<sup>64</sup> It was opinion that ensured that certain kinds of progress were irreversible; there were, he believed, some principles defended by a 'kind of shame' at relying upon 'errors too manifestly refuted'. Unlike an ancient tyrant, no modern government would claim a right to put to death without first passing judgement.<sup>65</sup>

A final general contrast, with roots both in his optimistic view of human nature and his progressive vision of human history, was that the ideal Constant valued was not preference-satisfaction, but rather a dynamic individuality that sought the realisation of perfectibility. 'Egoism' in his writings is always a bad thing; he was not, for example, a pacifist, opposed to war as such, but only to war as conducted by modern egoists.<sup>66</sup> To someone who is guided by a hope of moral progress, the evil to be dreaded is an arbitrary power, served by a class of writers who 'wish with all their strength that there should be no morality in the government of mankind'. Such writers 'construct the social state out of a small number of very simple elements: prejudices to deceive men, torments to frighten them, greed to corrupt them, frivolity to degrade them, arbitrary power to guide them ...'.<sup>67</sup> An egoistic worldview was thus the harbinger of a disastrous lapse into a stationary condition.<sup>68</sup>

His focus in such passages was less upon oppression than on its implications for human character. *The spirit of usurpation* went so far as to say that 'liberty is of inestimable price only because it gives soundness to our mind, strength to our character, elevation to our soul'.<sup>69</sup> But though liberty ennobles, it might seem that the prospects for liberty are slim. Fortunately, however, religion, which is natural, is naturally progressive: it is 'the result of the needs of the soul and the efforts of the mind' and for that very reason is not genuinely religious unless it is the enemy of stationary dogmas.<sup>70</sup> Even polytheism anticipated Christianity in developing a conception of the brotherhood of man.<sup>71</sup> When they are taken literally (before the intervention of self-interested priests), the fundamental precepts of religions are always in accordance 'with the most extended principles of liberty, one might say with principles of liberty so far extended that to this day their application has seemed impossible in our political associations'.<sup>72</sup> In any case, no irreligious people can stay free; secular

moral systems that are based on calculation are powerless to motivate the sacrificial conduct required to establish or to safeguard liberty.<sup>73</sup>

This is the broader outlook that makes sense of the thinking of the 1819 lecture ‘On the liberty of the ancients compared to that of the moderns’. The lecture reflects its immediate political context in that its ideas are adapted to criticising ultra-Catholic ultra-monarchists as much as Jacobins and Bonapartists; its argument is also in some respects less full. But it has the important merit that it distinguishes the reasons why the moderns demand their liberty from reasons why such liberty should actually be valued. The text can be read as consisting of two dissimilar parts. The first and longer one explains why the liberty ‘the exercise of which was so dear to the ancient peoples’<sup>74</sup> was by neither prized by, nor available to, their modern counterparts. The liberty of the ancients was direct participation in collective sovereign power. The liberty of the moderns consisted in a wide range of individual rights, including rights defending against arbitrary oppression; rights to choose one’s own profession and general mode of life; rights to associate freely with others, and to choose one’s own religion. It also, however, included ‘everyone’s right to exercise some influence on the administration of the government, either by electing all or particular officials, or through representations, petitions, demands to which the authorities are more or less compelled to take heed.’<sup>75</sup>

The liberty of the moderns thus had a political side, but even this aspect presented itself as a ‘right’ or ‘guarantee’. When the moderns refer to ‘political liberty’, it is in fact a ‘guarantee’ they are referring to: ‘individual liberty ... is the true modern liberty. Political liberty is the guarantee, consequently political liberty is indispensable.’<sup>76</sup> Political liberty (so conceived) thus has a necessary but instrumental role. There is, however, a problem. In a modern commercial society, the ready availability of multiple forms of enjoyment has the result that people no longer seek fulfilment in the exercise of power. In consequence, a revival of ancient liberty requires an impossible tradeoff with pleasures that the moderns would not willingly give up. All this looks quite compatible with a Hobbesian understanding for which liberty (lack of obstruction to what we will to do) is of the essence of ‘Felicity’.

