DIRK VERHOFSTADT

THE LIBERAL CANON

The Foundations of Liberalism

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CENTRUM VOOR DE GESCHIEDENIS VAN
HET VRIJE DENKEN EN HANDELEN

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Introduction

Liberalism is the first ideological movement in modern history. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, philosophers, writers and politicians began to identify with the human values of freedom, justice and progress. Their ideas fed into principles that would come to be associated with liberal ideology. They denounced the privileges of the Church and nobility and advocated for equality and tolerance. They strove for the separation of church and state, freedom of expression, equality – between men and women in particular – and greater individual freedom for all. Many among them wrote influential books and texts, each of them thus contributing in their own way to liberal ideology as we know it today.

More than 200 years ago, in 1809, the first liberal party, Liberales, was established in the Spanish harbour city of Cadiz. Its founding members drew on the core ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution – liberty, equality and fraternity – and would play an influential role in the drafting of the liberal constitution adopted in 1812 by the Cortes, the Spanish parliament. Central to this document were individual freedom, the sovereignty of the people, universal suffrage (albeit only for men), the abolition of aristocratic privileges, the dissolution of the inquisition and the independence of the judiciary. Their opponents were the Serviles, royalist conservatives who rejected Enlightenment thinking.

In fact, Liberales was the first political party based on an 'ideology', a term first used by the French Enlightenment philoso-

pher Antione-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy in his book *Éléments d'Idéologie* (1801). The Spanish liberal party soon gained followers, including in Belgium, where in 1846 the Liberale Partij (Liberal Party) was founded, the nation's oldest political party.

Liberal ideology has inspired and motivated countless citizens over the past 200 years and has incited many to fight for a freer, more equal and humane society. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, liberalism was hit hard by the rise of other ideologies with an explicitly anti-liberal character. Nationalism, communism, fascism and theocracy rejected individual freedom, the right to self-determination and liberal democracy. In these ideologies the individual was not free but rather subordinate to the nation, the collectivity of race, people, or belief. Despite these blows, liberal thinking survived. On 14 April 1947, almost literally amid the rubble of the Second World War, liberals from nineteen countries came together at Wadham College in Oxford, England, to found the federation Liberal International. The Spaniard Salvador de Madariaga – a staunch opposer of Franco – would become its first president.[1] At that time they drew up the famous Oxford Manifesto, which to this day is considered the cornerstone of liberal ideology.

At the heart of the Oxford Manifesto are the conditions of "personal freedom, guaranteed by the independence of the administration of law and justice; freedom of worship and liberty of conscience; freedom of speech and of the press; freedom to associate or not to associate; free choice of occupation; the opportunity of a full and varied education, according to ability and irrespective of birth or means; the right to private ownership of property and the right to embark on individual enterprise; consumer's free choice and the opportunity to reap the full benefit of the productivity of the soil and the industry of man; security from the hazards of sickness, unemployment, disability and old age; equality of rights between men and women". According to the founders, these rights and conditions can only be secured by a true democracy "based on the conscious, free and enlightened consent of the majority, expressed through a free and secret bal-

lot, with due respect for the liberties and opinions of minorities."

Furthermore, the Oxford Manifesto states that the abolition of economic freedom necessarily leads to the disappearance of political freedom. The authors oppose such abolition, whether brought about by state ownership or state control or by private monopolies, cartels and trusts. They only admit State ownership for undertakings "beyond the scope of private enterprise or in the case that competition no longer plays its part. The welfare of the community must prevail and be safeguarded from the abuse of power by sectional interests. A continuous betterment of the conditions of employment, and of the housing and environment of the workers is essential. The rights, duties and interests of labour and capital are complementary: organised consultation and collaboration between employers and employed is vital to the well-being of industry."

Finally, the Oxford Manifesto states that every freedom and right has a corresponding duty. "If free institutions are able to work effectively, every citizen must have a sense of moral responsibility towards his fellow men and take an active part in the affairs of the community (...) War can be abolished and world peace and economic prosperity restored only if all nations fulfil the following conditions: loyal adherence to a world organisation of all nations, great and small; (...) the free exchange of ideas, news, goods and services between nations, as well as freedom of travel within and between all countries, unhampered by censorship, protective trade barriers and exchange regulations; the development of the backward areas of the world, with the collaboration of their inhabitants, in their true interests and in the interests of the world at large." The authors of the Oxford Manifesto conclude their text with an appeal to all men and women who agree with these ideals and principles, to join them in the "endeavour to win their acceptance throughout the world".

In every sentence of the last three paragraphs are fundamental ideas that remain remarkably current today and that have been further developed by the authors that I will cover below. This book contains an overview of 60 influential thinkers and their

most important works that have had a major and enduring influence on the foundations of liberalism. Anyone wishing to understand liberal ideology would be remiss to skip these authors. Each of their books contains elements that contribute to greater freedom for the individual, to greater equality and greater justice. They show that freedom is unlimited, that people have the duty to help others, and that we must strive for universal secular values separate from religious dogma and political ukases. They are a source of inspiration for countless people who are free or dream of being so. The books of this liberal canon represent the foundations of liberalism. They give insight into what drove these thinkers and politicians who, often risking their own lives, defended standpoints that place human dignity first.

In this way *The Liberal Canon* serves as a useful guide for anyone seeking to learn more about liberalism. With the aid of these authors and their publications I aim to show how and to what extent thinkers from the past and today have left a lasting impact on one of the most successful ideologies of our time. My essay *The Foundations of Liberalism* is an attempt to create a coherent summary of the various standpoints held by these authors who lived in diverse countries and periods in time. I realise that some readers, including those who identify as liberals, will not always agree with this text. They may say that my vision is too much to the left or right, too progressive or too conservative, too optimistic or too pessimistic, too social or too asocial, too tame or too radical. By doing so, however, they seek to pigeonhole liberalism. This is precisely what I seek to avoid doing through a focus on that which connects liberals rather than divides them. This text is therefore a highly personal vision of liberalism, but one based on ideas advanced by many classical and contemporary champions of liberalism, ideas that revolve unfailingly around individual freedom.

Other ideologies also claim to observe the primacy of freedom. Their intentions differ, however. They deal not so much in the autonomy of the individual but rather in the protection of group interests. In the same vein, I distrust anyone who seeks to caricature liberalism, even if they identify as liberals themselves.

Many such people seek to characterise liberal ideology as being 'on the right'. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. The terms 'left' and 'right' stand for the two major rival forces of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Those of *rive gauche* (the Enlightenment) and *rive droite* (the Romantic era). In this sense liberalism was firmly on the left. Those representing a 'right-wing' or 'conservative' liberalism have missed the point as liberalism is decidedly progressive in character. The adjectives 'left' and 'social' are also tautological since liberal ideology is social to its core. Liberalism needs no further qualifying adjectives. In fact, to assign any adjective to further qualify liberal ideology is to undermine its intrinsically humane values.

Quite a number of philosophers and politicians have acted unjustly in the name of liberalism. At most, they have used or abused elements of liberal ideology to give their conservatism, nationalism, ethnicism, elitism, racism, Marxism or egocentrism a semblance of dignity and civilisation. Liberalism has been abused countless times out of selfishness and a hunger for power. Mainly by radical free-marketeers with no regard for the circumstances or dignity of individuals – fundamentalists who twist liberal ideology to justify their own injustice, violence and immorality. Their vision has no place in this book as they ignore the connections with humanism and thus reject the foundations of liberalism. "We must construct social institutions, enforced by the power of the state, for the protection of the economically weak from the economically strong," wrote Karl Popper.[2] Here he clearly states that the basis of a liberal constitutional state includes both freedom and justice, a position that has been defended by almost all liberal thinkers and politicians, classical and contemporary. In Popper's view, the future is unwritten: we are responsible for it as a species and together we can make something of it. Let us be optimistic and believe that the world can and will be improved. Liberalism stands for freedom, insofar as that freedom does not harm others. Liberalism advocates for a free market that functions within an ethical framework since, left to its own devices, the free market is only a caricature of liberalism. Liberalism is

social and humane at its core and thus requires no further qualifiers. It would be tautological to speak of 'humane liberalism' as humanity is central to liberalism. That is, humankind as opposed to any particular party, people, race, nation, faith, community, economy, money, profit or anything else. Every individual person. This vision, this optimism, this belief in freedom and justice, can be read in the following discussions of 60 books from 60 authors who each contribute to the bigger picture of liberal ideology.

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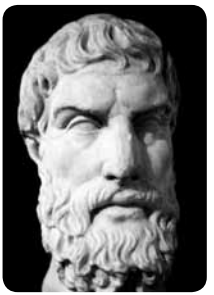
THE LIBERAL CANON

1

Epicurus



Επιστολή προς Μενοικέα
Letter to Menoeceus
Circa 290 BCE

Author

Epicurus (341-270 BCE) was a Greek philosopher and the founder of epicureanism, a philosophical movement in which the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain is central. Around 306 BCE he founded his own school (his Garden) where women and slaves were also welcome. It is recorded that Epicurus wrote many texts, almost all of which have been lost or destroyed over time. Only a number of statements and texts of his have been preserved. They deal with his epistemology, his atomic theory and his conception of the cosmos. His *Letter to Menoeceus* (290 BCE) is relevant to this book in that it deals with his thoughts on ethics. His philosophy regarding personal happiness has survived the ravages of time.

Contents

In his *Letter to Menoeceus* Epicurus describes how one can best attain happiness. This is only possible when one has freed oneself, through philosophy, of the fear of gods and death. Crucial in this is the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure. This may seem a hedonistic, even decadent and egotistical approach to life, but it is not: Epicurus is not so much focused on short-term pleasures, such as drinking or eating to excess, since these

would lead to more pain and thus less pleasure in the future. In fact, he lived quite a sober life and associated the term 'pleasure' more with the satiation of what he called 'natural and necessary' desires, such as eating and drinking. Another matter is the sating of 'natural but unnecessary' desires, such as eating the finest foods and in copious amounts. In the philosopher's view, these were all the desires that, if left unsated, would not lead to pain. A third matter is the satiation of 'unnatural and unnecessary' desires, such as the taking of drugs in order to become intoxicated. He did not advocate this either. For Epicurus, the pursuit of happiness concerned only the 'natural and necessary' desires. "When we say, then, that pleasure is the end and aim, we do not mean the pleasures of the prodigal or the pleasures of sensuality, as we are understood to do by some through ignorance, prejudice, or wilful misrepresentation. By pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul. It is not an unbroken succession of drinking-bouts and of merrymaking, not sexual love, not the enjoyment of the fish and other delicacies of a luxurious table, which produce a pleasant life; it is sober reasoning, searching out the grounds of every choice and avoidance, and banishing those beliefs through which the greatest disturbances take possession of the soul," he wrote.[3] For him another form of pleasure was that of living without inhibition or fear, for one to maintain a certain peace of mind, unsaddled by a fear of death or of the gods. Dying and suffering may be terrible experiences, but they are not death, however inevitable death may be, said Epicurus: "When we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not."[4]

Recognising that our lives are short-lived, he tells us that we must enjoy every moment and that we are in control of our own happiness in life. He was also sceptical with regard to the existence of the gods, at least as most people conceived of them, and did not subscribe to simply 'having faith'. That natural disasters arose from the ire of the gods was an absurd notion to him. Knowledge could be acquired through observation only. This belief was one of the reasons he received criticism from the religious

scholars of the day and the later church fathers. Epicurus' ideas have already played an important role in utilitarian thinking, as later developed by Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Michel Onfray, among others.

Quote

"(...) the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear, and, when once we have attained all this, the tempest of the soul is laid; seeing that the living creature has no need to go in search of something that is lacking, nor to look anything else by which the good of the soul and of the body will be fulfilled. When we are pained pleasure, then, and then only, do we feel the need of pleasure."[5]

Literature

Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus*, Prometheus, 1993
George Strodach, *The Philosophy of Epicurus,* Dover Publications, 2019

2

Lucretius

De Rerum Natura
On the Nature of Things
Circa 56 BCE

Author

Titus Lucretius (99-55 BCE) was a Roman philosopher, atomist and poet who, like Epicurus, strongly criticised the prevailing polytheism. He rejected stoicism as being the only way to achieve human happiness and asserted that people should free themselves of the fear that religions instilled in them. His work was strongly criticised by the first Christians and later by the church fathers and theologians. Most of his texts have since been destroyed or lost. In the fifteenth century the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini rediscovered Lucretius's famous work *De Rerum Natura* (56 BCE) in the Benedictine abbey of Fulda in Southern Germany. This spectacular find was responsible in part for the subsequent and pivotal breakthrough of humanism in Europe.

Contents

De Rerum Natura is a didactic poem written in dactylic hexameter and consisting of six books in which Lucretius argues defiantly against the state and religion of the time. His ideas, which largely pick up from those of Epicurus, are in diametric opposition to the religious ideas of the day, as well as indirectly opposing later ecclesiastical dogma. He defends atomism and states that eve-

rything is made up of invisible particles that are imperishable, that there is no fixed centre of the universe (while the Church regarded the earth as the centre), that the universe has no creator or designer, that providence is a fabrication, that everything comes about as a result of a 'swerve', that nature is constantly experimenting, that the universe is not created for or around mankind, that human beings are not unique in relation to other living beings, that human society did not begin in an era of peace and abundance but with a primitive struggle for existence, that there is no afterlife, that the supreme goal in life is to increase pleasure and limit pain, that death means nothing to us, that religions are – without exception – cruel, that there are no supernatural beings, and that all organised religions are superstitious fictions based on deep-seated desires, fears and ignorance. "Furthermore, you must not suppose that the holy dwelling-places of the gods are anywhere within the limits of the world. For the flimsy nature of the gods, far removed from our senses, is scarcely visible even to the perception of the mind. Since it eludes the touch and pressure of our hands, it can have no contact with anything that is tangible to us. For what cannot be touched cannot touch," wrote Lucretius.[6] These were all theses radically rejected by the later church scholars and the Inquisition, as Galileo Galilei and Giordano Bruno would discover.

Christianity condemned his book as a model of hedonism. Even though it has nothing to do with it. Crucial to understanding Lucretius is the importance he attaches to human intellect – reason, if you will – in gaining insight into nature and man. "Fables of the gods did not crush [Epicurus], nor the lightning flash and the growling menace of the sky. Rather, they quickened his manhood, so that he, first of all men, longed to smash the constraining locks of nature's doors. The vital vigour of his mind prevailed."[7] In this way he sought to give a good explanation for the various phenomena of the heavens, the progress of the sun and moon and by which power all manner of things take place on earth, but also for the nature of the soul and the mind. In his book Lucretius formulates an answer to this. He gives a surpris-

ingly modern explanation of natural phenomena, the origin of the world, the genesis of plants and animals, the first primitive people, the discovery of fire, the survival of the fittest, the causes of faith in the gods, the emergence of the first communities, the beginnings of language, the transition to agriculture and forestry and the origin of cities and laws. In each case, drawing on the limited knowledge of the time, he attempts to give a logical explanation for all these phenomena.

Lucretius is thus one of the first to advocate the importance of reason and the senses in the search for reality.

Quote

"One thing that worries me is the fear that you may fancy yourself embarking on an impious course, setting your feet on the path of sin. Far from it. More often it is this very superstition that is the mother of sinful and impious deeds."[8]

Literature

Lucretius, *On the Nature of Thinghs*, Hackett Publishing Company, 2001

Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, WW Norton & Company, 2012

3

Averroes

Fasl al-Maqaal
The Decisive Treatise
Circa 1175

Author

Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes (1126-1198) was born in Córdoba. He was a polymath with a great interest in science and the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. He was also a respected lawyer, astronomer, mathematician, physicist and physician. He worked as a chief judge in Córdoba and as a physician for the local caliph. Thanks to the Latin translation of his commentary (in Arabic) on Aristotle, he is now considered one of the founders of modern secular thinking in Western Europe. In the seventies of the twelfth century, Averroes was banished to Lucena due to his tolerant ideas. His theses were condemned and his books burned. Around 1195 he moved to Marrakesh where he died. Many of his works are thought to be definitively lost.

Contents

The Decisive Treatise (1175) presents a remarkable defence of the legitimate role of reason within a religious community. The common idea in Islam (to this day) is that the 'sacred' texts should not be interpreted. Averroes disagreed with this. He was critical of the anti-philosophical attitude of the Islam scholars. He felt that the sacred text called rather 'for the consideration of existing

things by means of the intellect and for pursuing cognizance of them by means of it'. As such he rejected a more narrowly mythical understanding of the text.

In his religious-legal argumentation he invoked, among others, the Koranic verse, Surah 16.125, 'The Bees': "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice, and debate with them in the most dignified manner."[9] Averroes expressed it as follows: "From this it has become evident that reflection upon the books of the Ancients is obligatory according to the Law, for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which the Law urges us."[10] Thus he felt that one should study the texts of antiquity and advocated for freedom of research. Here he referred to *ijtih d*, a pre-existing approach to interpreting the Koran. Today this term is used to refer to the 'golden age' of Islam, between the 9th and 12th centuries. At that time in Andalusia, for example, there was a great interest in writings of antiquity. In Córdoba alone there were more than 70 libraries at the time, while the Christian Occident was still in the dark Middle Ages. At this time critical thinking was encouraged in the Arab world, leading to the rediscovery of the Greek and Roman masters.

For Averroes, philosophy, just like science and any empirical finding, was not contrary to theology, but rather a tool for understanding the often hermetic texts. This attitude indicates that Averroes did not so much defend the role of reason within a religious community, but sought a compromise in which every inquiry was in service of the premise that the 'sacred' text is the truth. In this way everything that is said in the Koran is irrefutably true, and "demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law".[11] For Averroës, this literally meant that logical thoughts and empirical findings could never be in conflict with the Koran or its followers.

Such an attitude might be considered half-hearted today, but in the twelfth century it was a daring one. Because of the importance he attached to rationality, including in the interpretation of religious truths, he was diametrically opposed to Islamic orthodoxy. Averroes dared to disagree with the theocrats of the age.

For example, he spoke out in defence of the competence of women. A violent campaign for theological purity ensued, instigated by fundamentalists. Averroes had to appear before a tribunal, his books were banned and burned, and many of his works were definitively lost as a result of this censorship.

The works that remain show that Averroes was a very tolerant philosopher – with a great deal of understanding for dissidents – and a forerunner of humanism and the Kantian vision of *sapere aude* (dare to think). He also influenced Francis Bacon and other proponents of the scientific method.

Quote

"From this it has become evident that reflection upon the books of the Ancients is obligatory according to the Law, for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which the Law urges us."[12]

Literature

Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise* (1175), Gorgias, Pr Llc, 2017
Irshad Manji, *The Trouble with Islam*, St. Martin's Griffin, 2005

4

Pico della Mirandola

Oratio de hominis dignitate
Oration on the Dignity of Man
1486

Author

Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) was an Italian Renaissance philosopher and one of the first European humanists. He wrote the book *Conclusiones*, in which he collected wisdoms from diverse religious and philosophical sources. When he went to Rome to present his *Conclusiones*, he wrote *Oration on The Dignity of Man* (1486) as a public speech (an oration), but was not allowed to deliver the speech as the Pope and the church scholars at the time considered it heretical. Instead he was tried and even imprisoned for a short time. Near the end of his life, Mirandola supported the Dominican priest Girolamo Savonarola in Florence, who fiercely opposed corruption in the Church but gradually became a religious fanatic. Mirandola died under suspicious circumstances, most probably from poisoning. The text of his oration was published posthumously and is now considered a seminal work in the context of humanism in Europe.

Contents

Oration on the Dignity of Man is a speech serving as an introduction to the 900 assertions in his *Conclusiones* on faith, philosophy and magic.

In it, Pico della Mirandola formulates the liberating idea of 'man as his own creator'. From this perspective, we are not of a predetermined nature, but rather the only beings created by God with the freedom to become what we want, our destiny thus resting in our own hands. We are equally capable of barbarity and divinity. In this way each person shapes their nature by following their own path rather than by following a (traditional or religious) precept.

Religion, community and family determine the setting, Mirandola said, but you have to write the script yourself. "(...) like a free and sovereign creator, you may fashion your own form out of your own substance."[13] To put it another way, we have the freedom to make something of our lives. The author addresses Adam, as a symbol for all humanity: "We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature [...]. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine."[14]

This makes him one of the first to define, to a certain extent, the right to self-determination that lies at the heart of liberal thinking. He literally speaks of 'your own will' and asserts that it is we ourselves who determine and shape our destinies. Furthermore, he attempts to reconcile ideas from various religions, from paganism and Hellenism, in order to arrive at a kind of universal knowledge and to give shape to the real dignity of mankind.

In this way he demonstrated a great deal of openness and tol-

erance towards those who think differently And he returned to the texts of Plato and Aristotle and other great figures from antiquity, including many mathematicians, expressing sorrow that their writings were in danger of disappearing into the mists of history. "However, like other illustrious achievements of the past, it has through lack of interest on the part of succeeding generations, fallen into such desuetude, that hardly any vestiges of it are to be found."[15] In these words you can sense his regret regarding this forgetfulness and his desire to once again give these ideas the place they deserve.