In the second part, however, he took a different tack that brings out his deep disagreements with Hobbesian ideas. We have seen that the rights that constitute the liberty of the moderns include a right to ‘influence’ political events. Here, however, he goes further, suggesting that the moderns continue to possess ‘the rights we have always had, those eternal rights to assent to the laws, to deliberate on our interests, to be an integral part of the social body of which we are members.’<sup>77</sup> Though modern conditions necessitate ‘a different organisation’ that takes the form of government through representatives, it is important not to neglect these guarantees.<sup>78</sup> When allowance is made for this different organisation, it makes sense to say – as Constant then somewhat surprisingly does – that the French must combine both ancient and modern liberty.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, his peroration extols the results of ‘the exercise of political liberty’ on ‘our countrymen of all classes, of all professions’ in stimulating patriotism and other kinds of virtue. The final paragraph suggests that ‘institutions must achieve the moral education of the citizens’, not just by calling them ‘to contribute by their votes to the exercise of power’, but also by granting them ‘a right of control and supervision by expressing their opinions’.<sup>80</sup>

When read in isolation, this passage has the appearance of a mere concluding flourish in which Constant the committed Restoration politician has superseded Constant the sober analyst. It is difficult to reconcile his optimistic views with the exiguous size of the French electorate and with the scepticism that he himself expressed about the cultural effects of institutional changes. It makes better sense, however, when it is noted that the stress is on the effects of free expression of ‘opinion’ upon the ‘moral education’ of the citizens. Given the importance of opinion in realisation of perfectibility, it seems that the true value of political liberty was less in the enjoyments that it happened to protect than in the moral consequences that it might engender. As he dramatically exclaimed at the pivot of his lecture, the importance of mere happiness (*bonheur*) fell short of the importance of self-development (*perfectionnement*):<sup>81</sup>

I bear witness to the better part of our nature, that noble disquiet which pursues and torments us, that desire to extend our enlightenment (*étendre nos lumières*) and develop (*développer*) our faculties. It is not to happiness alone, it is to *perfectionnement* that our destiny calls us; and political liberty is the most powerful, the most dynamic (*énergique*) means of *perfectionnement* that heaven has given us.<sup>82</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a more emphatic denial of the inadequacy of mere preference-satisfaction. It has been a strange turn of intellectual history that has led its eloquent author to be classified with Hobbes.

### 3.

Isaiah Berlin too was much preoccupied with freedom. There is not much doubt that some kind of distinction between liberty as freedom from human interference and liberty as mastery by one's true or rational self was an established part of his mental furniture. In lectures given at Bryn Mawr in 1952, he distinguished a 'romantic' from a 'liberal' sense of freedom, while stressing that the latter is a 'negative' conception. It is negative in two senses. First, it denotes a sphere in which coercion by law is restrained: in which acts that someone wishes to perform are 'not forbidden'.<sup>83</sup> But the freedom that liberals value can also be described as being 'purely negative, almost more of a necessary condition of the good life than an ingredient in it, in the sense that only when it is made secure can those activities which alone make life worth living develop and flourish and yield their finest fruit.'<sup>84</sup> Liberal freedom is thus only a 'defensive operation', where the thing to be defended is not 'the operation itself, but the intrinsically valuable activities and experiences of mankind.'<sup>85</sup> It is 'the clearing of a space' within which human beings can achieve the 'positive goals' that they happen to deem worth pursuing.<sup>86</sup>

The Bryn Mawr lectures do not mention Constant. But a central theme of Oxford lectures given the same year was 'that the notion of freedom that I approved of ... was what English and French Liberals and Radicals were preaching in the early nineteenth century as opposed to the German brand'; this was freedom understood as 'a negative concept ... what you [an ex-pupil with whom he was corresponding] call elbow-room freedom'.<sup>87</sup> Soon afterwards, he delivered a series of radio talks in which Constant's description of 'modern liberty' is treated as 'a fair sample of what the word "liberty" meant to moderate defenders of it in the early nineteenth century'.<sup>88</sup> It was therefore not surprising that he chose 'Liberty' as the main theme of the inaugural lecture that he was to deliver in 1958. Nor was it surprising that Constant played an important role. But the nature of that role has been quite poorly understood.