Pico della Mirandola was tried in 1486 by Pope Innocentius VIII (who, with his papal bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, had also permitted the persecution of so-called witches) and fled to France. His Oration would later be celebrated by Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More and Jacob Burckhardt, among others.

Quote

"Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine."[16]

Literature

Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), Gateway Editions, 1996
Jader Jacobelli, *Pico della Mirandola*, Milano Longanesi, 1986

5

Michel de Montaigne

Les Essais
The Essays
1580

Author

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) was a French philosopher and politician. He was a sceptical humanist whose primary focus of study was humankind itself. As a Catholic he was shocked by the events of the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572, in which almost 25,000 Huguenots (French Protestants) were murdered by French Roman Catholics. Montaigne had been a member of the judiciary in his hometown of Bordeaux since he was twenty years old and rejected the cruel punishments of his time. He travelled extensively throughout France, Germany and Italy, and incorporated his experiences and his formidable literary knowledge into his essays, which reflected his humanistic views. Each of his texts shows his great curiosity and his aversion to dogma, the latter of which made him unpopular with the clergy.

Contents

The Essays (1580) comprise a series of Montaigne's personal perspectives on life, friendship, wisdom, passion, eroticism, religion and death. "The greatest thing in the world is for a man to know that he is his own.," wrote Montaigne.[17] Here he refers to the personal responsibility of every individual in their dealings

with their fellow people and with society as a whole, and by extension one's inner capacity to establish boundaries for one's own freedom. According to Montaigne, every action and attitude of a human being with respect to themselves and others should be based on the principle that they do not limit their own human possibilities, but at the same time do not compromise the dignity and integrity of others. Freedom and ethics only exist if everyone realises that they are neither superior nor inferior to other human beings. Even then, as a human being, one must realise that one's life is only possible thanks to others. Montaigne had little time for religious dogmas and alleged virtue, for no virtue can be imitated as easily as piety when one does not dedicate one's life and morals to it. Just like Pico della Mirandola, he felt that people can forge their own paths in life, because destiny does not determine our happiness or unhappiness.

Even more problematic in his relationship with the church was his interest in and quest for the knowledge of antiquity. Montaigne wrote about thinkers from antiquity as being sources of wisdom. "I cannot easily persuade myself that Epicurus, Plato and Pythagoras, have given us their atoms, ideas and numbers, for current pay. They were too wise to establish their articles of faith upon things so disputable and uncertain. But in that obscurity and ignorance in which the world then was, every one of these great men endeavoured to present some kind of image or reflection of light, and worked their brains for inventions that might have a pleasant and subtle appearance; provided that, though false, they might make good their ground against those that would oppose them."[18] And he goes one step further when he talks about his search for the truth. There is much more knowledge than the dogmas we can read in the texts of the Bible and we must try to find them: "There is no desire more natural than that of knowledge. We try all ways that can lead us to it; where reason is wanting, we therein employ experience, which is a means much more weak and cheap; but truth is so great a thing that we ought not to disdain any mediation that will guide us to it."[19] Montaigne was also one of the first philosophers to stand up for

the interests of women. "Women are not to blame at all, when they refuse the rules of life that are introduced into the world, forasmuch as the men make them without their help."[20] And he continued as follows: "I say that males and females are cast in the same mould, and that, education and usage excepted, the difference is not great."[21] Montaigne, a feminist *avant la lettre*.

His texts display his great scepticism, humanism and belief in tolerance; mentalities that would later play an important role during the Enlightenment. *The Essays* were put on *the Index librorum prohibitorum* ('List of Forbidden Books') in 1676 because Montaigne dared to relativise the ecclesiastical dogmas and revealed his interest in the pagan classics.

Quote

"A little natural pride, an impatience at being refused, the moderation of my desires and designs, my incapacity for business, and my most beloved qualities, idleness and freedom; by all these together I have conceived a mortal hatred to being obliged to any other, or by any other than myself."[22]

Literature

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Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live: Or A Life of Montaigne*, Other Press, 2011

6

Hugo Grotius

Mare Liberum
The Free Sea
1609

Author

Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) was a Dutch jurist and author of theological, historical and legal texts. His book *De iure belli ac pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace) from 1625 is generally regarded as the cornerstone of international law and the law of war. But insofar as liberal ideology is concerned *Mare Liberum* (The Freedom of the Seas, 1609) is of greater significance. As a remonstrator and follower of the tolerant theologian and preacher James Arminius, he believed that the authority of the state was above that of the Church. For example, he held that natural law, which included liberal principles such as the right to property, contractual fidelity and liability, was always valid, even if there were no God. As an advisor to Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt, the Lands' Advocate (spokesman) of the States of Holland and a supporter of Arminius, he was sentenced in 1618 to an 'eternal prison sentence' for treason. After three years on the run he reached Paris via Antwerp. There he served as Sweden's ambassador. In 1644 he was called to Sweden to join its Council of State and to advise the then queen Christina in her foreign policy. He later moved to Rostock in Germany where he died.

Contents

In *The Free Sea*, Grotius argues that every nation and every human being should have free access to the sea. He was the first to describe the idea of a global community that allows everyone to make use of what he called 'common things'.

"But as in man himself there are some things which are common with all, and other some whereby everyone is to be distinguished from other, so of those things which nature had brought forth for the use of man she would that some of them should remain common and others through every one's labour and industry to become proper," he wrote.[23] It should come as no surprise that a Dutchman such as Grotius would advocate for this. Until the seventeenth century, the oceans were mainly fared by Portuguese and Spanish ships, which practically had a monopoly on lucrative sea trade to the new world (America) and especially to India, where they traded spices, silk fabrics and other products that were much sought-after in the West. When the United Provinces of the Netherlands emerged as a new naval power and sought to trade with India, the United East India Company asked Grotius to legally establish the principle of the free sea. This led to his *Mare Liberum*. The subtitle gives the game away: *The Right Which Belongs to the Dutch to Take Part in the East Indian Trade*.

The content of the book met expectations. Grotius wrote that every nation must be free to make contact with every other nation and to trade with it. "The liberty of trading is agreeable to the primary law of nations which hath a natural and perpetual cause and therefore cannot be taken away," he asserted.[24] His ideas relating to free trade are based on the *ius naturale*, natural law, which was autonomous in relation to God. In this sense he is considered to be a forerunner of John Locke and other natural law thinkers. His defence of the free sea was in fact a plea for free trade as a means for peace and prosperity. The Netherlands also had to contend with the English, who claimed the exclusive right to all the waters around the island (the Channel, the North Sea and the Irish Sea), which led to the Dutch-English wars.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the principle of the free sea was generally accepted, with the exception of the territorial waters along the coastlines of various nations.

The principle of the free sea as elaborated by Grotius, which still applies to this day, was a strong impetus for the establishment of freedom of enterprise and trade. It inspired Adam Smith, who described the importance of free trade in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1766). The founders of the United States were also greatly influenced by Grotius and drafted the Declaration of Independence in his spirit.

Quote

"But laws were set down for both, that all surely might use common things without the damage of all and, for the rest, every man contented with his portion should abstain from another's."[25]

Literature

Hugo Grotius, *The Free Sea* (1609), Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 2004

Hugo Grotius, *Of the Rights of War and Peace*, Nabu Press, 2011

7

Francis Bacon

Novum Organum
The New Organon
1620

Author

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an English philosopher, lawyer, and a practitioner of the scientific method. He is generally regarded as the founder of empiricism. He attended the University of Cambridge, where he read Plato (although he would soon reject his ideas) and the *Organon* of Aristotle, whose 'logic and philosophy of science' Bacon sought to update.

Bacon wrote various philosophical works, including his famous *New Atlantis* (1626), a sort of utopian novel in which he describes how humankind can find greater happiness with the application of science and technology, due to their promise of progress, improved health and greater wealth. In 1620 he published his *Novum Organum* (The New Organon), in which he developed the inductive method, which would influence numerous later thinkers. As such, he is one of the most important progressive thinkers.

Contents

The title *Novum Organum* refers to a new method of logical thinking and methodology in philosophy and science, in contrast with the approach generally followed at the time, as described in Aris-

totle's *Organon*. Francis Bacon employs a series of aphorisms in discussing 'induction', a means of arriving at deeper scientific understanding through the use of reasoning and experimentation. Bacon takes a stand against tradition, prejudice and fallacies that obscure the human mind. "But by far the greatest obstacle to the advancement of the sciences, and the undertaking of any new attempt or department, is to be found in men's despair and the idea of impossibility; for men of a prudent and exact turn of thought are altogether diffident in matters of this nature, considering the obscurity of nature, the shortness of life, the deception of the senses, and weakness of the judgment. They think, therefore, that in the revolutions of ages and of the world there are certain floods and ebbs of the sciences, and that they grow and flourish at one time, and wither and fall off at another, that when they have attained a certain degree and condition they can proceed no further," he wrote.[26] The latter is untrue as knowledge will only continue to be amassed. To achieve human progress, he advocates for scientific experimentation, empirical research, human experience and critical thinking.

Bacon employs a logical methodology to this end. It is only by reflecting and using our senses that we come to truly understand nature and make progress, because it is only through reason that we can arrive at ideas that elicit no further doubt. He did however realise the limitations of this, remarking that doubt is fertile with controversy, but poor in what it yields. And yet, in this way, one had to investigate further, with the necessary degree of scepticism, and seek out the truth. "There are and can exist but two ways of investigating and discovering truth. The one hurries on rapidly from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from them, as principles and their supposed indisputable truth, derives and discovers the intermediate axioms. This is the way now in use. The other constructs its axioms from the senses and particulars, by ascending continually and gradually, till it finally arrives at the most general axioms, which is the true but unattempted way," according to Bacon.[27] The acquisition of knowledge is critical to Bacon, as indicated by the famous state-

ment in his book *Meditationes Sacrae* (1597): 'Scientia potentia est' – 'knowledge is power'. This sentiment also resounds in the aphorism: "Knowledge and human power are synonymous, since the ignorance of the cause frustrates the effect; for nature is only subdued by submission, and that which in contemplative philosophy corresponds with the cause in practical science becomes the rule."[28] For Bacon, education and the acquisition of knowledge were among the most important pursuits in life. This is reflected in how much he hoped for and anticipated human progress aided by technological development. With his emphasis on the scientific method, he inspired many later philosophers and researchers, including Immanuel Kant.

Quote

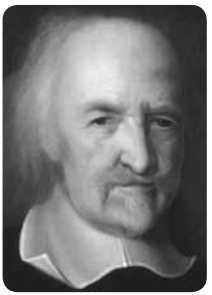
"Man, as the minister and interpreter of nature, does and understands as much as his observations on the order of nature, either with regard to things or the mind, permit him, and neither knows nor is capable of more."[29]

Literature

Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (1620), University of Michigan Library, 2009
Francis Bacon, *Aphorisms*, Round Bend Press, 2012

8

Thomas Hobbes



Leviathan
Leviathan
1651

Author

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an Oxford-educated English philosopher. He was influenced by atomism as propounded by Epicurus and Lucretius, and by the new scientific insights of Galileo Galilei, whom he met in Florence, among others. He is considered to be the founder of modern political philosophy, which tries to formulate answers to the questions of how a society should be organised and managed, what is the status of property and what is the role of the individual within the collective. Hobbes expounded on the importance of the social contract, which would later be further discussed in the work of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. Although Hobbes was a supporter of absolute monarchy, he was one of the founders of core liberal ideas such as the right of the individual to do everything that is not explicitly forbidden, and the natural equality of every human being.

Contents

In *Leviathan* (1651) Hobbes searches for a rational explanation to justify the power of the monarch as a sovereign ruler and maintainer of order, and why in almost all cases it is intolerable to re-

volt against it.His point of departure in this search is the original state of nature (the natural condition of humankind), in which people were completely free and in which there were no rules and laws to control them. According to him, this led to a "war of every man against every man".[30]

People were constantly afraid of each other because 'man to man is an arrant wolf' (*Homo humini lupus est*). According to Hobbes, a 'Leviathan', an absolute state power, was required to put an end to this permanent fear of death. He argued that every human being should surrender their rights to an all-powerful state that would ensure their peace and security. But that state power must also be able to effectively guarantee that security, otherwise it would have no reason to exist. In other words, people should irrevocably hand over their rights to an absolute power that will protect them in exchange. Here, for the first time, we see the theory of social contract, which at the time was strongly criticised, as it still is today.

In the England of Hobbes's day, supporters of the parliamentary system found that in his book Hobbes gave too much power to the 'Leviathan', or the sovereign ruler (the ruler of absolute power who did not recognise any other power), who is incidentally not a participant in the social contract themselves. Hobbes states that the sovereign's power would be so great that only they can judge what the means of peace and security are, and what things stand in the way of or disrupt them. But the royalists criticised Hobbes for being too democratic and for wanting to undermine the authority of the sovereign, because in their view monarchy was a divine right and not a secular matter as Hobbes would have it. "The obligation of subjects to the sovereign, is understood to last as long, and no longer, than the power lasteth, by which he is able to protect them. For the right men have by nature to protect themselves, when none else can protect them, can by no covenant be relinquished," wrote Hobbes.[31]

Dictatorial regimes have radically applied his ideas of the supremely powerful state and sovereign ruler: take communism and fascism, for example, and all their consequences. On the oth-

er hand, Hobbes also defended liberal ideas such as the natural rights of the individual, adopting a position at odds with Christian thinking at the time. Many of his ideas about ceding rights in order to obtain the protection of a sovereign ruler have been applied in the development of later, modern states.

Quote

"The legislator in all commonwealths is only the sovereign, be he one Man, as in a Monarchy, or one assembly of men, as in a democracy or aristocracy. For the legislator is he that maketh the law. And the commonwealth only prescribes and commandeth the observation of those rules which we call law: therefore the commonwealth is the legislator. But the commonwealth is no person, nor has capacity to do anything but by the representative, that is, the sovereign; and therefore the sovereign is the sole legislator."[32]

Literature

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), Penguin Classics, 2017
Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* (1642), Cambridge University Press, 1998

9

Baruch Spinoza

Tractatus theologico-politicus
Theologico-political treatiese
1670

Author

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was a Jewish-Dutch philosopher. He developed a philosophy in which God was equal to nature, he doubted the authenticity of the Ten Commandments and rejected the notion of miracles. In 1656, he was expelled from the Jewish community for 'abominable heresies'. During his lifetime his *Theologico-political Treatise* (1670) was published, in which he argues for a strict separation between philosophy, which searches for truth, and theology, which deals with faith. In his posthumously published *Political Treatise* (1677) he defended democracy as the most reasonable form of government, and in his *Ethics* (1678) he proposed a path that would lead to freedom and fairness for each individual. His works were quick to be added to the Catholic Church's List of Forbidden Books.

Contents

In his *Theologico-political Treatise*, published anonymously in 1670, Spinoza pointed out the many contradictions in the Bible. The 'holy' book contained no valuable knowledge, he said, as its doctrines were not in line with reasonable thinking.

He felt that people should therefore not believe in the truth of religious dogmas, but rather use their own minds to do good. For precisely this reason, people must be able to speak and discuss freely. This was the first time that a strong plea was made for the principle of freedom of expression and belief, and for the importance of reason, which would later be defended by many liberal thinkers. According to Spinoza, freedom of thought and speech, rather than freedom of conscience and religion, is the root of political freedom and peace. According to Spinoza no one can transfer or be forced to transfer to someone else their natural right or ability to reason and judge freely. It is therefore an act of violence for a government to attempt to control people's minds. The sovereign power wrongs its subjects when it assumes the right to prescribe to them what is true and untrue and what views they should hold in deference to God. These are rights that nobody can relinquish, even if they wanted to. However, he also pointed out the limits of freedom of speech. For example, he spoke against the use of inflammatory language that undermines society.

He also stated that religious leaders should not get involved in political affairs, which is an indirect plea for the 'modern' idea of the separation of church and state. Equally important was his choice of democracy as the best form of government as it arises from a social contract between all citizens. Spinoza sought to develop his vision of this form of government in his *Political Treatise*, but when it came to the chapter on democracy, he only managed to jot down a number of general principles before his death. It is clear, however, that he had in mind a system of government in which the people would be in control and not a despot, with the aim of preserving the peace and freedom of the citizens. His chapter XI opens as follows: "I pass, at length, to the third and perfectly absolute dominion [in addition to the monarchy and the aristocracy], which we call democracy."[33] He also spoke positively about democracy in his *Theologico-political Treatise*: "I think I have now shown sufficiently clearly the basis of a democracy: I have especially desired to do so, for I believe it to be of all forms

of government the most natural, and the most consonant with individual liberty."[34]

In this way, Spinoza was far ahead of his time and inspired many enlightened and liberal thinkers.

Quote

"The city of Amsterdam reaps the fruit of this freedom in its own great prosperity and in the admiration of all other people. For in this most flourishing state, and most splendid city, men of every nation and religion live together in the greatest harmony, and ask no questions before trusting their goods to a fellow-citizen, save whether he be rich or poor, and whether he generally acts honestly, or the reverse. His religion and sect is considered of no importance: for it has no effect before the judges in gaining or losing a cause, and there is no sect so despised that its followers, provided that they harm no one, pay every man his due, and live uprightly, are deprived of the protection of the magisterial authority."[35]

Literature

Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), Cambridge University Press, 2007

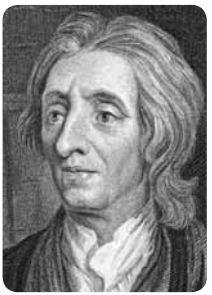
Spinoza, *Political Treatise* (Tractatus Politicus) (1677), Hackett Publishing Co, 2001

Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2001

10

John Locke

Two Treatises on Government
1690



Author

John Locke (1632-1704) was an English philosopher now regarded as a forerunner to Enlightenment thinkers and one of the fathers of liberalism. He defended the right to freedom and the rule of law and wrote several books including *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). In 1690 he published his renowned work *Two Treatises on Government*, a collection of his politico-philosophical ideas that broke with ideas of state based on religions. Before that he had already written his Letter Concerning Toleration (1689), in which he advocated for religious tolerance. The Catholic Church would soon put this book on their List of Forbidden Books.

Contents

Two Treatises on Government deals with the relationship between the individual and the government. According to Locke, a social contract between the citizens is necessary to get out of the state of nature which, as Thomas Hobbes described it, is a state of constant war 'of every man against every man'.

Only by working together can one escape self-destructive situ-

ation. Locke rejected the idea that kings had a claim to absolute power on the basis of some kind of divine right. He defended a constitutional monarchy, i.e. one based on an agreement between citizens, in which human freedom, equality and security would be central. Locke held that "all men by nature are equal", and that we have a number of original, inalienable rights, such as the right to life, freedom and property.[36] In order to guarantee this, citizens would voluntarily transfer some of their natural rights to the government, which would in turn see that everyone abides by their moral obligations while at the same time ensuring that it does not itself violate the inalienable rights of the citizens. If a government were to violate those rights, then the people have the moral right to revolt against that government and to oust the rulers, according to Locke. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke's social contract does not permit the state to suspend the rights of nationals. Rather, people transfer to the government the right to protect their rights, but not their rights themselves. The state must therefore guarantee at all times the freedom of the individual and any property acquired by the individual through their own work. With this, Locke laid the foundations of a system of individual rights that are not merely legal but constitutional.

God gave the world to all people along with the reason required to make use of it. "Now of those good things which nature hath provided in common, every one had a right (as hath been said) to as much as he could use, and property in all that he could effect with his labour; all that his industry could extend to, to alter from the state nature had put it in, was his."[37] Each person may claim a part of nature as long as they leave enough and of the same quality to others, and as long as they do not take possession of more than they can process and use themselves. "As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property."[38] The state must also provide a justice system with appropriate punishments. Even before Montesquieu, he argued in favour of separate powers that control each other in order to prevent arbitrariness and an excess of state power. The people, however, always retain the supreme

power to free themselves of all attacks and ill intentions including from lawmakers, should they be so foolish and evil as to forge and implement plans against the liberties and property of their subjects.

Locke's ideas had a strong influence on the American Declaration of Independence and on later liberal thinkers – particularly his ideas on tolerance, the natural rights of each individual and, above all, his principle of popular sovereignty, whereby the people could unseat a ruler who acts against the original rights of the individual. He is generally considered to be one of the founders of liberalism.

Quote

"The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."[39]

Literature

John Locke, *An essay concerning human understanding* (1690), McMaster University, 2000

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, (1689), OUP Oxford, 2010

11

Pierre Bayle

Dictionnaire Historique et Critique
Historical and Critical Dictionary
1697-1702

Author

Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) was a French Protestant philosopher who opposed the punishment of non-believers, which caused him difficulties in Catholic France. He fled to the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands and was appointed as a professor of philosophy and history in Rotterdam. He tried to separate not only faith and science but also faith and ethics. In 1682, many people were alarmed when Halley's comet skimmed past the earth. Some clergymen saw it as a sign from God that the end was nigh. But Bayle dismissed their doomsday thinking as nonsense. In 1684, he began publishing *Les Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, which could be regarded as the first critical journal in Europe. His principal work, the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, was published in four volumes over the period 1697 to 1702 and likewise contained a great deal of religious criticism. Bayle's ideas were an important stepping stone to the Age of Enlightenment.