Part of the difficulty stemmed from Berlin's exposition – or rather from his tendency to drift from exposition of Constant's attitudes towards increasingly opaque allusion. A dictabelt recording from the first surviving stage of an extremely complicated compositional process includes a request to his typist to add 'the following extra bits, each on a separate bit of paper. They've got to go in somewhere'. As might have been expected, one of these bits consisted in a faithful summary of the 'celebrated essay on the conception of liberty by the "Ancients" and the "Moderns"'.<sup>89</sup> In the event, however, this summary was cut. As the influence of Constant's distinction is fairly obvious, this cut has never seriously obstructed understanding. But a second alteration is more regrettable. Berlin largely cut a passage in which he reported that Constant believed that 'we cannot sacrifice "eternal principles of justice and mercy" without "degrading or denying our nature".' It followed that there ought to be a minimum of freedom.

What then must the minimum be? That which a man cannot give up without offending against the essence of our human nature. 'Nature', it may be objected, is a vague term, and many views have been taken as to what the true nature of man is. To this Constant replies that there are some uses of it that are virtually accepted by all men, with whom we have a common language.<sup>90</sup>

This passage is revealing. To begin with, it identifies Chapter One of Constant's *Principles of politics* (the source of the phrase 'degrading or denying our nature') as one of the main influences on Berlin's position.<sup>91</sup> The purpose of this chapter 'On the sovereignty of the people' is to attack the

very idea of sovereignty on the grounds that ‘some weights are too heavy for the human hand’ (a quotation that Berlin makes use of elsewhere in the lecture).<sup>92</sup> Comparison with what Constant said brings out a difference: Berlin has taken over the notion of a broad consensus about human nature; he has largely ignored its background (explained in the same chapter) in Constant’s faith in progress that is irreversible. There was in any case a gap between the minimal area that is guaranteed by ‘nature’ and the extensive area of individual rights that liberals in general believe is worth protecting. In the absence of Constant’s perception of a continuing process whose gains could not be lost, Berlin was left with an appeal to the ‘natural’ (or sometimes the ‘normal’), but could not explain why a concept that excluded moral horrors was capable of providing more extensive guarantees.

One symptom of this problem was an inconsistency in Berlin’s presentation of Constant’s attitudes. On the first of seven occasions that Constant’s name appears in the eventual published version, he is mentioned as part of a group – ‘libertarians such as Locke and Mill in England, and Constant and Tocqueville in France’ – who recognise that liberty must sometimes be curtailed for the purpose of securing other values. These thinkers nonetheless believed that ‘there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated’, the alternative being that ‘the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development of his natural faculties which alone makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred’.<sup>93</sup> A couple of pages later, developing the same theme, Berlin informed his readers that ‘Benjamin Constant, who had not forgotten the Jacobin dictatorship, declared that at the very least the liberty of religion, opinion, expression, property must be guaranteed against arbitrary invasion.’<sup>94</sup> Confusingly, however, his next invocation of Constant associates the latter with a more extreme demand: ‘the fathers of liberalism – Mill and Constant – want more than this minimum: they demand the maximum degree of non-interference compatible with the minimum demands of social life’.<sup>95</sup> On the last four occasions – in a section with the title ‘Liberty and sovereignty’ – Constant figures as a critic of Rousseauian sovereignty who knows that majority rule can invade the minimum of freedom.<sup>96</sup> It is said that

for Constant, Mill, Tocqueville, and the liberal tradition to which they belong, no society is free unless it is governed by at any rate two interrelated principles: first, that no power, but only rights, can be regarded as absolute, so that all men, whatever power governs them, have an absolute right to refuse to behave inhumanly; and second, that there are frontiers, not artificially drawn, within which men should be inviolable, those frontiers being defined in terms of rules so long and widely accepted that their observance has entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being, and, therefore, also of what it is to act inhumanly or insanelly ...<sup>97</sup>

Rights are ‘absolute’, then, in the sense that the rules on which they rest have been internalised at least by ‘normal’ human beings in a given time and place.

There are two problems here. The first is that the doctrine of the minimum privileged space has no logical connection with the extreme demand ‘for the maximum degree of non-interference’; one could readily imagine a minimum privileged space that did not include, say, sexual or economic freedom. Of course, an attractive basis for the frontiers of the space might be to say (as Constant unquestionably does)<sup>98</sup> that freedom is limited only by a ban on harming others – in other words, that his minimum gives rise to the same border as the maximum demand. But this solution, if it is accepted, only intensifies the second problem, which is the disproportion between the alleged basis of the frontiers of freedom – longstanding norms that constitute our shared humanity – and the much larger area that has actually been claimed. Constant can hardly have believed that the minimum that he defended was so wholly uncontroversial that it would be ‘inhuman’ or ‘insane’ to disagree: it would be a strange liberal who never laid claim to *new* freedoms that a longstanding custom had groundlessly denied. In other words, Berlin confuses two different minima: there are numerous courses of action that violate what liberals regard as human rights without breaching rules whose ‘observance has entered into the very conception of what it is to be a normal human being’.

In making use of Constant, Berlin no doubt believed that he was drawing attention to a doctrine held in common by two different traditions. The image of freedom he favoured was a protected space with a determinate frontier around it, while the claim that he wished to make was that the nature of the space could be abstracted from the nature of the frontier. But defending this conception involved him in endorsing the Hobbesian-Benthamite view that *any* obstruction of action was a fetter upon freedom; the freedoms ‘of slaveholders to dispose of their slaves’ and ‘of the torturer to inflict pain upon his victims’ were nonetheless ‘genuine freedoms’.<sup>99</sup> As we have seen, this was a view that Constant had rejected; he was opposed to Godwin’s claim that every government action is inherently an evil. There are some indications that Berlin was aware of and was troubled by this fact. He conceded, for example, that Locke and Montesquieu explicitly denied that there is ‘freedom’ to do evil and that their denial that freedom is freedom to do wrong was shared by ‘the thought and language of all the declarations of the rights of man in the eighteenth century’.<sup>100</sup> At one stage – he is noticeably vague about the date, but it surely overlaps with Constant’s literary career – the negative tradition had almost disappeared: ‘Bentham, almost alone, doggedly went on repeating that the business of laws was not to liberate but to restrain: every law is an infraction of liberty – even if such an infraction leads to an increase of the sum of liberty.’<sup>101</sup>

One way of conceiving the problem that Berlin was reluctant to face is to concentrate attention on the image of a space with a determinate frontier around it. In cases where this image seems fully appropriate, the value attached to the space derives from the criterion that draws the frontier, defining the freedom-as-value as it were from the inside. For Constant, the criterion is given by the rights that irreversible progress will eventually establish. But in the Hobbes-Bentham tradition, there is no privileged field; the most appropriate image is a boundaryless space, of which a residue is left (as it were from the outside) if other agents for some reason fail to intervene or make a positive decision not to. For thinkers in this tradition, some liberty is lost wherever and whenever this indefinite space is invaded. Berlin, however, fused this claim with something more ambitious. In Hobbes and Bentham, liberty was not of course a ‘value’, but rather a precondition of pursuing happiness. In his earlier Bryn Mawr lectures, Berlin recognised this point; it was, he thought, characteristic of the whole range of writers he called ‘the liberals’ that they agreed that freedom was ‘not a positive goal’.<sup>102</sup> But by the time he published the fully expanded version of his Two Concepts lecture, he wanted to use liberty for other purposes: the clash between negative freedom and other social goals became an illustration of his controversial doctrine that there are ‘ultimate values’ that inevitably conflict.<sup>103</sup> In consequence, the force of the term ‘negative’ had changed. At the time of the Bryn Mawr lectures, freedom was ‘negative’ in part in a sense contrasted with the ‘positive’ objectives for which it functioned as a precondition.<sup>104</sup> In the Two Concepts lecture, it was itself a goal. The price of this adjustment (which he was willing to pay) was that all opportunities for choice possessed some value.