Contents

Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* contains biographies of known and lesser known philosophers and historical figures. In the book he indirectly discusses the atheistic ideas of ancient phi-

losophers such as Epicurus and Lucretius, as well as contemporaries such as Spinoza.

Each of the book's lemmas was expanded on in detail in the footnotes, Bayle thus enabling his readers to familiarise themselves with the content of many forbidden books that the Catholic Church had placed on their list starting from 1559. Unsurprisingly, his *Dictionary* soon garnered attention; between the lines of his extensive writings one could detect his support of religious tolerance, even with respect to atheists and people of Muslim and Jewish faith. "Atheism is not a necessary cause of immorality," Bayle writes in his book *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*.[40] This standpoint immediately earned him many enemies in practically all religious circles.

He also advocated for the separation of church and state, a revolutionary idea for the time, for which he was accused of Spinozism. He did however write a particularly critical and influential lemma on Spinoza and his ideas, which he called the most 'monstrous hypothesis' being 'most diametrically opposed to the most obvious notions of our mind'. His attack on Spinozism was soon separately translated into Dutch and forms the basis for the first biography on Spinoza written by the German Lutheran Johannes Kohler.

In other lemmas Bayle makes it clear that in the study of nature we must engage our faculty of reason in order to discern the facts, and that a sceptical approach is better than one informed by dogmatic views. Because reality always has two sides, humankind has to document everything meticulously; this was how Bayle defended the importance of his *Dictionary*, which didn't take long to be reprinted. There is a very important difference between this and the other historical dictionaries. Bayle summarised his work as follows: "I am not satisfied, as one does in those other books, with broadly depicting people's lives; I collect, to the extent that the few books I possess allow me, the most remarkable, personal facts, the judgments that have been made about the person I am talking about, and the errors that have been attributed to them. I investigate, discuss, prove, refute according to the occasion."[41]

He would go on to influence a great many Enlightenment philosophers with his sceptical approach.

Quote

"It is thus tolerance that is the source of peace, and intolerance that is the source of disorder and squabbling."[42]

Literature

Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), Hackett Publishing Company, 1991

Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, Suny Press, 2000

12

Bernard Mandeville

The Fable of the Bees
1714

Author

Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) was a Dutch philosopher and physician who moved to London after his studies. He wrote fables in the style of Jean de La Fontaine and philosophical texts on various subjects. In 1705 he wrote the poem *The Grumbling Hive*, which he would develop into *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) over the following years. His work would later have a great influence on the Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith, generally regarded as the founder of economic liberalism. The liberal economist and philosopher Friedrich von Hayek also admired Mandeville's work and in 1966 wrote a talk entitled *Lecture on a Master Mind: Dr. Bernard Mandeville*, honouring the fact that Mandeville was the first to develop the classical paradigms of the spontaneous growth of orderly social structures. Mandeville's plea for so-called vice, however, was not well received by the Church.

Contents

In *The Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville describes a flourishing beehive in which the bees behave like villains. They have no sense of morality at all and are driven solely by greed and self-interest. They

dodge the rules, pocket subsidies for themselves and hinder the judicial process.

Until the gods decide to force the bees to be honest and virtuous. This honest beehive would seem to symbolise the perfect Christian society as presented to the people by clergymen. The consequences of the transition to virtue prove disastrous. Without the incentive of self-interest, one group of bees after another loses its work. No one can be bothered to make an effort anymore and as a result, welfare and prosperity collapses, leaving everyone worse off. According to Mandeville, self-interest, self-love and greed together form the driving force for societal dynamism and progress. It is only by the debauchery of some that others have work and pay. The debauched make work for garment makers, servants and sex workers, who in turn employ carpenters, bakers, etc. "Thus Vice nursed Ingenuity, / Which join'd with Time; and Industry / Had carry'd Life's Conveniencies, / It's real Pleasures, Comforts, Ease, / To such a Height, the very Poor / Lived better than the Rich before".

Charity may seem a virtue, but it usually leads to negative outcomes: 'Charity, where it is too extensive, seldom fails of promoting Sloth and Idleness, and is good for little in the Commonwealth but to breed Drones and destroy Industry.'[43] It is only through selfishness that people are incentivised to make an effort and thus contribute to the general prosperity of society. This creates the paradox that it is precisely humanity's selfish actions that lead to socially beneficial actions, or as Mandeville himself put it: 'private vices, public benefits'.[44] This thesis is not easy to prove, but the reverse has in any case led to significant tragedy. Take communism, for example, in which any form of self-interest was (and is) barred, which led to a collective impoverishment. When self-interest is eliminated, any incentive to make an effort, do better and be inventive disappears. In this sense, Mandeville also advocates free trade.

Mandeville may put it all a bit harshly and cynically, but his message still has value today. Anyone who rewards people for

their creativity and commitment will thus contribute to a more prosperous society. Anyone who tries to stop this threatens to plunge society into stagnation and decline.

Quote

'I flatter my self to have demonstrated that, neither the Friendly Qualities and kind Affections that are natural to Man, nor the real Virtues he is capable of acquiring by Reason and Self-Denial, are the Foundation of Society; but that what we call Evil in this World, Moral as well as Natural, is the grand Principle that makes us sociable Creatures, the solid Basis, the Life and Support of all Trades and Employments without Exception: That there we must look for the true Origin of all Arts and Sciences, and that the Moment Evil ceases, the Society must be spoiled, if not totally dissolved."[45]

Literature

Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), Penguin Classics, 1989

Bernard Mandeville, *An Inquiry into an Origin of Honour* (1732), Public Domain, 2012

Bernard Mandeville, *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (1729), Transaction Publishers, 2000

13

David Hume

A Treatise of Human Nature
1740

Author

David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and an advocate of empiricism. He was influenced by Newton's use of the scientific method to arrive at accurate conclusions. Hume's parents were sufficiently wealthy to have a library so that young David could read many ancient works, including those by Aristotele and Cicero. He travelled throughout Europe and was a welcome guest in Parisian salons, where he met Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert and Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach. At the age of 28 he wrote his *Treatise on Human Nature* in which he describes a complete philosophy based on scientific insights into human nature. He later published *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) and *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), which would greatly influence other enlightenment thinkers.

Contents

In *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume's point of departure was the world around us, including everyday human activities and experiences. "And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to

this science itself must be laid on experience and observation."[46]

Hume thus asserted that it is only through our senses that we can obtain knowledge about reality. Therefore, nothing can be known that is beyond the possibilities of our experience, not even God. Hume was a sceptic who accepted only sensory experiences as a source of knowledge, with the exception of insights from geometry and mathematics. He rejected the existence of 'miracles' proclaimed by the Church and others, as they violated the laws of nature. Like Voltaire, Hume rejected as absurd Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's thesis that we live in the best of all possible God-created worlds. He was not an atheist, but his ideas effectively made him an agnostic and a partisan of the separation of faith and science.

Hume rejected superstition based on his views regarding causation, the supposed connection between cause and effect. According to Hume, it is not because B comes after A that A is necessarily the cause of B. If, for example, you walk under a ladder and have an accident at a later date, you cannot say that the accident is the result of walking under a ladder. His causality theory thus undermines metaphysics, which says nothing about experienceable reality. Hume creates a clear distinction between impressions and ideas. In the case of an idea, one must ask oneself the question of from which impression it originated. If the answer is unclear, that idea must be distrusted and put to one side. Hume's views also influenced economists and politicians. People are naturally selfish, says Hume, but that does not prevent them from having sympathy for others. 'Thus self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice: but a sympathy with public interest is the source of the moral approbation.'[47] Adam Smith elaborated on this further, but it is Hume who makes the link between self-interest and coexistence. 'When men have found by experience, that 'tis impossible to subsist without society, and that 'tis impossible to maintain society, while they give free course to their appetites; so urgent an interest quickly restrains their actions, and imposes an obligation to observe those rules, which we call the *laws of justice*. This obligation of interest rests not here; but by the necessary course of the passions and sentiments, gives rise to

the moral obligation of duty; while we approve of such actions as tend to the peace of society, and disapprove of such as tend to its disturbance."[48] Hume expects the same from conduct from sovereign rulers in their relations with other states, where it is important to adhere to agreed treaties.

Hume also defended international trade as a means of increasing prosperity. Only free countries bring about economic progress; an assertion that would inspire Adam Smith and other supporters of free trade.

Quote

"The interest, on which justice is founded, is the greatest imaginable, and extends to all times and places."[49]

Literature

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), Oxford University Press, 2001

James Harris, *Hume. An Intellectual Biography*, Cambridge University Press, 2019

14

Charles de Montesquieu

De l'esprit des lois
The Spirit of the Laws
1748

Author

Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755) was a French philosopher and one of the foremost thinkers of the Enlightenment. He was a member of the French Academy and wrote the satirical novel *Lettres persanes* (Persian Letters, 1721) and the book *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline, 1734). In the latter, Montesquieu strongly criticised the monarchy, in which all power is in the hands of an absolute and untouchable ruler. Following on from John Locke, in his seminal work *De l'esprit des lois* (The Spirit of the Laws, 1748) he advocated the trias politica or the separation of powers. Also significant was his desire for tolerance and his vision of democracy as a virtue. His influence was enormous and to this day his ideas are part and parcel of any modern liberal constitutional state.

Contents

In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu advocates the trias politica, as previously set out by the English philosopher John Locke. This separation of powers would later form the basis of the constitu-

tions of France and the United States.

"When legislative power is united with executive powers in a single person or in a single body of the magistracy, there is no liberty, because one can fear that the same monarch or senate that makes tyrannical laws will execute them tyrannically. Nor is there liberty if the power of judging is not separate from legislative power and from executive power. If it were joined to legislative power, the power over the life and liberty of the citizens would be arbitrary, for the judge would be the legislator. If it were joined to executive power, the judge could have the force of an oppressor. All would be lost if the same man or the same body of principal men, either of nobles, or of the people, exercised these three powers: that of making the laws, that of executing public resolutions, and that of judging the crimes or the disputes of individuals,' wrote Montesquieu.[50]

According to Montesquieu, the trias politica was the best system to protect against arbtitrariness. In his argument he refers to the systems of ancient times, under which the people were allowed to make executive decisions, the three powers were combined and citizens had less freedom. In the same way, later despotic rulers tried to unite all state functions under one person. Montesquieu felt that the judiciary power would be better if it were not executed by a single permanent body, but rather by people who, as in ancient Athens, are selected from the population. This to prevent the concentration and abuse of power. The judiciary should not represent a particular position or profession. "The judiciary power ought not to be given to a standing senate," wrote Montesquieu.[51] He discussed many mother matters in his book, however. For example, he made a plea for punishment to be in proportion with the crime committed. "It is essential for penalties to be harmonious among themselves, because it is essential that the greater crime be avoided rather than the lesser one, the one that attacks society rather than the one that runs less counter to it," he asserted.[52]

It was an assertion that made a great impression on the right-wing scholar Cesare Beccaria and his book Dei delitti e delle pene

(On Crimes and Punishments, 1764). Montesquieu also rejected the punishment – usually to burn at the stake – of witchcraft, heresy and homosexuality. "Accusation of these two crimes [magic and heresy] can offend liberty in the extreme and be the source of infinite tyrannies if the legislator does not know how to limit it," wrote Montesquieu.[53] This was a very liberal idea: how can one be punished for what one thinks or believes in one's head? The Church and the Inquisition were horrified by his ideas, which led to his book being put on the List of Forbidden Books in 1751.

Quote

"In a state, that is, in a society where there are laws, liberty can consist only in having the power to do what one should want to do and in no way being constrained to do what one should not want to do. (...) Liberty is the right to do everything the laws permit; and if one citizen could do what they forbid, he would no longer have liberty because the others would likewise have this same power."[54]

Literature

Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (1748), Cambridge University Press, 2011
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters* (1721), Penguin, 1973

15

Denis Diderot

Encyclopédie
Encyclopedia
1751-1772

Author

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) was a French philosopher and writer who, together with Jean le Rond d'Alembert, co-edited the voluminous *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) in which they attempted to collect all human knowledge. Diderot wrote thousands of entries for this monumental work before it was banned in 1759 by Pope Clement XIII at the instigation of the Jesuits. However, even after the departure of d'Alembert from the project, Diderot continued to work on the encyclopedia in secret, supported by Madame de Pompadour (the chief mistress of the king of France) and the royal censor Lamoignon de Malesherbes. For Diderot, freedom of expression and religious tolerance were crucial conditions for a decent society. His goal was to bring together all existing knowledge and pass it on to future generations. Together with his friend Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach, he received the great Enlightenment philosophers of the day in the Parisian salons to dine together and discuss new insights and ideas. Diderot also wrote *Sur les femmes* (Essay on Women, 1772) in which he argues for equality between women and against slavery. He also wrote dozens of essays and books, which made him one of the most influential representatives of the Enlightenment.

Contents

The Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts) was akin to a dictionary, with entries sharing the knowledge of the day on the subjects of culture, science, art and professional life. Between 1751 and 1772, 17 volumes were published containing nearly 72,000 articles and 11 volumes comprising 2,900 illustrations. 25,000 copies were sold over a period of 30 years.

Reason was a central focus in the colossal work, such that the authors often contradicted the dogmatic beliefs of religions. Numerous controversial ideas from Montesquieu, Hobbes and Bayle, among others, received considerable attention. In this way almost all the books that were forbidden by the Church became visible and readable again in a certain sense. Diderot was arrested but ultimately released after he promised not to write another word against the Church. In the meantime, the *Encyclopédie* had already done its job and influenced a lot of readers. In the book's many entries people could read why and how certain things happened, in explanations that did not draw upon religious myths. Diderot made it clear that God was not the source of morality; rather, it was people who defined their own morals. The *Encyclopédie* has thus played a major role in breaking through religious dogmatism and establishing sceptical rationalism. With this basis, readers could now form their own opinion about cause and effect.

In addition to purely factual descriptions, the texts also contain virulent attacks on political absolutism and religious dogmatism. This criticism can be found in texts with innocent titles, veiled by irony, false praise, and above all a clever system of references. Under the entry 'Agnus Scyticus', a kind of carrot, is a text mocking supposed wonders and miracles, with references to other critical texts about on this topic. The philosopher is described as someone who has an obsessive and precise mind and is guided by true principles. The philosopher is an honourable man who

acts according to reason.[55]

The authors speak about the importance of toleration. "When certain truths may not be stated openly, this can only be due to poor legislation, which mistakenly links the political and the religious system. Wherever civil authority supports religion or uses religion as a prop, the progress of reason will be slow and there will be persecution, which is useless and ineffective, because men's minds can never be successfully put in fetters."[56]

In various entries the *Encyclopédie* also expounds on the importance of freedom and individual knowledge. For example, the entry 'Autorité polititique' states that no man has the natural right to oppress others; anyone who has seized authority has done so by force or violence. Needless to say, this explanation disturbed religious and secular rulers alike.

The gigantic project of the *Encyclopédie* would "shake society to its core", wrote historian Philipp Blom, who describes the monumental work as "a turning point in the intellectual history of Europe."[57]

Quote

"Liberty is a gift from heaven, and each individual of the same species has the right to enjoy it as soon as he enjoys the use of reason. If nature has established any authority, it is paternal control; but paternal control has its limits, and in the state of nature it would terminate when the children could take care of themselves."[58]

Literature

Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, Éditions de l'Eclat, 2013
Andrew S. Curran, *Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely*, Other Press, 2019

16

Claude Adrien Helvétius

De l'Esprit
Essays on the Mind
1758

Author

Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771) was a Swiss-French philosopher and a collaborator on Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. He married Anne-Catharine de Ligniville who had a salon in Paris where the most important Enlightenment philosophers of his time met. In 1758 Helvétius wrote the remarkable book *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind), in which he spoke out against the ignorance, sloth and cruelty of the clergy. His book promptly ended up on the Catholic Church's List of Forbidden Books and was publicly burned by an executioner.
In his writings he strived for tolerance, justice, and the greatest possible happiness for as many people as possible. In other texts he was one of the first to advocate the principle of the eight-hour working day, which would go on to influence many later thinkers.

Contents

In *Essays on the Mind*, Helvétius states that people are driven by their own self-interest. This attitude could be reversed by one's upbringing for the benefit of the common good, a view that was also shared by Adam Smith.

Helvétius refers to England's uncensored press in his defence of freedom of thought and freedom of speech. According to Helvétius, freedom can contribute to the common interest. At the heart of his work is his plea for tolerance of all faiths, even if this runs counter to the dogmatic thinking of the Catholic Church and other religions. Furthermore, he opposed all forms of metaphysics, which he considered to be a deliberate deception invented by priests. It was sometimes said: The first priest was the first rogue who met the first fool.' According to Helvétius, we need scientific knowledge if we are to unmask and destroy such deception, as general happiness is served more by reason than by dogmas and prejudices. As such, he vehemently attacked the Inquisition for prosecuting and burning at the stake enlightened minds in many countries. 'The gospel has no where enjoined us to use tortures and prisons for making converts. True religion never built scaffolds; yet its ministers have sometimes been seen, in order to avenge their pride, offended by opinions different from theirs, to arm in their behalf the stupid credulity of people and princes.'[59]

Helvétius also considered it unacceptable that mankind should only be successful in life thanks to the privileges and protection of high-ranking people. Like John Locke, he was convinced that people have equal natural rights and abilities. According to Helvétius, differences between people were not congenital, but a consequence of their upbringing and education (or a lack thereof), whether or not provided by the government. Most ordinary people had received little or no education, which meant that they were unaware of the scientific facts and were susceptible to superstition. He therefore insisted on the need for public education to develop people's intellectual faculties. He further insisted that laws must be just; punishments should not serve as a form of vengeance, as in the case of horrific executions. Rather, they should be for the benefit of society.

This assertion inspired Cesare Beccaria, who strove for the humanisation of criminal law. With his utilitarian ideas about the

greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, Helvétius also influenced the British philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

Helvétius also speaks out in favour of political freedom and against any form of despotism, by which he is indirectly referring to the absolutism in his own country at the time and urging for a change in the state structure. In the meantime he expresses the hope that his ideas will bring about a number of changes, something that would indeed happen, abeit it after his death, with the French Revolution.

Quote

"If we cast our eyes to the north, the south, the east end the west, we every where see the sacred knife of religion held up to the breasts of women, children and old men; the earth smoking with the blood of victims sacrificed to the false Gods, or to the Supreme Being; every place offers nothing to the fight but the vast, the horrible carnage, caused by a want of toleration."[60]

Literature

Claude Adrien Helvétius, *De l'Esprit: or Essays On the Mind, and its Several Faculties* (1758), Andesite, 2017

Irving Horowltz Louis, *Claude Helvetius: Philosopher of Democracy and Enlightenment*, Paine-Whitman, 1954

17

Cesare Beccaria

Dei delitti e delle pene
On Crimes and Punishments
1764

Author

Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) was an Italian philosopher and jurist who, together with Pietro and Alessandro Verri, was influenced by the enlightened ideas of his time. In the magazine *Il Caffé* they published various articles on liberal, progressive and enlightened reform ideas, placing them in opposition with the practices of the Ancien Régime. In 1764 Beccaria published his influential treatise *Dei delitti e delle pene* (On Crimes and Punishments) in which he described a coherent criminal justice system and proposed numerous humane reforms. The work struck like a bomb and had a great deal of influence on the enlightened rulers, politicians and legal scholars of his time, and later on various fundamental laws and declarations of human rights. His ideas remain highly topical as they touch on the basic pillars of our democratic and open society.

Contents

On Crimes and Punishments lays out a set of principles by which to put an end to arbitrariness, the abuse of power and the religious dogmas characteristic of criminal law under the Ancien Regime. These principles were aimed at the abolition of torture and the

horrific forms of punishment common at the time. These punishments would often follow accusations – of heresy, witchcraft, blasphemy, homosexuality – that were the result of anonymous tip-offs. Even people who committed suicide were punished *post mortem*. Beccaria opposed the death penalty.[61] He argued the importance of clear laws, independent judges and dignified prisons. Penalties should not serve to exact vengeance, he argued, but to benefit society. Some of his ideas may not have been new, but Beccaria was the first to describe a coherent, logical and comprehensive criminal justice system. Central to his text were the principles of *legality nulla poena sine lege* (no punishment without a law), equality (everyone is equal before the law), proportionality (the punishment must be proportionate to the offence committed), *ultimum remedium* subsidiarity (people must fear the law, but no further inconvenience provided they act in accordance with it) abolitionism (confessions obtained through torture are invalid, and the death penalty is reprehensible), personality (only the perpetrator may be punished, not their relatives or third parties), rationality (no punishment of heresy, witchcraft, blasphemy, suicide or homosexuality), laicisation (trial by ordeal, the Inquisition and punishment for accusations of magic are all reprehensible), and, lastsly, the principle of publicity (processes must be kept public and procedures must not take place in secret).

To avoid any punishment in the form of an act of violence perpetrated by one or more people upon any private citizen, it is essential that the punishment should be public, speedy, necessary, as minimal as possible in the given circumstances, proportionate to the crime, and determined by the law. This was Beccaria's explanation of his humane criminal justice system in a nutshell. At the end of his book, Beccaria refers to the importance of good upbringing as the best way to fight crime. "Finally, the most certain but more difficult means of preventing crime is to improve education."[62] Beccaria's starting point, or rather his driving force, as he mentions in his introduction, is the realisation of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number"[63] or, to put it another way, a justice system that does not create additional suffering, but seeks

to reduce crime in society.