He differed from Hobbes, then, in regarding freedom as a value – indeed, as an ‘ultimate value’. But the meaning of ‘ultimate value’ was far from obvious. With an insouciance remarkable in someone who was after all a friend of J.L. Austin, Berlin employed a very wide variety of phrases that seem, on first inspection, to be synonymous, including ‘ultimate value’,<sup>105</sup> ‘ultimate end’,<sup>106</sup> ‘end in itself’,<sup>107</sup> and ‘absolute claim’.<sup>108</sup> He also invoked such expressions as ‘goals’,<sup>109</sup> ‘ideals’,<sup>110</sup> ‘purposes’,<sup>111</sup> ‘the deepest human needs’,<sup>112</sup> and ‘the deepest interests of mankind’.<sup>113</sup> It would be unfair to accuse him of treating all these phrases as interchangeable, if only because his argument depends upon moving between between them: he moves, for instance, on one page between the cautious statement that ‘some values may conflict intrinsically’ to the flatter, more dogmatic assertion: ‘ends collide’.<sup>114</sup>

The effect is to obscure a fruitful tension in his thought that he would have done better to bring out into the open. On the one hand, human values are chosen and not found: the ideal that he put forward in the last version of his peroration is ‘the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity for them’.<sup>115</sup> On the other, there is *something* by reference to which it is possible to identify the ‘deepest human needs’ and judge alternative accounts mistaken.<sup>116</sup> There are even, it seems, ‘facts’ that make a rigid monism ‘not reconcilable with the principles accepted by those

who respect the facts.’<sup>117</sup> The ‘empirical view of politics’ is approvingly contrasted with the ‘metaphysical’.<sup>118</sup>

The nature of the experience to which appeal is made is clearest from a later (and somewhat atypical passage) in which he explicitly raises ‘the question of what are in fact the values which we regard as original and “basic”’, by which he means those values that are ‘presupposed (if that is the correct logical relation) by the very notions of morality and humanity as such’. This is, he says,

a question for which the answer to which we must go to historians, anthropologists, philosophers of culture, social scientists of various kinds, scholars who study the central notions and central ways of behaviour of entire societies, revealed in monuments, forms of life, social activity, as well as more overt expressions of belief such as laws, faiths, philosophies, literature.<sup>119</sup>

If so, then the assertion that negative freedom is an ‘ultimate value’ that is in competition with other ‘ultimate values’ is really a claim about its place within specific cultures. Constant’s background appeal to a notion of perfectibility has been replaced by an appeal to features described as ‘central’ to ‘entire societies’. To say that a value is ultimate is simply to say that it is ineradicably present even in the face of others that are incompatible.

There is room for disagreement if freedom of choice extending to a freedom to do evil is in this sense an ultimate value in societies like ours. What cannot be doubted, however, is that the shift from seeing freedom as a precondition to seeing freedom as itself a value leaves him without a reason for resolving any clash in the direction of more liberty.<sup>120</sup> What is left is an injunction to do the best we can, on the basis of materials supplied by a ‘pattern of life’, assisted, it seems, by uncodified practical wisdom: ‘to adjust claims, compromise, establish priorities, engage in all the practical operations that social and even individual life has, in fact, always required’.<sup>121</sup> If liberals are people with arguments for prioritising freedom, this theory of freedom is much less ‘liberal’ than the alternatives that can be found in Hobbes or Constant. For better or worse, it seems to be more helpfully described as a sub-species of conservatism.