For Beccaria, a better upbringing was the key to promoting more ethical – or less violent – behaviour. This vision was later also defended by other Enlightenment thinkers. Despite the fact that Beccaria is virtually unknown in our part of the world, he had an enormous influence on the criminal justice systems of many countries. His importance and impact with regard to liberal and humane thinking was enormous.

Quote

"The experience of all centuries has shown that the ultimate penalty has never stopped man's determination to injure society."[64]

Literature

Cesare Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments*, Transaction Publishers, 2009

Marcello Maestro, *Cesare Beccaria and the Origins of Penal Reform*, Temple University Press, 1973

John Hostettler, *Cesare Beccaria. The Genius of 'On Crimes and Punishments'*, Waterside Press, 2010

18

Voltaire

Dictionnaire philosophique
Philosophical Dictionary
1764-1769

Author

François-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), or Voltaire as he is widely known, was a French philosopher, freethinker and writer who promoted enlightened ideas under the influence of John Locke and Isaac Newton. He was persecuted for this by the French religious authorities and fled to Geneva and later on to the French town of Ferney, where he could express his views undisturbed. In 1759 he published *Candide* in response to Leibniz, who claimed that we lived in the best of all possible worlds. Voltaire was in contact with many princes, philosophers and intellectuals who read his writings. He vehemently opposed the horrific torture and murder of the Huguenot Jean Calas, who was convicted of murder, though there was no evidence of it, and of Chevalier de La Barre, who was executed for his religious beliefs. In response, he wrote his *Traité sur la tolérance* (Treatise on Tolerance, 1763), in which he opposed the barbaric legal system and the fanaticism of religions. The book soon ended up on the Catholic Church's List of Forbidden Books. In 1764 he started on his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, a work that was burned by an executioner in the same year and also ended up on the List. Voltaire was one of the most important pioneers of the Enlightenment.

Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary* continued the tradition of Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* and Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. However, rational and concise as Voltaire was, he deliberately opted for a shorter publication that could reach more people.

The dictionary contains 118 alphabetised entries in which Voltaire, in a playful and often satirical way, stimulates the reader's curiosity. He encourages readers to think independently instead of slavishly following the Bible's claims of truth. For him, morality had nothing to do with dogmas. He also attacks some of the pillars of the Christian faith, such as the idea of the trinity which, according to Voltaire, is a contradiction in terms: how can there be only one God, if there are three persons, each of whom is truly God?[65] And he didn't hold back on the Inquisition: "The Inquisition is well known to be an admirable and truly Christian invention for increasing the power of the pope and monks, and rendering the population of a whole kingdom hypocrites."[66]

Although he was not an atheist himself, he had more faith in atheists than in religious fanatics, saying that "fanaticism is certainly a thousand times more deadly; for atheism inspires no bloody passion, whereas fanaticism does: atheism is not opposed to crime, but fanaticism causes crimes to be committed."[67]

Voltaire also had enlightened ideas in the field of criminal law, including some influenced by Beccaria. For example, he argued that the punishment of criminals must serve a purpose and that it is better to condemn someone to forced labour than to hang them. Furthermore, he asserted that laws should be clear and precise, and not open to interpretation, especially not by priests. "No priest should ever deprive a citizen of the least prerogative on the pretext that this citizen is a sinner, because the priest should pray for sinners, and not judge them."[68]

His famous statement "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it," does not appear in this work. In fact, it is highly uncertain that this quote in defence of

free speech was even uttered by Voltaire, even though it is attributed to him. It is probable that the writer Evelyn Beatrice Hall, who wrote a biography about Voltaire, put this infamous statement in his mouth. In any case, Voltaire's aversion to censorship is a recurring theme in his work.

With his many critical and sarcastic texts, Voltaire undermined the existing social order, which was under the control of the nobility and the Church. In this way he inspired many other enlightenment thinkers.

Quote

"PHILOSOPHER, lover of wisdom, that is to say, of truth. (...) The philosopher is not enthusiastic; he does not set himself up as a prophet; he does not say that he is inspired by the gods."[69]

Literature

Voltaire, *Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary* (1764-1769), Carlton House, 2006

Voltaire, *The Philosophical Dictionary* (1764-1769), Andesite Press, 2015

Roger Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty*, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2005

19

Adam Smith

The Wealth of Nations
1776

Author

Adam Smith (1723-1790) was a Scottish philosopher and economist who advocated free trade. He outlined his ethical views in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in which he shows that people's self-interest is not based on selfishness but on caring for others: when based on good intentions, self-interest promotes respect for others. According to Adam Smith, the basis for moral human behaviour is sympathy or compassion, i.e. the human inclination to empathise with the feelings of others. "No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable," he wrote.[70] He was in favour of freedom of religion and against the funding of religions. Smith was one of the most important representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment, the father of economics, and made a major contribution to liberal thought.

Contents

In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith explains how useful the free market is for the general prosperity of a society. Job specialisation and division of labour play a very important role in this. If each person provides for their own necessities, they will

find it difficult to create wealth. But if everyone focuses on what they do best, productivity will quickly increase. Smith himself gave the example of a pin maker. He may be able to make one pin a day by himself, but if you work with ten people, each practicing their own specialty, you can make up to 48,000 pins in one day. In a free market, an 'invisible hand' determines through the laws of supply and demand the amount of available goods and the price, and the market does this better than a government. This gives the impression that Smith saw the free market as panacean and stood up for an absolute free market, but that is not the case. According to Smith, the government also has a role to play: it must be concerned with ensuring fair competition, defending property rights, defence and safeguarding the security of citizens.

But Smith goes even further. Public authorities themselves should not be economic actors, he argues, except for in the creation and maintenance of those public institutions and works which, although they contribute greatly to society, are of such a nature that their benefits would never outweigh the costs they would incur for a single person or small group of persons. Such institutions cannot be expected to be created and maintained by one person or a small group of persons. The government therefore has the task of safeguarding common goods such as education, canals, ports, bridges and roads, all of which are impossible to develop and finance by private individuals. Smith also opposed protectionism, monopolies and concentrations of power, such as the East Indian Companies of the time, which disrupted the free market. In addition, he advocated for progressive taxation. "It is not very unreasonable that the rich should contribute to the public expense, not only in proportion to their revenue, but something more than in that proportion,' wrote Smith.[71]

Nevertheless, at its essence his thinking remains focused around the value of self-interest and free trade. For example, he stated that the maximisation of each individual's own benefit (self-interest) would benefit the maximisation of the benefit to the whole community. Self-interest, according to him, was not an expression of selfishness but a logical element in the progress of

the whole. "By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it," Smith asserted.[72] His ideas have been successfully applied worldwide and have led to an enormous increase in prosperity.

Quote

"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."[73]

Literature

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), J.M. Dent, 1954

20

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Nathan der Weise
Nathan the Wise
1779

Author

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) was one of the most prolific German writers and poets. He first studied theology but soon began writing enlightened texts. He advocated tolerance and opposed any form of fanaticism. Lessing was one of the most important representatives of the Enlightenment and sought to avoid the literal interpretation of the Bible and the Koran. Lessing was a deist, a freethinker and an active freemason. He was also the author of numerous plays, prose works and a series of treatises such as *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (The Education of Humankind, 1790), in which he stated that human reason would develop even without the help of a divine revelation. His best-known play, however, is *Nathan the Wise* (1779). Lessing, who was not Jewish himself, became friends with the German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, who would eventually serve as a model for *Nathan the Wise*. The play would be performed countless times. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, however, it was banned for being too liberal. After the Second World War it was performed again and again, and this was also the case after the attacks of 9/11 in the United States, as an indictment of religious intolerance.

Contents

The play *Nathan the Wise* centres around the Jewish Nathan, who lost his whole family during a pogrom. In the twelfth century, at the time of the third crusade, he ended up in Jerusalem amid a wasps' nest of people who are at each other's throats due to their differences in faith. Nathan adopts the parentless girl Racha, who herself was saved by a Templar and happens to be the niece of Sultan Saladin. In this way, a bond is created between people with different religious beliefs. Sultan Saladin asks Nathan which religion is the one true faith: Islam, Judaism or Christianity. Because of the three religions, only one can be the right one. According to Saladin, the fact that each of these religions is different is shown by the diversity of names of their gods, the clothes they wear, the food and the drinks they consume. Lessing has his characters say that all people are actually related and that they would do better to love one another. To make his point clear, he tells Saladin the parable of a dying king who had a particularly valuable ring that made him loved by the gods and the people. The king, however, had three sons whom he loved equally. And so he had an experienced goldsmith make two additional, identical copies of his ring and gave one to each son sons.

Each of the sons claimed to own the only true ring and they started arguing about it. "Scarce is the father dead, each [of the sons] with his ring; Appears, and claims to be the lord o' th' house. Comes question, strife, complaint—all to no end; For the true ring could no more be distinguished; Than now can—the true faith. (...) Are not all built alike on history, Traditional, or written. History Must be received on trust—is it not so? In whom now are we likeliest to put trust? In our own people surely, in those men, Whose blood we are, in them, who from our childhood?"[74] Until a judge ruled that no one could know who had the real ring.

The father ordered them to consider each ring as the real ring, saying that they could prove the ring's authenticity through love, tolerance and compassion. "'Tis possible the father chose no longer, To tolerate the one ring's tyranny; And certainly, as he

much loved you all, And loved you all alike, it could not please him By favouring one to be of two the oppressor. Let each feel honoured by this free affection. Unwarped of prejudice; let each endeavour To vie with both his brothers in displaying The virtue of his ring; assist its might

With gentleness, benevolence, forbearance, With inward resignation to the godhead."[75] The three rings symbolise the three monotheistic religions. When the sultan hears this story, he understands its deeper meaning. Jews, Christians and Muslims have to prove for themselves that their religion is true through proper, tolerant and peaceful behaviour.

With this play, Lessing wrote one of the most important texts on tolerance, which inspired many later philosophers and politicians and remains topical to this day.

Quote

"And if the virtues of the ring continue; To show themselves among your children's children, After a thousand years, appear; Before this judgment-seat—a greater one; Than I shall sit upon it, and decide."[76]

Literature

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise* (1779), Forgotten Books, 2012

Edward Batley, *Catalyst of Enlightenment: Gotthold Ephraim, Lessing: productive criticism of eighteenth-century Germany*, Bern Lang, 1990

21

Immanuel Kant

Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten
Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
1785

Author

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher and one of the foremost representatives of the Enlightenment. He was influenced by David Hume and wrote several comprehensive works such as *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Critique of Judgement* (1790). In these works he asserts time and again that the freedom of humankind depends on the moral autonomy or self-government of the individual. In his work *What is Enlightenment?* (1784) he stated that Enlightenment is the individual's release from 'self-incurred tutelage'. He advocates freedom of thought and a scientific approach. At a later age, as a kind of conclusion to his oeuvre, he wrote *Perpetual Peace* (1795), in which he underlined the importance of international law and world citizenship in achieving eternal peace.

Contents

In *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, Kant's establishes his well-known categorical imperative as being central to his concept of ethical correctness: "Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a

universal law."[77] Man is thus the designer of his own morality. The second part of the categorical imperative is as follows: "So act that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means."[78]

In the first part, Kant makes it clear that an action is only ethically acceptable if it can be universalised, i.e if it would be desirable for everyone under the same circumstances. In this way he solves the dilemma of what is 'morally correct'. Because no one would 'want' anything to be done by others that they themselves would not do. There is thus an intrinsic reciprocity and generalisation in such ethics. It is often noted that the first part of the categorical imperative ("Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law") is identical to the Golden Rule found in various philosophical practices and religions. There are several variations on the theme. 'Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself' (Confucius). 'Hurt not others with that which pains yourself' (Buddha). 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you' (Matthew 7:12). 'None of you [truly] believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself' (Mohammed).

However, Kant stressed that his categorical imperative was different. Good conduct, according to the philosophy of the Golden Rule, is determined by an external law that dictates what to do. Anyone who complies or does not comply with this will be rewarded or punished, respectively. The Golden Rule is essentially based on a form of calculation. Kant's categorical imperative of Kant is in this sense morally superior. After all, he emphasises the individual's moral consciousness and asserts that it is one's will that determines the moral quality of his actions. Man must therefore act autonomously and be guided not by laws imposed from outside himself, but by laws imposed on him by his own sense of reason.

A good deed, in accordance with the categorical imperative, is not undertaken because one would later be rewarded or punished, but because of one's own humanity.

One must do good because one is good, without any form of calculation involved. "Duty, does not rest at all on feelings, impulses, and inclinations but merely on the relation of rational beings to one another, in which the will of a rational being must always be regarded as at the same time lawgiving, since otherwise it could not be thought as an end in itself," Kant states.[79]

It follows that the personal obligation to care for others is unconditional and does not expire because someone cannot claim a right to be helped by others. This reasoning was revolutionary and continues to have a major impact on liberal thought to this day.

Quote

"Autonomy is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature'. (...) Morality is thus the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, that is, to a possible giving of universal law through its maxims. An action that can coexist with the autonomy of the will is permitted; one that does not accord with it is forbidden."[80]

Literature

Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Cambridge University Press, 2006

Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Moral and What is Enlightenment?*, MacMillan, 1987

Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, FQ Classics, 2007

22

Jeremy Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation
1789

Author

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was an English philosopher and jurist. He is generally regarded as the founder of utilitarianism and had much influence on the development of liberal thinking. Bentham made numerous proposals for social and criminal reforms to promote happiness in society and reduce suffering. He was influenced by the ideas of Cesare Beccaria and Helvétius who proposed a more humane criminal law with an emphasis on the interests of society rather than on vengeance. He designed a system based on his utilitarian ideas to measure pleasure quantitatively on using a number of parameters. He also designed the panopticon: the ideal prison, where one supervisor suffices to guard all the cells from a central position.

Contents

In *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), Bentham developed the idea that nature has placed humankind under the power of two sovereign masters: pain and pleasure: "They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to ab-

jure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while."[81]

In other words, the happiness of the human being is contingent upon knowing as much well-being and as little pain as possible. Acts that increase well-being are therefore good and acts that increase pain are bad. In this way Bentham returned to the ideas of Epicurus and Lucretius, and of David Hume, who connected the virtues with the element of utility. However, Bentham radically extended this reasoning by stating that morality is not about a person's intention but about the result of their action. Accordingly, he was bothered by the enormous poverty in the England of his day. As such, he felt all effective means should be used in achieving as much well-being and as little suffering as possible. In order to support the most underprivileged people, he wanted to help pensioners and the sick by means of a kind of health insurance funded by an inheritance tax. He considered such a tax to be the least harmful to freedom and the most conducive to equality.

Bentham developed his utilitarian ideas in other areas, too. He resolutely opposed slavery, the practice of which of course did not align with his vision of the greatest pleasure for the greatest possible number of people. He also supported the separation of church and state, for the sake of freedom of expression and free trade and to protect against monopolies and protectionism. Visionary was his advocation of equal rights for women and even rights for animals.[82] With regard to the status of animals, he stated that the central question is not whether they can reason or talk, but whether they can suffer. And that one day there would come a time when mankind would take care of all living, breathing creatures.

In *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham develops his principles systematically. He emphasises non-intervention in particular, asserting that one knows best for oneself what gives one pleasure and what causes one suffering. He also developed a rational system for measuring pleasure quantitatively, something that John Stuart Mill would later criticise.

In any case, utilitarianism as developed by Bentham, and

later refined by John Stuart Mill, has had an enormous impact on philosophical and political thinking in the West over the past 150 years. Consider the constant search for a balance between the freedom of the individual and laws that restrict freedom for the benefit of the happiness of the majority of the population, such as the taxation of tobacco and alcohol.

Quote

"The business of government is to promote the happiness of the society, by punishing and rewarding. That part of its business which consists in punishing, is more particularly the subject of penal law. In proportion as an act tends to disturb that happiness, in proportion as the tendency of it is pernicious, will be the demand it creates for punishment. What happiness consists of we have already seen: enjoyment of pleasures, security from pains."[83]

Literature

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Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government* (1776), Cambridge University Press, 1988

23

Thomas Paine

The Rights of Man
1791-1792

Author

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was a British-American-French philosopher, political activist and publicist. Three of his books, *Common Sense* (1776), *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792) and *The Age of Reason* (1794) were bestsellers that played a major role in the independence of the United States, the acceptance of human rights and the rejection of religious dogmatism. Central to his thinking was the freedom of the individual, the equality of every human being, his aversion to slavery, and his resistance to institutionalised religion. In his last important work, *Agrarian Justice* (1797), he defended fair free trade, minimal taxation for people in need, social rights and a redistribution of income and property. Essentially he was calling for an inheritance tax that could provide a basic income for everyone. In this way, he was the first to link economic liberalism with social justice.

Contents

The Rights of Man is a passionate plea for representative democracy and human rights and freedoms, and against the despotism of the time. In the space of two months, 50,000 copies were sold and in the following year over 400,000.

Paine was particularly against the inheritance system that could lead 'imbeciles' to come to power – something he meant quite literally in the case of King George III (in the autumn of 1788 the king was declared mentally ill) – who had no notion of the public interest or the rights of the citizen. He called it absurd that William the Conqueror, who had invaded England in 1066 and installed himself on the throne, had then granted himself a historical and divine right which, through inheritance, would last until the end of time. "All hereditary government is in its nature tyranny. An heritable crown, or an heritable throne, or by what other fanciful name such things may be called, have no other significant explanation than that mankind are heritable property. To inherit a government, is to inherit the people, as if they were flocks and herds," argued Paine.[84] In his view, political leaders should therefore not claim special rights on the basis of their ancestry, but should be elected by the people at regular intervals.

And those leaders must respect human rights: "The end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; and these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance of oppression. The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it," wrote Paine, who resolutely favoured democracy as the best form of government.[85] Democracy can guarantee that people with knowledge and talent come to power. All individuals, rich and poor, are born with equal natural rights. They all have the right to vote on a regular basis in order to designate a government, even if to them it was a necessary evil: a society cannot do without it, but its power must be curtailed. However, according to Paine, if the world was to attain a higher level of development, this would have to be precipitated not only by political change, but social change, too.

In the second part of *The Rights of Man*, Paine makes a plea for public education, structural government support for the underprivileged, support for senior citizens and taxes for the rich. The British Government did collect a lot in taxes, but that money was

not spent on solving the problems of the least well-off in society. It was used instead to maintain the privileges of the powerful. Paine opposed this with an active social policy comprising visionary proposals that would later form the basis for the social welfare state. Crucial in this was his concern for society's poor. He suggested to give financially disadvantaged citizens an allowance that would enable them to send their children to school, devised a pension system that would make life easier for senior citizens, and proposed provisions for anyone struck by misfortune. In the final chapter, he expressed the hope that human rights would spread throughout Europe. In his time Paine was one of the most influential activists for a more humane and liberal society.

Quote

"Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights. Civil distinctions, therefore, can be founded only on public utility."[86]

Literature

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792), Wilder Publications, 2009
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), Dover Publications, 1997
Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (1794), Merchant Books, 2010

24

Olympe de Gouges

Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne
Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen
1791

Author

Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793) was a French writer and feminist who opposed the fact that the articles of the *Declaration of The Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789) only applied to men. This was at odds with the principles of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity. She had already written noteworthy texts in which she opposed the death penalty, slavery, the right to divorce and the inheritance rights of all children, including illegal children. When she spoke out against Maximilien de Robespierre and against the death penalty of King Louis XVI, she was accused of royalist sympathies, arrested and beheaded by guillotine on 3 November 1793 on the Place de la Révolution.

Contents

In her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* (1791), Olympe de Gouges stated that every woman was born free and endowed with the same rights as a man. She referred to the first article of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, which stated: "Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights." The second article, too, refers to all people, excluding no one. "The purpose of all political organisa-

tions must be the protection of the natural and imprescriptible rights of Woman and Man: these rights are liberty, property, security and above all the right to resist oppression."

In her preamble de Gouges wrote that the mothers, daughters and sisters, as representatives of the people, ask to be included in the national assembly. She spoke, in the sense of Locke, of the 'natural and inalienable rights of woman' and the imperative that these be respected at all times. Her first two articles went as follows: "Woman is born free and remains the equal of man in rights. Social distinctions can only be founded on a common utility. The purpose of all political organisations must be the protection of the natural and imprescriptible rights of Woman and Man: these rights are liberty, property, security and above all the right to resist oppression."[87] She emphasises this further in her article 4: "Liberty and justice exist to render unto others what is theirs; therefore the only limit to the exercise of the natural rights of woman is the perpetual tyranny that man opposes to it: these limits must be reformed by the laws of nature and reason."[88]

In article 10 she writes the following on the political rights of woman: "None must be disquieted for their opinions however fundamental: woman is entitled to mount the scaffold; she must be equally entitled to mount the rostra so long as her manifestos do not disturb the public order according to the law."[89] A remarkably modern idea can be found in her article 15, in which she elucidates the principle of no taxation without representation: "The collective of women, joined to that of men for the purposes of taxation, has the right to demand of any public agent an account of its administration."[90]

And in article 17 she talks about the highly liberal principle of the right to property for every human being, as expressed much earlier by John Locke, but now for both men and women: "Property belongs to both sexes, united or separated; for each it is an inviolable and sacred right; no one can be deprived of a true natural heritage unless a general necessity, legally verified, obviously requires it and on condition of a fair indemnity agreed in advance."[91]

In her afterword she concludes with an appeal to all women: "Woman, wake up; the tocsin of reason is resounding throughout the universe: acknowledge your rights. Nature's powerful empire is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition or untruth."[92] And she called on all women to join forces under the banner of philosophy, which she felt was only a question of will. Her texts were only rediscovered and read in the second half of the twentieth century, subsequently inspiring many women during the second wave of feminism.

Quote

"Oh women! Women, when will you cease to be blind? What advantages have you gained through the Revolution? A greater scorn, a more pronounced disdain. During the centuries of corruption you only reigned over the weakness of men."[93]

Literature

Olympe de Gouges, *The Declaration of the Rights of Women* (1791), Ilex Press, 2018

Sophie Mousset, *Women's Rights and the French Revolution: A Biographie of Olympe De Gouges*, Routledge, 2014

25

Mary Wollstonecraft

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman
1792

Author

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was an English Enlightenment philosopher who lived off her writing and translation work. Before this she was already an independent and societally-engaged woman who was well aware of the injustices of the Ancien Régime. When the French Revolution broke out, she went to Paris to offer enthusiastic support and wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) to defend it. Like Thomas Paine, she spoke out fiercely against Edmund Burke, who was opposed to the Enlightenment. She married the philosopher William Godwin, who indicated that he and Mary were equal partners, contrary to common opinion. In 1792 she wrote her famous work *A Vindication on the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft made a major contribution to liberal feminism and the right of women to self-determination.

Contents

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft asserted that women are rational beings who deserve the same rights as men. Her argument is based on reason and refers to the irrationality of the prejudiced men who subordinate women.

Women are not weak by nature, but are kept weak by all kinds

of social conventions. At first they are oppressed by the father, later by the husband. There are differences between men and women, such as the greater physical strength of men, but that is no reason to exclude them from all the civil and political rights that men claim for themselves. "Is not that government then very defective, and very unmindful of the happiness of one half of its members, that does not provide for honest, independent women, by encouraging them to fill respectable stations? But in order to render their private virtue a public benefit, they must have a civil existence in the state, married or single," she wrote.[94] Wollstonecraft insisted on the importance of the attainment of moral freedom by women through knowledge and education. She opposed the vision of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who believed that girls should only be prepared for a supportive role for the benefit of the man. In his eyes women were weak and passive.

According to Wollstonecraft, girls needed better education so that they could fully develop their talents and thus contribute to society. "Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge ... how can women be expected to co-operate unless she know why she ought to be virtuous?"[95] It was only by giving women the same rights as men that the ideals of the French Revolution – freedom, equality and fraternity – could be realised, she argued. She was critical of religion and believed that events took place according to natural processes and not according to a divine plan. She accordingly focused on reason in her ethical thinking, as opposed to faith, stating that the Enlightenment was not a privilege reserved for men, but a matter for all humankind, men and women, all of whom were endowed with reason and intellect. There is therefore no reason, she argued, to deny women the rights that men claim for themselves alone.

Originally overlooked, her book would eventually be picked up again in the second half of the nineteenth century by feminists such as John Stuart Mill, and later by the suffragettes, who fought for women's suffrage.

Quote

"[w]ould men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens."[96]

Literature

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Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, 2003

Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Penguin, 2012

26

Wilhelm von Humboldt

Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit eines Staates zu bestimmen
The Limits of State Action
1792

Author

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) was a German philosopher, statesman and founder of Berlin's Humboldt University. After completing his studies in classical languages, law and philosophy, he moved to Paris, where he experienced the French Revolution at first hand. Humboldt was friends with Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. By 1792 he had already written his *Limits of State Action*, in which he defines freedom as the highest 'human good' and expresses his aversion to excessive state interference. He went on to work for the Education Department of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior and reformed the entire education system. He co-founded the University of Berlin (which would later take his name), where academic freedom, critical thinking and scientific research were central. As a minister he developed the text for a constitution featuring numerous liberal principles, such as representation of the people, but this was met with reactionary resistance. Humboldt attached great importance to the self-development of the individual, i.e. the development of one's moral and critical faculties through upbringing and education.

Contents

In *The Limits of State Action*, Wilhelm von Humboldt discusses the titular subject with respect to the individual. Every state, he observes, has a tendency to seek the increase of its power and, to this end, to regulate the lives of each individual as much as possible through extensive bureaucracy.

The great danger is that the state will act despotically, thus restricting human freedom. The power of the state must therefore be curtailed so as not to impede the development of mankind. If this is not achieved, the state failing to take into account each individual's uniqueness, citizens are liable to conform as passive subjects. Humboldt argued that the best government is the one that makes itself redundant. This statement is somewhat exaggerated, given that the author acknowledges the necessity of the state, albeit as a sort of necessary evil. The only necessary duties he envisions for the state are to uphold legal order, to protect the civil liberties of man and to defend its territory against foreign enemies.

The ideal, says Humboldt, is a society in which everyone devotes himself to his *Bildung*. A free society in which the state intervenes as little as possible, so that citizens are given every opportunity to develop into independent individuals, both economically and intellectually. The state does not interfere in matters such as faith, education and morality. Nor does the state concern itself with the material well-being of its citizens. Education is of central importance to the individual's development into a unique, free personality. "The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the grand and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes."[97] Von Humboldt concludes: "Reason cannot desire for man any other condition than that in which each individual not only enjoys the most absolute freedom of developing himself by his own energies, in

his perfect individuality, but in which external nature even is left unfashioned by any human agency, but only receives the impress given to it by each individual of himself and his own free will, according to the measure of his wants and instincts, and restricted only by the limits of his powers and his rights."[98] Every citizen must follow their own destiny and avoid becoming a slave to the state. This way, citizens will also be much more productive and take more responsibility for themselves.

With his plea for individual freedom and the limiting of state power, Humboldt had a great influence on John Stuart Mill and his book *On Liberty* (1859). Friedrich Hayek also admired his work and spoke of him as "Germany's greatest philosopher of freedom".[99] Humboldt's views were of crucial importance to the development of liberalism in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century and left their mark on the liberal constitutions adopted in various countries. His work focuses on negative liberty, a concept that would later be developed by Isaiah Berlin in his work *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958).

Quote

"Every limitation of personal freedom is to be condemned, as wholly foreign to the sphere of the State's activity."[100]

Literature

Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, Cambridge University Press, 1969

Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit eines Staates zu bestimmen* (1792), Hardpress Publishing, 2013

27

Nicolas de Condorcet

Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain
Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind
1795

Author

Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794) was a French philosopher and scientist who was a member of France's Royal Academy of Sciences and later the Académie Française. He associated with the Encyclopedists and maintained particularly liberal ideas, being an exponent of the free market, a minimal form of social security and free public transport. In the period shortly preceding the French Revolution, he advocated increasingly for women's rights and a system of human rights, and against slavery and the death penalty. As a member of the Girondins, he was opposed to the execution of Louis XVI, which led him to be accused of treason. He was arrested and murdered, although some say he took his own life in prison. His *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795) was published posthumously.

Contents

Condorcet began writing his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* in 1793. His premature death prevented him from developing it into a complete work. However, this sketch gives us a good idea of his political-philosophical and ethical views.

In his *Sketch* he describes ten epochs of human history. Nine dealing with the past and the tenth with 'the future progress of the human mind'. In this section he asserts his faith in the progress and perfectibility of mankind. He felt that we should strive for the ideals of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, and fraternity, or, as he words it, towards "the destruction of inequality between different nations; the progress of equality in one and the same nation; and lastly, the real improvement of man."[101] He did not think that the course of this improvement would run smoothly, but rather that a gradual improvement would be achieved in spite of any temporary setbacks. In his opposition to slavery he was extraordinarily visionary. "Then will arrive the moment in which the sun will observe in its course free nations only, acknowledging no other master than their reason; in which tyrants and slaves, priests and their stupid or hypocritical instruments, will no longer exist but in history and upon the stage; in which our only concern will be to lament their past victims and dupes, and, by the recollection of their horrid enormities, to exercise a vigilant circumspection, that we may be able instantly to recognise and effectually to stifle by the force of reason, the seeds of superstition and tyranny, should they ever presume again to make their appearance upon the earth."[102]

In his vision of the ideal society, Condorcet also predicted the independence of the colonies, the decline of trade monopolies, the rise of free trade as a means for greater wealth creation, and the distribution of wealth through levies to support the poor and the elderly. He counted on equality of education to correct the natural inequality of capabilities. Condorcet put his faith in science and technology to make all this progress possible, hoping that reason would be able to keep pace with scientific and technological developments. He also advocated for the elimination of inequality between men and women, a remarkably progressive idea for his time.

This inequality "had at first no other origin but abuse of strength, and all the attempts which have since been made to support it are idle sophisms," wrote Condorcet.[103] In this same sense,

he pled for fraternity between all peoples, in the knowledge that wars are 'the most disastrous of all calamities'. In this area he was again remarkably optimistic: "As the people of different countries will at last be drawn into closer intimacy, by the principles of politics and morality, as each, for its own advantage, will invite foreigners to an equal participation of the benefits which it may have derived either from nature or its own industry, all the causes which produce, envenom, and perpetuate national animosities, will one by one disappear."[104]

It is an inspiring text that has influenced many humanists to stand up for greater freedom, equality and justice. Condorcet was an important source of inspiration for abolitionists and feminists.

Quote

"The people being more enlightened, and having resumed the right of disposing for themselves of their blood and their treasure, will learn by degrees to regard war as the most dreadful of all calamities, the most terrible of all crimes. The first wars that will be superseded, will be those into which the usurpers of sovereignty have hitherto drawn their subjects for the maintenance of rights pretendedly hereditary. Nations will know, that they cannot become conquerors without losing their freedom."[105]

Literature

Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), G. Langer, 2009
Condorcet, *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, 2012

28

David Ricardo

On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation
1817

Author

David Ricardo (1772-1823) was an English economist who systematically furthered the development of Adam Smith's ideas, but also criticised them in certain areas. He was friends with Thomas Malthus, James Mill (the father of John Stuart Mill) and Jeremy Bentham. He lived in the period when the Industrial Revolution started to take effect, an event which had a huge societal impact. The emerging middle class demanded more rights and freedoms in relation to the feudal rulers whose interests lay in fixed prices and import restrictions so as to safeguard their own situations. With his work, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), Ricardo would fiercely oppose their dominance. In the last years of his life he entered politics and became a member of the House of Commons, where he opposed all forms of protectionism and spoke in favour of free trade.

Contents

In *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* David Ricardo outlines the principle of comparative cost and how it benefits international trade. Crucial was his insight that nations stand to benefit the most by specialising in those products at which they

excel in producing. Ricardo gives the example of trade between England and Portugal. In contrast with Adam Smith, who only considered the absolute cost advantage, Ricardo examined the effects of the comparative or relative cost advantage. For example, the production of wine and port is relatively cheaper in Portugal, such that England would be ill-advised to compete. In England, on the other hand, the production of wool is relatively more advantageous, such that Portugal would be ill-advised to compete. As such, Portugal would be better off specialising in the production of wine and England in the production of wool.[106] The result being that the total production of wine and wool increases, as does the wealth of both nations through mutual trade. This is of course only possible in a system of free trade without import or export restrictions. And without any market-distorting subsidies aimed at the protection of one's own industry.

Under no circumstances should there be protectionism aimed at protecting one's own market from imports of cheap products from abroad. That is why Ricardo opposed the so-called Corn Laws in Britain, which imposed a tax on the import of grain from abroad.[107] This leads to poorer efficiency, more expensive farmland, overproduction and, ultimately, economic stagnation. These Corn Laws were mainly defended by noblemen who owned large agricultural areas and benefited from import duties. This led to fierce parliamentary debate between the Conservatives and the Whig Party (liberals). Action groups such as the Anti-Corn Law League, led by Richard Cobden, held public meetings against protectionism. Ricardo's ideas had a great influence on politics and the economy. England abolished the Corn Laws in 1846, which led to lower prices and higher wages. Ricardo advocated a night-watchman state, which would only be occupied with general administration, justice, police and defence. Taxes would be divided proportionately between all social classes with the exception of the working class, so that their real wages remained the same. He did, however, foresee that increasing technological progress could be at the expense of employment.

With his ideas, Ricardo laid the foundations of classical eco-

nomics. He argued for a meritocratic society in which everyone would be remunerated such as to reflect the benefits they conferred on themselves and the community through their endeavours. This vision was at odds with the conservative ideas of the major landowners of the time, who sought to keep their property at all costs and opposed the taxation of their land. Many of Ricardo's liberal ideas remain topical, such as the minimisation of government, curbing state debt, free wage formation and free trade as a motor for more efficient international trade.

Quote

"By far the greatest part of those goods which are the objects of desire, are procured by labour; and they may be multiplied, not in one country alone, but in many, almost without any assignable limit, if we are disposed to bestow the labour necessary to obtain them."[108]

Literature

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David Ricardo, *Works of David Ricardo*, The Perfect Library, 2013

29

Benjamin Constant

Principes de politique
Principles of Politics
1815

Author

Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) was a Swiss nobleman who became a French citizen. As a writer he experienced the Ancien Régime, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic period, as well as the Restoration period under Louis XVIII and Charles X. He was an outspoken liberal, influenced by Montesquieu's vision of the separation of powers, and was sceptical about Rousseau's *volonté générale* ('general will'), the excesses of which he had seen during the Reign of the Terror. He advocated for free elections and absolute protection of the fundamental human rights of individuals. He wanted state power to be limited in such a way that the state could do as little harm as possible. In the Hundred Days of Napoleon's last reign, he wrote *Principles of Politics* (1815), in which he gave his view on representative democracy and warned against an oppressive government. Constant is considered to be the grandfather of continental parliamentary democracy.

Contents

In *Principles of Politics*, Constant advocated for constitutional monarchy, the principle of ministerial responsibility and the importance of individual freedom. It was an distinctly liberal text

in which he defended a system very different to that by which Napoleon had ruled in the years prior.

His point of departure was popular sovereignty, but not in the way Rousseau saw it – the general will exercising authority over individual existence –, as Constant felt this approach could lead to despotism as during Robespierre's Reign of Terror. Popular sovereignty should instead only exist in a limited and relative way, he felt, so as not to threaten the freedoms of citizens. "The power of the people is not unlimited."[109] This power must be kept within the limits determined by the law and the rights of the individual. Nor should any monarch have unlimited power.

What was new was his vision of ministerial responsibility, which aims to separate the power of the monarch from that of the ministers. The monarch then has only a neutral function, while the ministers can be called to account by parliament, both politically and legally. Politically, the monarch can appoint and dismiss ministers. Legally, the courts can intervene. "Ministers can be charged and prosecuted in three ways: (1) through abuse or misuse of their legal power; (2) by unlawful acts harmful to the public interest; (3) by attacks against the freedom, security and property of individuals." This requires a strict separation and balance between the various powers.[110] As the overarching power, the monarch has every interest in maintaining this balance. This is the difference between an absolute monarchy and a constitutional monarchy.

In the other chapters of *Principles of Politics*, Constant stressed the importance of freedom of the press, the inviolability of the home, freedom of religion, individual freedom and legal guarantees for the individual. The press had to be able to serve as a kind of mouthpiece for public opinion, facilitating a critical assessment of government policy. Like the separation of powers, this would help to ensure that the government would not acquire too great a power over the citizen, and that citizens could actively participate through the press as a kind of fourth power in political debate. In line with the ideals of the Enlightenment, Constant defended religious freedom as an essential part of human freedom.

"On the question of belief there is only one principle: complete freedom. Any time people want to depart from this, they fall into more or less shocking absurdities, but always equally dangerous ones, because all of them stand together and one necessarily harks back to the others."[111]

With his ideas, Constant influenced many liberal thinkers and politicians who strove for a parliamentary democracy. He inspired Alexis de Tocqueville and, with his lecture on ancient and modern liberty, Isaiah Berlin, too.

Quote

"We have placed among individual rights the certainty that one will not be treated arbitrarily, as though one had exceeded the limits of these rights, that is to say, the guarantee that one will not be arrested, nor detained, nor tried, except according to law and following due process."[112]

Literature

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Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism*, Yale University Press, 1984

30

Alexis de Tocqueville

De la démocratie en Amérique
Democracy in America
1835-1840

Author

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) was a French political philosopher and historian who greatly admired democracy. He studied law and worked as an examining magistrate but became increasingly interested in politics. In 1831 he travelled to the United States with Gustave de Beaumont to study the prison system and the social system. After nine months of travelling they returned and published their report *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and its Application* (1833), which was well received. In 1835 de Tocqueville published the first part of his *Democracy in America*, the second part of which would follow in 1840. He became the French Minister of Foreign Affairs for several months but resisted the coup of Louis Napoleon in 1851. In 1856 his work *The Old Regime and the Revolution* was published, a study on the causes of the French Revolution.

Contents

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville shows strong support for the democratic system in the United States, observing its success in reconciling the principles of individual freedom and societal equality.

The book's opening sentence is unambiguous: "The fact that most struck the author during his stay in the United States was the fact of equality of conditions. He believed that this primary fact had exercised and still exercised a prodigious influence on the laws, habits, mores of the Americans and dominated, so to speak, civil and political society in the United States."[113] This value is established in the nation's Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Nevertheless, the Frenchman remains critical of American democracy and discusses both the weaknesses and the strengths of the system. "I admit that in America I saw more than America; I sought there an image of democracy itself, its tendencies, its character, its prejudices, its passions; I wanted to know democracy, if only to know at least what we must hope or fear from it."[114] In this way he points out the tension between freedom and equality. Too much freedom can affect equality and too much equality can destroy freedom and lead to a despotic system, something that would later be evidenced in the socialist and communist 'utopias'.

Tocqueville also held that democracy and socialism were difficult to reconcile. He understood the danger of the tyranny of the majority, a situation that could even lead to a majority being able to abolish democracy. He defended several means of preventing the power of the majority and the state becoming too great: the separation of powers with the aid of an independent judicial system, the system of temporarily elected civil servants, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. Another safeguarding measure was that the laws of the (US) member states should not conflict with the constitution that protects the individual rights and freedoms of citizens. Tocqueville concluded that America had a stable system that should not fear revolutions, even though in his book he makes a visionary reference to the potential for race-related conflict, an issue that would be hotly debated during the American Civil War.

He understood that slavery in the US was at odds with their high-minded principle that 'all men are created equal'. Slavery, according to Tocqueville, "dishonours work; into society, it introduces idleness, along with ignorance and pride, poverty and luxury. It enervates the forces of the mind and puts human activity to sleep."[115]

Tocqueville is generally regarded as 'the pioneering theorist of modern political liberalism,' as the French philosopher Claude Lefort called him.

Quote

"In America the common man has conceived a high idea of political rights, because he has political rights; he does not attack the rights of others, so that no one violates his. And while in Europe this same man has no regard even for the sovereign authority, the American submits without murmuring to the power of the least of his magistrates."[116]

Literature

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Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Ancient Régime and the Revolution* (1856), Penguin Classics, 2008

31

Gustave de Molinari

Soirées de la rue Saint-Lazare
Evenings on Saint Lazarus Street
1849

Author

Gustave de Molinari (1819-1912) was a Belgian economist and a radical advocate for a stateless free market. Like Frédéric Bastiat, he belonged to the Paris School, which was influenced by Jean-Baptiste Say and Jeremy Bentham. De Molinari strongly believed in the self-regulating nature of the free market and therefore rejected government intervention and protectionism. Nevertheless, he made an exception for compulsory education and a ban on child labour. He was also an outspoken pacifist, understanding that war hindered free trade, restricted people's freedom and led to the appropriation of other people's property. In 1849 he published his *Evenings on Saint Lazarus Street*, which gives us a good idea of his views. He also travelled frequently to Russia, where he was one of the most popular economists at the end of the nineteenth century. De Molinari enjoyed a great deal of renown in his time, but is now as good as forgotten.

Contents

Evenings on Saint Lazarus Street is the account of a fictitious discussion, spanning twelve evenings, between a socialist, a conservative and an economist, De Molinari himself. In this way, he was able

not only to share his vision of the economy and the role of the state, but at the same time make a clear distinction between liberal ideas and other ideologies.

Both the socialist and the conservative believe in state power. The first wants to levy and redistribute taxes, the second wants to keep its power by imposing import restrictions and import duties. The economist disagrees. He points out to the socialist (and also to the communists) that redistribution is a perverse consequence of the tyranny of the majority, which does not take into account the individual's right of ownership. Although in a democracy the individual can vote against issues, the majority can impose taxes, carry out expropriations and create state monopolies. The economist also reproves the conservative who undermines prosperity with his protective government measures and other forms of protectionism. "What was the immediate consequence of the import restrictions? There were shortages on the market. The greater these deficits became, the more the prices of domestic products rose. (...) We must get rid of all kinds of tariffs and all barriers to free trade," argues De Molinari.[117] If one country protects its market, others will follow suit, resulting in a decrease in productivity and overall prosperity.