## Notes

1. I am grateful for the comments of the editors and two anonymous readers. Joel Felix kindly gave advice on a linguistic point.
2. Benjamin Constant, *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 177–9 (313–16). The number in brackets refers to the original French text as printed in Constant, *Œuvres politiques*, ed. Marcel Gauchet (Paris: Gallimard, 1997).
3. Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 168.
4. Berlin, *Liberty*, 178.
5. Berlin Isaiah, *Political ideas in the Romantic Age*, ed. Henry Hardy, second edn (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 360.
6. Berlin, *Liberty*, 170n.
7. *Ibid.*, 209.
8. [William Cavendish], *Horae subsecivae* (1620), 229.
9. *Eight bookes of the Peloponnesian warre written by Thucydides son of Olorus* (1629), tr. Thomas Hobbes, 260, 262, 337, 453.
10. Thomas Hobbes, *A briefe of the art of rhetoric* (1637), 30; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1366a.
11. *The elements of law*, ed. Friedrich Toennies (London: Macmillan, 1928), part II, chapter viii, section 3; *De Cive: the Latin version*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), chapter x, section 8; *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), vol. II, p. 334 (p. 111 of the first edition).
12. *Politics*, 1317b (*The complete works of Aristotle: the revised Oxford translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984), vol. II, p. 2091).
13. *Politics*, 1318b–1319a (*Works*, II, 2093).
14. *El*, I ix 21.
15. *Civ*, ix 9. For anglicised examples of ‘arbitrary’ meaning ‘arising from a choice’, see *El*, I xvii 5; II i 1.
16. *Lev*, 324 (107).
17. Hobbes, *De Corpore*, x 6 in *The English works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. William Molesworth, 9 vols (London: John Bohn, 1839–43), vol. I, p. 131.
18. Berlin, *Liberty*, 32, 41.



19. *Lev*, 324 (107-8).
20. *Lev*, 96 (29).
21. *El*, II v 2.
22. *El*, I xv 13.
23. *El*, II ix 4.
24. *Lev*, 336-8 (111-12).
25. *Lev*, 340 (112).
26. *El*, II ix 4.
27. *El*, II ix 4.
28. *Civ*, xiii 15.
29. *Lev*, 540 (182).
30. Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 59.
31. Edward Husbands, *An Exact Collection* (1643), 320.
32. *Lev*, 192 (62).
33. *El*, II iii 3; *Civ*, viii 1.
34. *Lev*, 328-30 (109).
35. *El*, II viii 3.
36. *El*, II iv 9.
37. *Civ*, x 8.
38. *Lev*, 334 (111).
39. *Lev*, 324 (107).
40. *Lev*, 328 (108-9).
41. *Lev*, 328 (109).
42. Benjamin Constant, *Journaux intimes*, ed. Jean-Marie Roulin (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 58, 275.
43. Benjamin Constant, *Adolphe: anecdote trouvée dans les papiers d'un inconnu*, ed. C.P. Courtney (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 69.
44. Constant, *Journaux intimes*, 207, 301, 342, 432, 496.
45. Constant Benjamin, *Ma vie (le Cahier Rouge): Amélie et Germaine: Cécile*, ed. Jean-Marie Roulin (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), 70.
46. For a helpful survey of the most important themes, see Jeremy Jennings, 'Constant's Idea of Modern Liberty', in *The Cambridge Companion to Constant*, ed. Helena Rosenblatt (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 69-91.
47. For the last, see Benjamin Constant, *Principes de politique applicables a tous les gouvernements*, ed. Etienne Hofmann, 2 vols (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1980).
48. Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 681.
49. *Ibid.*, 702-5. On perfectibility, see Etienne Hofmann, 'The theory of the perfectibility of the human race', tr. Arthur Goldhammer in Rosenblatt, *Companion*, 248-72.
50. Constant Benjamin, *Commentary on Filangieri's Work*, ed. and tr. Alan Kahan (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2015), 251.
51. Constant, *Political Writings*, 122 (236).
52. Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 665.
53. Constant, *Political Writings*, 277 (465).
54. Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 682-4.
55. Constant, *Political Writings*, 102 (206).
56. Constant, *Political Writings*, 104 (208).
57. Constant, *Political Writings*, 104-5 (209-10).
58. Constant, *Political Writings*, 104 (208).
59. Constant, *Political Writings*, 104 (208).
60. Constant, *Political Writings*, 105 (210).
61. Constant, *Political Writings*, 105 (210).
62. Constant, *Political Writings*, 105 (210). For a useful survey of Constant's views about opinion, see Biancamaria Fontana, *Benjamin Constant and the Revolutionary Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1991), 81-97.
63. Constant, *Filangieri*, 255.
64. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997), 60.
65. Constant, *Principes (1806)*, II, 56; Constant, *Political Writings*, 182 (321).
66. Constant, *Political Writings*, 56-7 (135-6).
67. Constant, *Political Writings*, 123-4 (238). The very similar passage delivered in 1819 adds 'egoism to corrupt them' (*Political Writings*, 323-4 (613)).
68. Constant, *Political writings*, 122-6 (236-41)
69. Constant, *Political Writings*, 110 (218).
70. Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 636.

71. Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 649–50.
72. Benjamin Constant, *De la religion considérée dans sa source, ses formes et ses développements*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov and Etienne Hofmann (Actes Sud, 1999), 61.
73. Constant, *Religion*, 62.
74. Constant, *Political writings*, 309 (591)
75. *Ibid.*, 310–11 (593–4).
76. Constant, *Political writings*, 323 (612). Compare Montesquieu - of whom Constant is probably thinking - in his chapter 'On the liberty of the citizen': 'Political liberty consists in security or, at least, in the opinion one has of one's security' (Montesquieu, *The spirit of the laws*, ed. and tr. A.M. Cohler, B.C. Miller, and H.S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 188).
77. Constant, *Political Writings*, 324 (613).
78. Constant, *Ibid.*, 325–6 (615–17).
79. Constant, *Ibid.*, 327 (618)
80. Constant, *Ibid.*, 327–8 (617–19).
81. *Perfectionnement* seems to have no natural English translation retaining the obvious reference to perfectibility.
82. Constant, *Political Writings*, 327 (617).
83. Berlin, *Romantic Age*, 196–7.
84. *Ibid.*, 202.
85. *Ibid.*, 202–3.
86. *Ibid.*, 209.
87. Isaiah Berlin, *Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960*, ed. Henry Harvey and Jennifer Holmes (London: Pimlico, 2011), p.352.
88. Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and its betrayal: six enemies of human liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy, second edn (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 54.
89. [http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published\\_works/tcl/tcl-a.pdf](http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published_works/tcl/tcl-a.pdf) [accessed 8 January 2021]; passage printed at Berlin, *Freedom and betrayal*, 231–2.
90. Berlin, *Freedom and Betrayal*, 187–8.
91. Compare Isaiah Berlin, *Four essays on liberty* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969), 126, where the reference to 'eternal principles of justice and mercy' is cut and the specific borrowing from Constant is obscured by a vague reference to a view allegedly shared by 'Jefferson, Burke, Paine, Mill'. Hardy's edition clarifies by adding a helpful footnote (*Liberty*, 173) that identifies 'degrading or denying our nature' as a quotation from Constant's *Principes de politique* (Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 318), but the source would not have been obvious to Berlin's early readers.
92. Berlin, *Liberty*, 209.
93. *Ibid.*, 171.
94. *Ibid.*, 173.
95. *Ibid.*, 207.
96. *Ibid.*, 209–11.
97. *Ibid.*, 211.
98. Constant, *Ecrits politiques*, 682.
99. Berlin, *Liberty*, 48. See also a number of footnotes endorsing the same view: 41n1, 170n3, and 194n3.
100. *Ibid.*, 193–5.
101. *Ibid.*, 195.
102. Berlin, *Romantic Age*, 208.
103. Berlin, *Liberty*, 42.
104. Berlin, *Romantic Age*, 209.
105. Berlin, *Liberty*, 43, 211, 212, 217.
106. *Ibid.*, 172, 199n.
107. *Ibid.*, 197, 214.
108. *Ibid.*, 214.
109. *Ibid.*, 171, 172, 174, 175, 216.
110. *Ibid.*, 176, 199n, 212, 216.
111. *Ibid.*, 199n.
112. *Ibid.*, 54.
113. *Ibid.*, 212.
114. *Ibid.*, 43.
115. *Ibid.*, 217.
116. *Ibid.*, 54.
117. *Ibid.*, 216.
118. *Ibid.*, 217n.
119. *Ibid.*, 45.

120. John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996), esp.152. The notoriously weak argument that pluralism ‘entails’ at least a ‘measure of “negative” liberty’ (*Liberty*, 216) is probably best seen as a trace of the Bryn Mawr position.
121. Berlin, *Liberty*, 53. For the phrase ‘pattern of life’, see *Liberty*, 47.

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