On the eleventh evening, the economist goes one step further and advocates a stateless society. In this scenario, the government should not only refrain from investing in roads, buildings, education, culture and social services, but should also withdraw from the administration of justice and security. Why should people not decide for themselves who has the right to rule over them? And why not break the monopoly on the use of force by setting up a series of companies to protect the citizens who sign up with them? "Everyone would subscribe to the company that inspires them the most confidence and whose conditions seem to them the most favourable. (...) As this industry is free, we would see as many companies being formed as there are useful ones to form. If there were too few, if, therefore, the price of security was raised, it would be profitable to train new ones; if there were too many, the overabundant companies would soon dissolve. The price of secu-

rity would therefore always be reduced to the level of production costs," says De Molinari.[118] The same principle would apply for the care of the poor. Here the economist would rely on charity, seeing it as encouraging gratitude and as an incentive to roll up one's sleeves. Benefits provided by the government would readily be interpreted as a 'right' and take away the incentive for self-reliance.

The stateless society may have seemed unfeasible, but many of de Molinari's arguments have become commonplace. Recently the myth of the free lunch also seems to have disappeared.

Quote

"Without the spirit of innovation, men would not have stopped eating acorns or grazing on the grass. Without the spirit of innovation, you would be a rude savage, lying in the leaves, instead of being a worthy owner having a house in the city and house in the fields, comfortably fed, clothed, housed."[119]

Literature

Gustave de Molinari, *Les Soirées de la rue Saint-Lazare* (Evenings on Saint Lazarus Street) (1849), Institut Coppet, 2014

Gustave de Molinari, *Entretiens Sur Les Lois Economiques Et Défense de La Propriété* (1849), Kessinger Publishing, 2010

32

Frédéric Bastiat

La Loi
The Law
1850

Author

Frédéric Bastiat (1801-1850) was a French philosopher, economist, justice of the peace and, at the end of his life, a representative of the people who advocated for a liberal society. He regularly contributed to the *Journal des Economistes*, in which he often fiercely opposed the socialist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Bastiat also published some remarkable books and essays in his time. His book *Economic Sophisms* (1845) discusses the importance of free trade. In *Justice and Fraternity* (1848) he states that the titular concepts are often misunderstood. In *Things Seen and Things Not Seen* (1850) he deals with the problem of the hidden effects of economic activity. Just before his death he wrote the essay *The Law* (1850), in which he talks about the duty of government, taking a stance against protectionism and socialism. He was a friend of the liberal statesman Richard Cobden, who fought against the English Corn Laws.

Contents

In *The Law* Bastiat provides an answer to the question of what the law – and thus the 'government' – is, what its limits are and what purpose they should serve. Right from the introduction, he

stresses that the law has gone down the wrong path. Rather than serving as a control measure, the law has become a cause for concern itself, he claims. According to the principles of natural law, man has the right to personality, freedom and property. These existed before man made laws about them. The purpose of the law must therefore be the following: "If every person has the right to defend – even by force – his person, his liberty, and his property, then it follows that a group of men have the right to organize and support a common force to protect these rights constantly. Thus the principle of collective right – its reason for existing, its lawfulness – is based on individual right. And the common force that protects this collective right cannot logically have any other purpose or any other mission than that for which it acts as a substitute. Thus, since an individual cannot lawfully use force against the person, liberty, or property of another individual, then the common force – for the same reason – cannot lawfully be used to destroy the person, liberty, or property of individuals or groups."[120]

We can defend our individual rights against such an abuse of power, says Bastiat. The problem, however, is that the government has turned the plundering of individuals into a right. "Now, legal plunder can be committed in an infinite number of ways. Thus we have an infinite number of plans for organizing it: tariffs, protection, benefits, subsidies, encouragements, progressive taxation, public schools, guaranteed jobs, guaranteed profits, minimum wages, a right to relief, a right to the tools of labour, free credit, and so on, and so on. All these plans as a whole – with their common aim of legal plunder – constitute socialism," wrote Bastiat.[121] Indeed, this 'legal plunder' is precisely the sort of thing that the law should punish. Humankind will only have respect for the law if the law has respect for humankind. The law is therefore 'organised justice' with regard to persons, their freedom and their property. Bastiat goes on to say that solidarity achieved by law is merely coercion, enforced solidarity.

According to Bastiat, the culprits are protectionism, collectivism and communism, which he says are 'one and the same plant'.

Justice implies the individual freedom of man, Bastiat held, and the state is to be distrusted. The state is the great fiction by which everyone tries to live at the expense of everyone else or, more accurately, tries to benefit from the work of others. "Which countries contain the most peaceful, the most moral, and the happiest people?" Bastiat asks himself rhetorically, before concluding: "Those people are found in the countries where the law least interferes with private affairs; where government is least felt; where the individual has the greatest scope, and free opinion the greatest influence; where administrative powers are fewest and simplest; where taxes are lightest and most nearly equal, and popular discontent the least excited and the least justifiable; where individuals and groups most actively assume their responsibilities, and, consequently, where the morals of admittedly imperfect human beings are constantly improving."[122] Bastiat's main influence was upon supporters of the night-watchman state.

Quote

"And what is this liberty, whose very name makes the heart beat faster and shakes the world? Is it not the union of all liberties – liberty of conscience, of education, of association, of the press, of travel, of labour, of trade? In short, is not liberty the freedom of every person to make full use of his faculties, so long as he does not harm other persons while doing so? Is not liberty the destruction of all despotism – including, of course, legal despotism? Finally, is not liberty the restricting of the law only to its rational sphere of organizing the right of the individual to lawful self-defense; of punishing injustice?"[123]

Literature

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Frédéric Bastiat, *Sophismes économiques* (1854), Les Belles Lettres, 2005

33

John Stuart Mill

On Liberty
1859

Author

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was an English philosopher. He is considered one of the most important pioneers of liberalism. Through his father James Mill (1773-1836), a friend of Bentham and a proponent of his ideas, John Stuart also became a champion of utilitarianism. Unlike Bentham, he saw it rather as an art of living, where pleasure is not only about the satisfaction of basic needs, however important they may be, but also about desires for the finer things, such as art and culture. Mill married Harriet Taylor, who would have a great influence on him. He defended women's rights and in 1867 proposed the introduction of voting rights for women in the British Parliament. Mill has had an enormous influence on the struggle for greater self-determination.

Contents

On Liberty (1859) is one of the most important works on the meaning, scope and limitations of freedom as a concept. Mill asserts that everyone can believe, think and say what they want. No one should be able to impose influence on another's faith, thinking or opinion. "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign", wrote Mill.[124] This is the most concise

description of the right to self-determination, which, according to the author, every human being possesses. In the first chapter, entitled '*Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion*', Mill wrote: "If the arguments of the present chapter are of any validity, there ought to exist the fullest liberty of professing and discussing, as a matter of ethical conviction, any doctrine, however immoral it may be considered."[125] He thus made it clear that freedom of speech is a precondition for human freedom in general. This in turn implies that it must also be permissible to make pronouncements that are socially reprehensible. To allow an immoral statement to be made does not mean that one agrees with that view. Mill drives the point home with an extreme example. "When there are persons to be found, who form an exception to the apparent unanimity of the world on any subject, even if the world is in the right, it is always probable that dissentients have something worth hearing to say for them selves, and that truth would lose something by their silence." Mill argues. And he goes further: "All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility."[126]

This is the freedom that Mill has left to us: the freedom to differ in opinion. Does that mean that freedom of speech is absolute? Certainly not. Mill addresses this question as follows: "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[127] This is the famous harm principle. Mill himself gives the well-known example of the grain merchant who sees his warehouse threatened by an angry mob. To urge the crowd to attack the grain merchant or his possessions should indeed be punishable, Mill maintained. Instigation and threats are therefore not permissible under freedom of expression. However, there is a tendency to understand this example too literally and too broadly. Mill proposes that accusations against the grain merchant should certainly not be banned from appearing in the press, even if a possible consequence is that the population would take a stand against him. Expressing ideas and points of view that are foolish, coarse or hate-mongering do not necessarily give rise to the use of violence. The literal incitement to physically attack

or even kill a specific person over an opinion, on the other hand, is a different category of expression and should not be allowed.

With this book, Mill has exerted a great deal of influence on liberal thinking. *On Liberty* remains topical in the debate on the limits of freedom of expression, particularly in relation to so-called blasphemy. The cases of Salman Rushdie, the violence following the publication of the Danish Mohammed cartoons and the murders of Charlie Hebdo's editors, offer specific examples of the issue in question.

Quote

"If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind."[128]

Literature

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34

Ludwig von Mises

Liberalismus
Liberalism
1927

Author

Ludwig von Mises (1881-1973) was an Austrian-Jewish economist and philosopher, and the most influential proponent of the Austrian School, which advocated a classical approach to liberalism, with freedom and the free market playing a central role. In 1922 he published his book *Socialism*, in which he predicted that socialism, with its belief in central planning, was bound to fail economically. To escape the rise of Nazism in his country, von Mises emigrated to Geneva in 1934, where he was appointed a position at the university. In this period he wrote his magnum opus *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (1940). He emigrated to the United States where he was granted American citizenship. There he wrote his influential books *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of Total State and Total War* (1944) and *Bureaucracy* (1944), in which he opposed government intervention and advocated laissez-faire capitalism.

Contents

In *Liberalism* (1927) Ludwig von Mises makes a strong plea for liberalism as the way to achieve greater prosperity and a better quality of life for all. In the book he opposed Marxism, socialism and

totalitarianism, which in the 1920s seemed so appealing, leading liberal ideas to be sidelined. Von Mises was also opposed to social liberalism, which he considered to be an attempt to reconcile socialism and liberalism. According to him this was a *contradictio in adjecto* (i.e. the adjective contradicted the noun). In his preface to the first English edition of *Liberalism* – published in 1962 and entitled The Free and Prosperous Commonwealth – he remarked that in Europe only a few people correctly understood the term 'liberalism', and that in England and in the United States the term was completely divorced of its original meaning, as their belief in state intervention was rather a form of socialism.[129] "All modern political parties and all modern party ideologies originated as a reaction on the part of special group interests fighting for a privileged status against liberalism."[130]

In *Liberalism*, von Mises follows on from the ideas of pioneers of classical liberalism David Hume, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham and Wilhelm von Humboldt. He defends methodological individualism, negative liberty and a minimal state whose role is limited to defence, justice and security as 'public goods'. Everything else must remain in the hands of free individuals, he argued, who, in a free market, are in complete control of their possessions and property. Any attack on it, any intervention, any infringement on private property, any redistribution of resources by the government must be rejected. Private property offers the possibility for the individual to be free from the state.

Von Mises also makes the link between free trade and peace and warns of the danger that international institutions could impede the complete freedom of trade and migration. "A capitalist world organized on liberal principles knows no separate "economic" zones. In such a world, the whole of the earth's surface forms a single economic territory," von Mises explains.[131] He was also a fierce opponent of colonialism on the grounds that it was contrary to the freedom of the local population and constituted a violation of their property rights. "No chapter of history is steeped further in blood than the history of colonialism. Blood was shed uselessly and senselessly. Flourishing lands were laid

waste; whole peoples destroyed and exterminated. All this can in no way be extenuated or justified."[132]

Von Mises' views would inspire Friedrich von Hayek, Murray Rothbard, Wilhelm Röpke, Milton Friedman and other radically liberal and libertarian politicians and philosophers.

Quote

"There is simply no other choice than this: either to abstain from interference in the free play of the market, or to delegate the entire management of production and distribution to the government. Either capitalism or socialism: there exists no middle way."[133]

Literature

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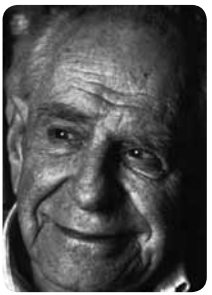
35

Karl Popper

The Open Society and Its Enemies
1945



Author

Karl Popper (1902-1994) was an Austrian philosopher of Jewish descent who was originally drawn to Marxism. In the 1920s, he broke with communism and all other forms of totalitarianism and began basing his ideas on Kantian principles of justice. In 1934 he published his *Logik fur Forschung* (first published in English in 1959 as The Logic of Scientific Discovery) in which he placed falsifiability at the heart of scientific theory. Due to the rise of Nazism, in 1937 he emigrated to New Zealand, where he was appointed as a lecturer in philosophy in Christchurch. Immediately after the Anschluss, Popper started writing. "In March 1938, on which I received the news that Hitler had invaded Austria (my native country), I finally decided to write the book."[134] In quick succession, he would go on to write *The Poverty of Historicism* (1944) and his most significant work *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945).

Contents

The Open Society and Its Enemies is considered a seminal work in the Western history of political philosophy. According to *The Times*, it is 'one of the great books of the century' and Bertrand Rus-

sell called it "a work of first-class importance, which ought to be widely read for its masterly criticism of the enemies of democracy, ancient and modern".

In the book's 800-plus pages, Popper launches a direct attack on the ideas of Plato, Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, who advocated a static society, inevitably leading to the suppression of any possible changes. They believed in centrally planned political systems and incontrovertible, knowable laws of history, on the basis of which they believed we could predict future societal developments. Popper wrote the book at a time when fewer people than ever believed in democracy as the best form of government. Winston Churchill famously relayed the opinion that democracy was "the worst form of government – of course all other forms of government excepted."[135] Popper made a global impression with his critique of historicism and his critically rationalist attitude. In the first volume, *The Spell of Plato*, Popper strongly opposes the ideas of the Greek philosopher and writer, student of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. Plato grew up in ancient Athens but was averse to its form of democratic government, which was at its height under Pericles.[136] Plato sympathised with the rival city-state of Sparta, which advocated tribalism, traditionalism and authenticity. For Popper, Sparta was a paragon of the closed society.

In the second volume Popper turns his criticism towards Hegel and Marx. He describes Hegel as a mindless, disgusting, ignorant charlatan for whom dialectics was law. He argues that Hegel considered blind obedience more important than personal conscience, preferring totalitarian nationalism to the brotherhood of men. According to Popper, the most dangerous form of historicism was Marxism. He dedicates more than 200 pages to hacking this ideology – which resulted in more oppression and human suffering than any other – into kindling. His arrows are slung mainly at political leaders who wanted to put Marxism into practice, not to help the oppressed, but to safeguard their own positions of power, with all the devastating consequences that this would bring.

Popper saw the danger of excessive state power and argued in favour of a legal framework within which the state could act. Yet he did not believe in the infallibility of the free market or in unlimited freedom. "We must construct social institutions, enforced by the power of the state, for the protection of the economically weak from the economically strong. (...) Unmlimited freedom means that the strong man is free to bully one who is weak and to rob him of his freedom," wrote Popper.[137]

Today, Popper's defence of the open society is maintained and applied by almost all the liberal parties in the world.

Quote

"Less well known is the paradox of tolerance: Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them."[138]

Literature

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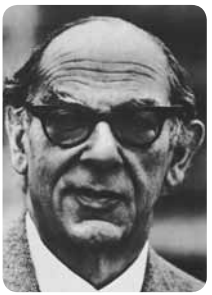
36

Isaiah Berlin

Two Concepts of Liberty
1958



Author

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) was a British political scientist and philosopher. He was born in Riga, where as a child he experienced the Russian Revolution of 1917, after which he fled to England with his parents. There he would live through the Second World War. His political-philosophical thinking was influenced by his youth in Russia, his Jewish family ties and his academic training in Britain. When accepting his professorship in social and political theory at Oxford University in 1958, he spoke of the concept of negative and positive liberty. He defended the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment in his works such as *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (1952), *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958) and *Four Essays on Liberty* (1969). Central to his work is his rejection of monism, the notion that there is only one correct answer to every question.

Contents

In *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Isaiah Berlin speaks mainly about the importance of negative liberty and the danger of positive liberty. Negative liberty means being free from coercion and limitations imposed by others. "I am normally said to be free to the degree to

which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. (...) Coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act. You lack political liberty or freedom only if you are prevented from attaining a goal by human beings," writes Berlin.[139] Positive liberty relates to people's need for autonomy and self-determination. "I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes."[140] Many other thinkers argue that this is only possible through a series of provisions and laws imposed by the state, especially for the benefit of those who are unable to shape their own lives. Berlin saw negative liberty as a protection against a super powerful state that could lead to terror on the behalf of that same state.

According to Berlin, the heralds of positive liberty all too often have a monistic view of the world and believe that there is only one way to live the good life. They assume that liberty does not mean the freedom "to do what is irrational, or stupid, or wrong".[141] This view, Berlin warned, could lead to derailment, which could in turn restrict and even destroy freedom. Just look at the tragedies brought about by Jacobism and communism. Here he quotes Jeremy Bentham, who once stated: "Every law is an infraction of liberty – even if such 'infraction' leads to an increase of the sum of liberty".[142] The fact that many people choose to live according to certain laws and rules has to do with tradition, convenience, security, virtue, the promised reward in the afterlife, status and prosperity. In fact, the balance lies in "a maximum degree of non-interference [negative liberty] compatible with the minimum demands of social life."[143] The message: beware of any overreaching form of positive liberty. Yet Berlin did not defend laisser-faire liberalism. Indeed, he saw roles for the government in education, social security and the protection of the free market. "The extent of a man's, or a people's, liberty to choose to live as they desire must be weighed against the claims of many other values, of which equality, or justice, or happiness, or security, or public order are perhaps the most obvious examples. For this rea-

son, it cannot be unlimited."[144] However, like John Stuart Mill, Berlin warns of the danger of a dictatorship of the majority taking hold under democracy. And the danger of those who see it as their mission to elevate mankind or to place the interests of a certain race, people or class above the interests of the individual.

Quote

"The truth will not, for lack of a free market in ideas, come to light; there will be no scope for spontaneity, originality, genius, for mental energy, for moral courage. Society will be crushed by the weight of 'collective mediocrity'."[145]

Literature

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37

Friedrich von Hayek

The Constitution of Liberty
1960

Author

Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992) was an Austrian economist and political philosopher who won the Nobel Prize in 1974. In 1944 he published *The Road to Serfdom*, in which he opposed all forms of collectivism on the basis that it always led to tyranny, making reference to both nazism and communism. Central to his viewpoint was his aversion to a state-run economy. He made a passionate plea for the free market as the best way to achieve greater prosperity and peace in the world. In 1947 he founded the greatly influential Mont Pelerin Society in Switzerland, a liberal think tank intended to strengthen free society and the free market economy. Founding members included Ludwig von Mises, George Joseph Stigler, Karl Popper, Wilhelm Röpke and Milton Friedman. During a party policy meeting in 1975, Margaret Thatcher is said to have taken a copy of *The Constitution of Liberty* out of her briefcase, slammed it on the table and declared: "This is what we believe!"[146]

Contents

In *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), Friedrich von Hayek provides answers to the question of which domains of human life should remain beyond the reach of the government.

Planners, such as socialists, think they can measure and know the needs of the people. This is a flawed notion. No one is capable of gathering all that knowledge. The free market is much more efficient in this respect, whereas nanny-state interference is unnecessary and can even prove disastrous. In the first part of his book, Hayek discusses the value of freedom. No one should be allowed to impose their views of good and evil, he argues. Freedom is the absence of coercion by another person or by a group. This does not mean that he is anti-government, but that he is against any exclusive, privileged, monopolistic organisation. "Liberty not only means that the individual has both the opportunity and the burden of choice; it also means that he must bear the consequences of his actions and will receive praise or blame for them. Liberty and responsibility are inseparable," Hayek explains.[147]

In the second part of his book he discusses the role of the state. Laws are needed to guarantee the freedom of the individual. And there is a need for central banks to order the monetary system. But the individual always retains maximum freedom. "Under a reign of freedom the free sphere of the individual includes all action not explicitly restricted by a general law."[148]

In the third part, he discusses the importance of freedom for the welfare state. Too much dependence on the state can lead to despotism and a loss of freedom, he maintained. People must provide their own insurance for emergencies such as illness, old age and unemployment. If necessary, the government may force them to do so, since a community cannot force a person to do something for his own benefit, but it can force a person to do something in the interest of the community, so as to prevent harm to its members. Hayek opposed progressive taxes but was in favour of proportional taxes (such as a flat tax).

His infamous postscript '*Why I am not a conservative*' makes his position clear. According to Hayek, conservatism is indicative of an aversion to change. Liberals are not opposed to evolution and, on the contrary, have faith in the power to change things for the better. That does not mean that liberals do not value customs and traditions. However, though they may be important, they

must not obstruct progress. "But the conservatives are inclined to use the powers of government to prevent change or to limit its rate to whatever appeals to the more timid mind. In looking forward, they lack the faith in the spontaneous forces of adjustment which makes the liberal accept changes without apprehension, even though he does not know how the necessary adaptations will be brought about."[149]

Hayek has had a significant influence on many liberal thinkers and politicians, as well as some conservative political leaders, such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Quote

"What is important is not what freedom I personally would like to exercise but what freedom some person may need in order to do things beneficial to society. This freedom we can assure to the unknown person only by giving it to all."[150]

Literature

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38

James Buchanan

The Calculus of Consent
1962

Author

James Buchanan (1919-2013) was an American economist who, together with Gordon Tullock, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1986 for his public choice theory. This theory shows that government policy is mainly determined by a gamut of pressure groups. With his theory, Buchanan provided a thorough explanation of how economic and political decisions are made. He was chairman of the Mont Pelerin Society for a time and a senior fellow of the Cato Institute. He wrote the controversial book *The Power to Tax: Analytical Foundations of a Fiscal Constitution* (1980), which examined how tax decisions are made. Following Hayek's example, he wrote the text *Why I, Too, Am Not a Conservative: The Normative Vision of Classical Liberalism* (2005), in which he elucidated the difference between liberalism, of which he counted himself a proponent, and conservatism. In all his works he positions himself in opposition to the ideas of John Mayard Keynes.

Contents

The Calculus of Consent (1962) is a book about the political organisation of a society of free people. It discusses the principles of public choice theory.

The central problem, according to James Buchanan, is not so much the failure of the free market as the failure of the government, which is becoming increasingly influenced by interest groups. Increased government spending is often a direct consequence of the broader impact of these pressure groups. Another negative effect of so-called *public choice* is that governments, i.e. politicians and administrations, attempt to make themselves indispensable. They have a tendency to introduce, in the name of a supposed 'public interest', more and more regulations, to provide more resources and to expand the government apparatus. According to Buchanan, this tendency must be curbed as it often serves to arrest the development of the private sector.

In his work he makes frequent reference to statements and ideas by James Madison, one of the *Founding Fathers* and the fourth president of the United States. 'If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary," wrote Madison.[151] But the people in power are not angels, of course, and it is therefore useful to study their impact. And if this impact is negative with respect to overall prosperity, then the government must be slimmed down and curtailed in that area. In addition, the government deficit should be reduced, the number of government regulations curtailed and taxes lowered. Like Hayek, Buchanan had little interest in the egalitarian thinking of the left with its Keynesian economic policy.

In the 50s and 60s in particular, classical liberal thinking seemed to be in decline. In his text *The Soul of Classical Liberalism*, Buchanan described the situation as follows: "But the light of classical liberalism was dimmed, put in the shadows, by the emergent attraction of socialism. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, classical liberals retreated into a defensive posture, struggling continuously against the reforms promulgated by utilitarian dreamers who claimed superior wisdom in discovering routes to aggregate happiness, as aided and abetted by the Hegel-inspired political idealists, who transferred personal realization to a collective psyche and away from the individual. The

soul of socialism, even in contradiction to scientific evidence, was variously successful in capturing adherents to schemes for major institutional transformation."[152] Insight into public choice theory is indispensable in understanding why good intentions are not sufficient to justify government intervention. We must always remain critical. "With the philosophers of the Enlightenment we share the faith that man can rationally organize his own society, that existing organization can always be perfected, and that nothing in the social order should remain exempt from rational, critical, and intelligent discussion."[153]

Public choice theory is of significance to liberalism in defining the core tasks of government in an open and democratic society. In fact, it is a necessary tool in deciding what a government should be able to do and why, and above all, what matters it should keep out of. Buchanan's ideas have influenced many economists and, from the late 1970s onwards, an increasing number of politicians.

Quote

"The acceptance of the right of the individual to do as he desires so long as his action does not infringe on the freedom of other individuals to do likewise must be a characteristic trait in any 'good' society."[154]

Literature

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39

Raymond Aron

Essai sur les libertés
An Essay on Freedom 1965

Author

Raymond Aron (1905-1983) was a French philosopher, journalist and liberal thinker of Jewish descent. He studied with Jean-Paul Sartre at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, taught French in Cologne and in 1933 witnessed the burning of books by the Nazis. During the war he stayed in London and joined Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces. For thirty years, he wrote as a journalist for Le Figaro, in which he assumed classical-liberal standpoints against the prevailing leftist-intellectual zeitgeist of Sartre and others who embraced Soviet communism. Aron wrote numerous impressive books in which he made his belief in freedom clear, such as *Le grand schisme* (1948), *L'opium des intellectuels* (1955), *La lutte des classes* (1964) and *Essai sur les libertés* (1965). He was also one of the first to point out the danger of Islamic fundamentalism as a form of totalitarianism.

Contents

In *An Essay on Freedom*, Raymond Aron compares the degree of freedom within the Soviet republics with that in Western democracies, taking the ideas of Karl Marx and Alexis de Tocqueville as his point of departure. A liberal democracy, Tocqueville ar-

gued, has equal living conditions, a representative government and both personal and spiritual freedom. Marx also believed in freedom, but only as the end result of a revolutionary process that would lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat – only then would man truly be free. People who have to work day in, day out are not free, according to Marx; they are slaves of the producer and of the tyranny of need. The main focus of Aron's criticism was the so-called utopian states of the Soviets. With his criticism he aligned himself in opposition with the prevailing movement in France in 1965, the zeitgeist being dominated by the communist party and intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre.

In contrast with Sartre, Aron quickly realised that Marxism did not spell the liberation and development of mankind, but rather a form of terror in which classes continued to exist and personal freedom was constantly violated. In the one-party system of the Soviets, intellectuals, writers and artists were not allowed to say what they wanted, while in the West the principles of formal freedom and liberal democracy were widely accepted. However, liberal democracies were weak during the interwar period and had to make way for the fascist and communist 'utopias'. Aron takes up the ideas of Friedrich von Hayek, who stood practically alone in his argument against 'the road to serfdom'. In 1956 Aron saw in the uprisings in Poland and Hungary the struggle of man against the "organised lie and the tyranny of the state".[155] This leads him to conclude that Western democracies, with their regular elections, are "most in conformity with the democratic ideal".[156]

To put it another way: "The mixed economy, liberal democracy and the *Welfare State* seem to be the best compromise between the various freedoms that modern society wants to give to people."[157] Coercion is a characteristic trait of Soviet states, whereas freedom implies the absence of coercion. However, Aron is not blind to the increasing bureaucracy of Western democracies and its endangerment of the rights of individuals. Nor to the fact that here, too, people are never completely free, if only because they are excluded from the means of production that belong to only a

few. And he also realised the danger that Tocqueville had already signalled with regard to the dictatorship of the majority. He was not a fanatical defender of the market economy, but believed that the state should provide its citizens with the necessary resources – through social laws, for example – to realise their freedom. However, this does not detract from the fact that Aron mainly targets the collectivist planners who advocate the radical denial of liberalist freedom. The Soviet states oppose freedom of assembly and freedom of property. They are totalitarian regimes about which Aron writes that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Aron was ultimately proved right and saved many French intellectuals from the lure of Marxism.

Quote

"The only criterion is that a society gives its members more freedom, that they are less at risk be punished for actions that they do not consider to be illegal or that were not effectively prohibited."[158]

Literature

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Raymond Aron, *Peace & War. A Theory of International Relations*, Tranaction Publishers, 2003

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Murray Rothbard

Power and Market
1970

Author

Murray Rothbard (1926-1995) was an American philosopher and economist. He made a name for himself with his book *Man, Economy and State* (1962), in which he propagated the principles of the Austrian School. His focus was on the ideas of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek. The publisher, however, chose not to publish the last eight chapters as he deemed them too radical. These censored chapters were published separately in the book *Power and Market* in 1970. Rothbard is known as a proponent of anarcho-capitalism, a political-philosophical movement that strives for the abolition of government and bases itself entirely on voluntarism. He opposed the postmodernism and hermeneutics of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who argued that there is no objective truth. He strongly criticised supporters of the planned economy, which he argued has always led to poverty and totalitarianism.

Contents

In *Power and Market*, Murray Rothbard examines the negative effects of the various forms of government intervention. His decision is that the state is neither necessary nor useful at all.

A truly free society is one in which every human being has the absolute right to his property and to the material goods he has produced. He does not agree with the proponents of the night-watchman state, whereby the government would only be responsible for defence, security and justice. These matters can also be dealt with more efficiently and more cheaply by the free market, he argues. "Defense services, like all other services, would be marketable and marketable only," writes Rothbard.[159] Various private companies could in this way offer security and protection, to which citizens, as customers, could subscribe. The efficiency and reputation of these companies would govern their success. Rothbard is not convinced by the classic argument that a democracy is guided by the will of the people. After all, what about those who did not come to vote or held a minority viewpoint? Then it is again a case of the tyranny of the majority. But even those who vote for what the majority wants do not always do so out of conviction. In fact, they are obliged to make a choice through coercion. "The point is that the public never has the opportunity of voting on the State system itself; they are caught up in a system in which coercion over them is inevitable."[160]

Rothbard also opposes any form of price control by the government. Both minimum and maximum prices distort the free market and affect the freedom of citizens. In the same vein, he opposes product control, quality standards, import restrictions, conscription, minimum wages, benefits for the unemployed, antitrust legislation, nature protection laws, patents, voting rights, and even the prohibition of child labour. He abhors taxation and redistribution, seeing these as forcing consumers to hand over part of their income to the state, meaning that they have less freedom and can only watch on as others receive (their) money. Furthermore, the collection of these taxes costs that same government money. Even worse if the government uses the money for its own initiatives: this would be socialism. Rothbard also scrutinises the myth of 'public property': in reality, the property does not belong to the public, since they can't truly take possession of it. It is the rulers who decide on 'public property', and even then

it is often a temporary matter, until new rulers emerge following elections, acting again in the name of the 'general interest'. This means that temporary rulers often plunder the property before vacating their functions. As such, Rothbard questions democracy for its lack of correspondence to a truly free society.

Rothbard occupies an island within liberal thinking. Gustave de Molinari only spoke of a stateless society as a thought experiment. But anarcho-capitalists like Rothbard really mean it and are thus a source of inspiration for many libertarian thinkers.

Quote

"It is often asserted by critics of the free-market economy that they are interested in preserving 'human rights' rather than property rights. This artificial dichotomy between human and property rights has often been refuted by libertarians, who have pointed out (a) that property rights of course accrue to humans and to humans alone, and (b) that the 'human right' to life requires the right to keep what one has produced to sustain and advance life. In short, they have shown that property rights are indissolubly also human rights."[161]

Literature

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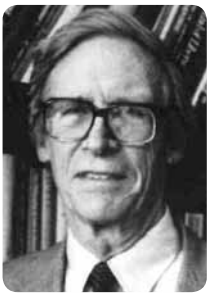
41

John Rawls

A Theory of Justice
1971



Author

John Rawls (1921-2002) was an American philosopher who had an enormous influence on the political and philosophical thinking of the last forty years, largely thanks to his seminal work *A Theory of Justice* (1971). In *Political Liberalism* (1993) Rawls examines how free and equal citizens with different religious, philosophical and ideological ideas might live together peacefully. To this end, Rawls develops three moral concepts, namely *political liberalism*, *public reason* and *overlapping consensus*. In *The Law of Peoples* (1999) Rawls applies his theory to justice between peoples.

Contents

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls describes how freedom and social justice go hand in hand. The problem is that – due to differing natural abilities, social backgrounds and the fortune or misfortune encountered in the course of their lives – people do not have the same opportunities. Some are born rich, healthy or with great gifts. Others grow up in poverty, have learning difficulties or illnesses. These are things that people themselves can do little or nothing about and that have nothing to do with a kind of 'moral merit'. We cannot eliminate these differences, or at least not en-

tirely, but we can ensure that, in the redistribution of scarce resources, everyone receives what they need to enable them to lead a dignified life. Yet Rawls does not want to impose direct coercion in the manner that collectivists and egalitarians proposed and applied with little success. Free choice remains a crucial condition for Rawls. He invites citizens to engage in a thought experiment. Suppose we are behind 'a veil of ignorance'.[162] To paraphrase Rawls, nobody knows whether they will be born sick or healthy, rich or poor, strong or weak, black or white, male or female, young or old, gifted or less gifted. And suppose we have to come up with a design for society, from this unknowing perspective, and devise a system in which everyone is treated equally and fairly. People may imagine that they will be rich, young, smart or healthy and choose to benefit from freedom above all. But they may also imagine that they will be poor, old, less intelligent or sick and be inclined to opt for redistribution so that in these circumstances, too, they could lead a dignified life.

The result is a justice derived from our collective will. Here, the principles of justice originate from one unified wish, one that is not arbitrary but fundamental. This ensures that reasonable limitations are established through rational free will. According to Rawls, this outcome provides a just foundation for the society that was chosen by free individuals in a kind of embryonic state. Rawls proposes two principles to this end. The first principle is as follows: "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all."[163] The second principle is that social and economic inequalities can only be justified if a system of equal opportunities is provided for all, and if such inequalities are primarily for the benefit of the most disadvantaged in society.[164]

This also clarifies Rawls's political position. He rejects laissez-faire capitalism because it only ensures formal equality and has no qualms about using mankind as a means to maximise profits. He also rejects state socialism because of its intrinsic incompatibility with the fundamental rights of freedom that Rawls considers to be a priority in his first principle. Only regimes that adhere

to the principle of redistribution meet the conditions that Rawls considered essential for achieving a just society.

Quote

"But the worth of liberty is not the same for everyone. Some have greater authority and wealth, and therefore greater means to achieve their aims. (...) But compensating for the lesser worth of freedom is not to be confused with making good an unequal liberty. Taking the two principles together, the basic structure is to be arranged to maximize the worth to the least advantaged of the complete scheme of equal liberty shared by all. This defines the end of social justice."[165]

Literature

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John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Harvard University Press, 1999

42

Robert Nozick

Anarchy, State and Utopia
1974

Author

Robert Nozick (1939-2002) was an American philosopher of Jewish descent and a professor at Harvard University from the age of thirty. He published numerous texts on political philosophy, epistemology, literature and metaphysics. In his interpretation of the work of classical liberal thinkers, there was only room for a minimal night-watchman state. He maintained that the government does not have the right to interfere in the private lives of citizens. Nozick focused a great deal on the right to property and considered taxes to be a form of theft. He is considered by many to be the father of libertarianism. His principal work *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) serves as a response of sorts to *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls. He also wrote various articles on the 'objectivism' of the philosopher Ayn Rand, author of the bestseller *Atlas Shrugged* (1957).

Contents

In *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Nozick advocates a minimal state that is limited to guaranteeing the safety of its citizens and enforcing contracts and legal order by means of a number of laws.

"The minimal state treats us as inviolate individuals, who may not be used in certain ways by others as means or tools or instruments or resources; it treats us as persons having individual rights with the dignity this constitutes. Treating us with respect by respecting our rights, it allows us, individually or with whom we choose, to choose our life and to realize our ends and our conception of ourselves, insofar as we can, aided by the voluntary cooperation of other individuals possessing the same dignity. How dare any state or group of individuals do more. Or less," writes Nozick.[166] The minute a state proceeds to do more, it inevitably violates the rights of individuals. In particular, he opposes any form of income redistribution and taxation, which he considered to be infringements of individual property rights. For this point, Nozick draws on his *entitlement theory*, concerning the way in which ownership is acquired. He distinguished three principles. According to "*the principle of justice in acquisition*", a property is only justly held if the ownership arises from the exercise of one's own natural abilities and only insofar as it does not infringe on the use of this property by others. Specifically, this principle concerns property that may be taken possession of, as long as it is not yet in someone else's possession.

Under no circumstances should the government restrict or discard this property, even if others have less or no property at all. Here, unlike Rothbard, Nozick is in agreement with Locke's vision that everyone should be able to take as much of nature as he likes provided "*that enough and of the same quality should be left for others*". According to "*the principle of justice in transfer*," only the owner has the right to sell, rent or give away his property.[167] On the basis of this principle, Nozick opposed against taxes. This just leaves the question of how one can be sure that a property has been justly acquired.

According to "*the principle of rectification of injustice in holdings*," unjustly acquired or transferred property may be compensated for, although Nozick is unclear regarding what is deemed unjust in this context and how exactly the compensation might be arranged.[168]

Regarding what constitutes just acquisition, Nozick's point of departure is that "in the beginning" there were no property rights.

Crucial to Nozick's thinking is his assertion that a person's qualities and natural gifts are their own and may not be used for the benefit of others without consent. He does not accept that equality should be imposed through redistribution and that, for example, lazy people would benefit from enterprising people. He argues that the state is therefore not obliged to guarantee opportunities in life, but that this gap can be bridged by private initiatives such as charity and other forms of private aid.

Robert Nozick had a major impact on proponents of minimal government in the 1980s and 90s.

Quote

"Taxation of earnings from labor is on a par with forced labor."[169]

Literature

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43

Simone Veil

Elles sont 300.000 chaque année
They are 300,000 each year
1974

Author

Simone Veil (1927-2017) was a French politician and a champion of women's rights. Born into a Jewish family, she was deported with her mother and sister to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. Simone survived this horror and went on to study law and political science. In 1974 she became the French Minister of Health under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and later President of the European Parliament. As a minister, she took the lead in the legalisation relating to contraceptives and abortion, the latter of which was made legal in France in 1975 under her impetus. In 2008 she was elected a member of the famous Académie Française. In defence of her position on abortion, she wrote the essay *Elles sont 300,000 chaque année* ('They are 300,000 each year,' 1974). She had previously written another pamphlet urging the legalisation of contraceptives. Her vision gave the liberal senator Lucienne Herman-Michielsens the resolve to fight the same battle in Belgium.

Contents

Elles sont 300.000 chaque année ('They are 300,000 each year') is the text of speech given by Simone Veil on 26 November 1974 in the French parliament, pleading for the decriminalisation of abor-

tion. Since 1920 the termination of a pregnancy was subject to severe punishments and Veil, who was supported by the left, had most of all to convince her own majority of Giscardians, Gaullists and centrists.

Veil's aim was to put an end to illegal abortion as practiced by some 300,000 French women each year. These abortions usually took place in poor conditions and often led to complications that would sometimes leave the women infertile for the rest of their lives. Only those who had the money could have an abortion carried out abroad. In addition, the law prohibiting the termination of pregnancy was scarcely even applied anymore. "We have come to a point where, on this matter, the public authorities can no longer shirk their responsibilities," said Veil.[170] Why was the law not being applied? Because doctors and the staff of social institutions, and even many ordinary citizens, participated in these clandestine practices, even if this sometimes went against their personal convictions. "Because, when faced with a woman who has decided to terminate her pregnancy, they realise that by not providing help they are relegating her to a position of loneliness and fear, in the worst cases, and with the risk she will be mutilated forever."[171]

Abortion remained an exception under this new law, the last resort in hopeless situations. No woman undergoes an abortion gladly. It has always been a tragedy and this will never change. We must not leave these helpless women high and dry. Some women feel that their family lives are being ruined because of their unwanted pregnancy, that their children are going to lead unhappy lives and even commit suicide. Veil firmly rejected the argument that legalising abortion would lead to a decline in birth rate. There was no correlation between legislative changes and the birth rate of French women. Indeed, all signs indicated that legal abortions would simply replace clandestine abortions, thus having no impact on demography.

The new law aimed to make abortion legal in the event of a serious psychological or physical threat to the woman in question, in the event of rape or incest, or in the event of psychological

problems within the first ten weeks of pregnancy. The physician would play a central role in the woman's decision and ensure she was fully informed regarding the medical risks that might be associated with an abortion. The social services would have to listen to the woman's account and, if necessary, arrange an anonymous delivery in a hospital or guide them through the process of ultimately giving the child up for adoption. They would also advise women on the use of contraceptives for the future. The law would still enforce a waiting period of eight days so that the termination of pregnancy would not become an impulsive, trivial act, but would remain the result of a well-considered decision. The abortion could then only be performed by a doctor, though doctors would be permitted to conscientiously object to performing the procedure.

The abortion law was approved by the French Parliament on 20 December 1974.

Quote

"Abortion is a failure when it is not a tragedy. But we can no longer turn a blind eye to the three hundred thousand abortions that maim women each year in this country, that flout our laws and that humiliate and traumatise those who resort to them."[172]

Literature

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Simone Veil, *Une vie*, Stock, 2007

44

Milton Friedman

Free to Choose
1980

Author

Milton Friedman (1912-2006) was an American economist who won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1976. In 1962 he published his book *Capitalism and Freedom*, in which he advocated a free market economy, negative income tax and school vouchers. He was one of the pioneers of monetarism, which had a major influence on central bank policy. Too much money put into circulation by the government leads to inflation, he observed. As such, governments should not interfere with the currency markets. As chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan pursued a monetarist policy that was consistent with the idea of the self-regulating capacity of the financial markets. Friedman was a strong proponent of far-reaching liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. He called for minimal government intervention. His ideas were applied by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Contents

In *Free to Choose* (1980), which was not only published as a book but broadcast as a widely-watched television documentary series, Milton Friedman and his wife Rose defend the power of the free market. Friedman starts the book with a reference to the Adam

Smith's 'invisible hand'. He illustrates this by means of an ordinary pencil.[173] The manufacturing of this pencil, with its rubber eraser held on by a copper ring, is proof that the free market creates efficiency and mutual trust between people and countries. The pencil countless people across the world use to write is made using wood from the United States, graphite from Sri Lanka, copper from Congo, metal type from Italy, rubber from Indonesia, paint from Marseille. Its manufacture depends on lumberjacks, sawmen, ore miners and rubber producers, and it is distributed, bought and sold by transporters, warehouse managers and retailers. In order to achieve all this, you need free cooperation. And it works through a price system, a mechanism that works flawlessly without government intervention, that is to say without forcing people to come into contact with each other or to like each other. Prices come about through the free market mechanism, where each of the people who have participated in this whole process pursues their own self-interest.

Friedman also follows Adam Smith's thinking regarding the tasks of the government. According to Smith, there are only a few government tasks: to protect the country against aggression from outsiders, to protect citizens – through a judicial system – against oppression by other citizens, and to set up and maintain public works and institutions whose usefulness can be clearly demonstrated. Friedman adds a fourth task, namely the duty to protect those members of society who cannot be held responsible for their own actions. Here he is talking about children and people with intellectual disabilities. In this case it is the parents who are primarily responsible, he says, but the government must ensure that this responsibility is upheld. For the rest, people are simply free, although Friedman himself explicitly states that freedom cannot be absolute: "We do live in an independent society. Some restrictions on our freedom are necessary to avoid other, still worse restrictions."[174] Having said this, he also adds that, at his time of writing, 1980, restrictions should be abolished as a matter of urgency, the government having become a mastodon, resulting in high inflation, increasing unemployment and enor-

mous public debt. He extends this view to public education. To him, the education system organised by the government represents a huge waste of taxpayers' money and is of extremely poor quality.[175] He proposes a kind of voucher system so that parents can choose which school to send their children to.

The impact of Milton Friedman's ideas on liberal thinking in Western democracies has been particularly great, especially since the late 1970s.

Quote

"A society that puts equality before freedom will get neither. A society that puts freedom before equality will get a high degree of both."[176]

Literature

Milton Friedman, *Free to Choose* (1980), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Chicago University Press, 2002

45

Claude Lefort

L'Invention démocratique
The Democratic Invention
1981

Author

Claude Lefort (1924-2010) was a French philosopher who was strongly influenced by the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Lefort was at first a Trotskyist before turning away from Marxism in 1957. In particular, it was reading *The Gulag Archipelago* (1973) by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn shocked him out of it. From then on, going against the grain in a France dominated by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, he strongly criticised the totalitarian character of the Eastern Bloc countries. His research into the roots of totalitarianism led him to a love of democracy. According to Lefort, totalitarian society is not characterised by excessive politicisation, but rather by complete depoliticisation. The public domain is destroyed, conflicts are denied and nipped in the bud, dissenting opinions are neither printed in the press nor heard, opponents are imprisoned or murdered. Only a democracy guarantees the rights and freedoms of the individual.

Contents

Lefort's work *L'Invention démocratique* ('The Democratic Invention', 1981) is an in-depth political-theoretical analysis of democracy that discusses both how it works and how it could work.

"Democracy is the only form of society that recognizes the relentless social conflict that underlies every society. What's more, she lives off that conflict. It is her source of energy and renewal. Conflictuality can neither be lifted nor overcome or eliminated in a democracy."[177] Lefort observes that an election serves as an important barometer, but that the democratic process continues immediately afterwards. "The reference to the will of the people (in an election) can therefore only serve as a mandatory reference point in a never-ending discussion that makes its final determination impossible."[178] As such, the 'burden of democracy' lies not so much with the citizens, who are invited to vote every few years, but with the politicians. It is they who must constantly enter into discussion and clash opinions with others in a never-ending battle for the 'vacant seat' of power that no one may definitively occupy. "In democratic society, no one is naturally destined to speak "in the name of the people." In this sense, the place of power - the will of the people - inevitably remains "empty". Or what boils down to the same thing, it has to be filled in again and again and in a provisional manner."[179]

For Lefort, democracy is an acceptance of uncertainty and ambiguity. The definitive solution or ideal society does not exist. Instead, we're forced to question the matter over and over again. This applies to habits and traditions as well as new trends and rational phenomena. This reasoning is revolutionary. It means that no society will ever reach perfection, that no ideology will ever reach the final victory, as Francis Fukuyama claimed with his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). The assumption that someone or something would take the place of power disappears in a liberal democracy. "Precisely at the moment when people's sovereignty is expected to manifest and the people are expected to realize themselves by casting their vote, social solidarity evaporates and the citizen feels disconnected from all networks in which social life develops, so that it can be reduced to an arithmetic unit. The number takes the place of the substance," writes Lefort.[180] Here he emphasises the importance of the individual and their opinion. Individuals who, amid the political debate be-

tween various parties, have to make choices, for themselves and for society. Democracy is the one certainty when all other certainties are elusive, when it's up to the citizen to decide who is to – temporarily, and only temporarily – determine the policy going forward. With his analysis of liberal democracy as the ongoing struggle for the 'vacant seat' of power, Lefort makes the difference between democracy and totalitarianism clear.

Quote

"The point is that it [democracy] forbids rulers to usurp or embody power. Her practice is subject to a procedure that occasionally unsettles everything. It only comes about at the end of a regulated struggle, the conditions of which are constantly protected."[181]

Literature

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Claude Lefort, *Complications: communism and the dilemmas of democracy*, Columbia University, 2007

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Mario Vargas Llosa

Contra viento y marea
The Culture of Liberty
1983

Author

Mario Vargas Llosa (1936) is a Peruvian writer who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2010. Until the 1980s he defended socialist ideas, but would later become one of the most important liberal intellectuals of our time. In 1990, he stood as a candidate in the presidential elections of Peru, but narrowly lost out to his rival, the populist Alberto Fuyimori. He wrote about this event in the autobiographical *A Fish in the Water* (1994). Vargas Llosa argues that in the world of the poor with all its misery and violence, there is also an enormous potential of energy, ingenuity and the will to move forward. His plea to open up the market and phase out protectionism sparked unrest among trade unions and company leaders alike. He wanted to make Peru a democracy and despised the abuse of power, corruption and etatism. In *The Language of Passion* (2000) he speaks out against religious intolerance and nationalism.

Contents

The Culture of Liberty is a speech given by Mario Vargas Llosa in Amsterdam on 29 November 1985 on the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the Meulenhoff publishing house. He spoke

of an eminent British anthropologist who predicted that books would gradually but surely disappear to make way for audiovisual media. Radio and television were so much more significant as sources of information that books would surely become irrelevant.

If this were to happen, Vargas Llosa feared, the culture of liberty would disappear and the world would become a "boring society of stupid robots".[182] The reason for this pessimistic statement lies in the fact that, unlike the written word, audiovisual media can be much more easily controlled, dominated and manipulated by those in power. Even amid dictatorships, writers have managed to clandestinely commit their ideas, revelations and imaginative power to paper and smuggle them abroad. Take, for example, the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist people's republics, which were actually dictatorships: here, with samizdat (literally 'self-publishing'), writers managed to publish and distribute underground literature and pamphlets. Among those practicing samizdat were big names like Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Václav Havel and György Konrád, among many others.

The disappearance of the book, said Vargas Llosa, would mark the general enslavement of the human spirit. People would no longer have the freedom of choice to read what they want, and would receive almost all their information from the government. Books, especially novels, do not allow themselves to be enslaved. The authors can draw from their rich imaginations and use their pen to express mankind's deepest emotions. The political, economic, cultural and religious authorities – sometimes superficial and innocent, but often ruthless when dealing with those who cross them – can use language to engender forces that stir up the masses, awaken the indifferent and arm the weakest. Literature is the product of a creative process that takes place in a meddle-free zone: the writer's mind. Liberty, according to Vargas Llosa, "has been the motor of material and social progress."[183] It's thanks to liberty that man has become an individual with inalienable rights. It has brought about prosperity, progress, great achievements,

cultural and otherwise. However, liberty has not always yielded good things: take scientific developments like the atomic bomb, for example, that were used to destroy human life. But only in literature is such freedom harmless, reflecting both the good and the bad of humanity without enslaving or coercing others.

Vargas Llosa makes us realise that liberty is a precious commodity and that we have to work tirelessly for it, because "those who are not willing to fight for freedom, who are not willing to step into the breach, run the risk of permanently losing her".[184]

Quote

"Like love, freedom is a rich experience that cannot be captured in a definition. But as impossible as it is to define her, it is as simple as identifying her, realizing when she is there, whether she is real or false and whether we enjoy or lack her."[185]

Literature

Mario Vargas Llosa, *De cultuur van de vrijheid* (The Culture of Liberty) (1983), Muelenhoff, 1989
Mario Vargas Llosa, *A Fish in the Water*, Faber & Faber, 1995

47

Ralf Dahrendorf

Fragmente eines neuen Liberalismus
Fragments of a New Liberalism
1987

Author

Ralf Dahrendorf (1929-2009), together with Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Jürgen Habermas, is considered to be one of the most influential sociologists of our time. His father was elected as a social democrat in the German Reichstag in 1932. The following year, under pressure from the Nazis, the parliamentary system collapsed and the Social Democrats were oppressed. Dahrendorf became involved in the student resistance and secretly distributed information about the concentration camps. By the end of 1944, at the age of fifteen, he was arrested and imprisoned in Frankfurt. This exeperience would remain an influence on his vision of the inviolability of human dignity and would lead him to embark on the path of liberalism and social democracy, which he considered to be the two children of the Enlightenment. He was a member of the European Parliament on behalf of the liberal party FDP and became a member of the European Commission in 1970.

Contents

In *Fragmente eines neuen Liberalismus* ('Fragments of a New Liberalism') (1987) Dahrendorf elaborated upon Karl Popper's concept

of the open society. Like Popper, he rejected Francis Fukuyama's thesis about 'the end of history'. He saw the implosion of the communist states as proof of Popper's claim that closed societies were not viable. For Dahrendorf this did not mean the end of history, but rather a 'new beginning'.[186]

It is this attitude that made Dahrendorf such an important thinker. He persistently sought to discover the right balance between freedom and equality, concepts that play an essential role in liberalism. Like Popper, he opposed any dogma or monopoly of an ideological system that would inevitably turn into a closed system. In this sense he rejected the vision of that other liberal giant Friedrich von Hayek, who pitted socialism against another all-encompassing system. Like Marxism, the absolute belief in the free market, that is to say market fundamentalism, is essentially at odds with the open society. And yet it was Hayek and Friedman's ideas that would be put into practice, first in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher and later in the United States under Ronald Reagan. Dahrendorf was sceptical; he feared that radical liberalism would undermine society's social cohesion and, in time, democracy itself.

This has to do with his vision on the concept of 'freedom'. He tends to follow the Kantian interpretation of freedom as a 'responsible freedom'. *Du Kannst denn du Sollst*: the idea that there is a sense of duty associated with the concept of freedom. Hence his plea for a guaranteed minimum income for everyone, among other proposals. In addition, Dahrendorf endorses Kant's ideas about world citizenship: There is no more important topic of international, global action than the creation of the 'Weltbürgergesellschaft'.'[187] This is also his response to certain immoral consequences of a globalisation that lack international regulation. Nevertheless, Dahrendorf opposed social democracy and its excessive trust in the state. In the early 1980s, he announced the end of social democracy. He acutely observed that socialism had run up against its limits and was undermined by its inherent choice to opt for the status quo. It had failed to adapt to a constantly changing social reality.

Dahrendorf was a liberal politician, but always an independent thinker. He cited the ideas of Karl Popper, Raymond Aron and Isaiah Berlin as examples of the independent, purposeful thinking that shaped him. He had a great influence on contemporary sociologists and liberal thinkers.

Quote

"Most of the major reformers of the past two centuries have been liberals. Their goal has always been a society that guarantees everyone the basic freedoms, as many open borders as possible, and a creative environment for encouraging new creators."[188]

Literature

Ralf Dahrendorf, *Fragmente eines neuen Liberalismus*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1987

Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, Routledge, 2004

Ralf Dahrendorf, *The Modern Social Conflict. An Essay of the Politics of Liberty*, University of California Press, 1988

Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, Stanford University Press, 1959

48

Francis Fukuyama

The End of History and the Last Man
1992

Author

Francis Fukuyama (1952) is an American philosopher, political scientist and professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) he defended the thesis that the end of communism also spelled the end of the ideological struggle and that liberal democracy had ultimately won out. Consistent with the zeitgeist following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the book exuded enormous optimism, but his thesis was criticised by Karl Popper, Ralf Dahrendorf, Samuel Huntington and Benjamin Barber, among others, and ultimately proved untenable. He went on to write remarkable books such as *The Great Disruption* (1999), *State-building* (2004), *America at the Crossroads* (2006) and *The Origins of Political Order* (2011), in which he thoroughly revised his basic thesis.

Contents

In the summer of 1989, Francis Fukuyama caused a stir with his essay *The End of History*, published in the international affairs magazine *The National Interest*. At that time, Soviet communism was on its way out and in countries across Eastern Europe and Latin America dictatorships were making way for budding liberal

democracies. In 1992 Fukuyama further developed his essay into a voluminous book, in which he described the end of the ideological struggle.

For a significant part of the twentieth century there was a great deal of pessimism surrounding democracy, worldwide – hence the success of totalitarian ideologies. But, in practice, liberal democracies, with their economically free market, succeed in creating not only unprecedented material prosperity, but also stability and peace. Citizens wanted to beat their own path to democracy, as Fukuyama shows with a series of examples from 1989, 1990 and 1991. From the fall of the Berlin Wall to the upheavals in Eastern Europe, from the abolition of the Soviet Union to the call for greater democracy on Tienanmen Square in China, from the election of Lech Walesa in Poland to the release of Nelson Mandela in South Africa and the end of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile. The number of liberal democracies increased spectacularly from 13 in 1940 to 36 in 1960 and 61 in 1990. Fukuyama spoke of "The Worldwide Liberal Revolution".[189]

Democracy stood out in other areas, too. "As a whole, democratic political systems reacted much more quickly to the growth of ecological consciousness in the 1960s and 70s than did the world's dictatorships."[190] The Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986, followed by the clumsy and downright misleading information from the Soviet authorities about its harmful consequences, eroded confidence further. In a democracy, citizens and interest groups have the freedom to react peacefully and to steer democratic policy with their votes. According to Fukuyama, what drives people is not so much material comfort, but rather a desire for respect, recognition and dignity. "Life in a liberal democracy is potentially the road to great material abundance, but it also shows us the way to the completely nonmaterial end of recognition of our freedom. The liberal democratic state values us at our own sense of self-worth," writes Fukuyama.[191] He also emphasises the universal aspirations of liberalism. "The liberal state must be universal, that is, grant recognition to all citizens because they are human beings, and not because they are members of some par-

ticular national, ethnic, or racial group."[192] The modern human is 'the last man', according to Fukuyama, because he is exhausted by the experience of history and no longer to be led along by passionate pleas and fanaticism.

Fukuyama's statements were endorsed by many liberals in the 1990s, but have received pushback since the 9/11 attacks. With globalisation, the rise of Islamism and the return of authoritarianism in Russia and elsewhere, the battle of ideologies is more alive than ever.

Quote

"The liberal state, on the other hand, is rational because it reconciles these competing demands for recognition on the only mutually acceptable basis possible, that is, on the basis of the individual's identity as a human being."[193]

Literature

Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, The Free Press, 1992
Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*, Profile Books, 2015
Francis Fukuyama, *State Building*, Profile Books, 2005
Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*, Profile Books, 2018

49

Amartya Sen

Development as Freedom
1999

Author

Amartya Sen (1933) is an Indian economist and philosopher. The common theme of his work is the question of how a society deals, or should deal, with the weaker members of society. Famine, population policy, development aid, income inequality and the position of women in developing countries can only be improved by making people freer and giving their capacities every opportunity to bloom. He developed the '*capability approach*' to lifting people out of poverty. Sen won the 1998 Nobel Prize for Economics and in 1999 released his book *Development as Freedom*. In *Identity and Violence* (2006), he opposed the view that people have one fixed identity. Membership of a group can be important, according to Sen, but even more important is the right of every person to determine their own identity. His book *The Idea of Justice* (2010) represents a synthesis of his liberal ideas.

Contents

In *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen shows himself to be a passionate proponent of the notion that freedom can be a solution for many of society's problems. Specifically, that by maximising personal freedom, society as a whole stands to be improved.

For example, he argues that the freedom of action and enterprise, which etatists consider to be the cause of human misery, is in fact a precondition for not falling into a new form of serfdom or slavery. Freedom is the opposite of child labour, of the exclusion of women from the labour market, of feudalism and of any kind of planned economy. The lack of freedom led to one of the greatest catastrophes in modern history, namely the famine in China between 1958 and 1961.[194] The prevailing leaders believed that with their theoretical model they could avoid disaster and misery. The reality is that in that period almost as many people died as during the First World War. Sen's proposition is essentially that freedom is more than just the growth of gross national product. "Freedom is an essential element for escaping some form of bondage or subordination to collective delusions of the extreme right or extreme left."

Equally as important as freedom is democracy. Because in democratic regimes, those in control must at least answer to the representatives of the people, and their continued positions depend on the outcome of the elections. Sen notes that there has never been a famine in democratic countries. The free market is the best system for human development, he argues: in it, people can buy, sell and exchange possessions or revenues, and thus accumulate some degree of security. Anyone who restricts freedom is condemning his fellow people to serfdom.

A strong belief in the free market does not imply an indifference towards one's fellow human beings, however. This is not in human nature, Sen argues. We have always been sympathetic towards others of our kind and always will be. After all, every individual is part of a society and thus knows, or at least presumes to know, what is neeed for their fellow people's survival. Throughout history, this insight has driven hundreds of thousands of people to work for the benefit of others. Out of compassion, solidarity or love alone. According to Sen, "the basic ideas about justice are not alien to social beings, who worry about their own interests but are also able to think about family members, neighbors, fellow citizens and about other people in the world."[195] He

sees people not so much as passive recipients of instructions or assistance, but as actors in the process of change. Individual freedom, a democratic government, the provision of primary education, basic healthcare and agricultural reforms are Sen's recipes for helping less developed countries – and their freedom-deprived inhabitants – to move forward.

Quote

"To see capitalism as a system of pure profit maximization based on individual ownership of capital, is to leave out much that has made the system so successful in raising output and in generating income."[196]

Literature

Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (1999), Knopf, 1999
Amartya Sen, *Identity and violence*, Norton & Company, 2006
Amartya Sen, *The idea of justice*, Harvard University Press, 2009

50

Hernando de Soto

The Mystery of Capital
2000

Author

Hernando de Soto (1941) is a Peruvian economist and the founder and director of the *Institute for Liberty and Democracy* (ILD). He made a name for himself with the book *The Other Path* (1989) and later with *The Mystery of Capital* (2000), in which he defends the free market and property rights. His standpoints met with political resistance from the ruling class as well as attacks and death threats from the Maoist group Shining Path. De Soto has worked with the ILD in Peru as well as in El Salvador, Mexico, Haiti, Tanzania and Egypt. His aim is to remove obstacles that prevent people from acquiring property and starting a legal business.

Contents

In *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, Hernando de Soto observes that the millions who live in the favelas, shanty towns and slums surrounding major cities find it difficult to escape poverty because they do not have property rights. The government and the ruling class often do not allow it.

"The disparity of wealth between the West and the rest of the world is far too great to be explained by culture alone. (...) The

major stumbling block that keeps the rest of the world from benefiting from capitalism is its inability to produce capital," writes de Soto.[197] The impoverished inhabitants of less developed countries do in fact have possessions, but lack the means to formally declare their property and to create capital. They have houses but no papers, harvests but no documents, shops but no articles of association. In other words, their property is not registered, not formally authorised. The latter is crucial because credit can only be obtained through property rights. Property converted into capital provides the opportunity to create, produce and grow. If the poor had formal possessions, they could use them as collateral for loans and be able to contribute through taxes. Instead they're trapped in an informal world.

The many millions of migrants who settle in the outskirts of large cities immediately enter an informal world, without official laws. They have their own social rules. But that doesn't mean they're not active – on the contrary. Nowhere is there so much activity and entrepreneurship as among the poor. And the poor not only work for other poor people, they also fill gaps in the legal economy. With unlicensed buses and taxis, with undeclared work in the construction and hospitality sectors, or as employees in unregistered shops, offices and factories. This leads de Soto to the surprising conclusion that the legal world is marginal and the informal world the norm.[198] And to the even more important conclusion that the poor are not the problem, but the solution. However, the many and complex rules and laws, often aimed at favouring the legal world, make it difficult or impossible for the poor to gain access to formal property rights. De Soto identifies six effects of the allocation of property rights. (1) Fixing the economic potential of assets, such as by recording them in contracts, shares, registers. This is necessary for collateral, having addresses for the collection of taxes and debts, for the registration of a place of business, as a connection point for water, sewage and electricity. (2) Integrating dispersed information into one system, such that it is possible to establish who owns what. (3) Making people accountable. The formal system of ownership does mean that the

owners lose their anonymity, but it does make the right of ownership enforceable. (4) Making assets fungible. Descriptions of real estate are portable, presentable and make it easier to do business. (5) Networking. Formal property stimulates the activity of other legal producers such as water, electricity and telecoms suppliers. (6) Protecting transactions.

Fair and transparent laws impede underground economies, mafia control, instability, capital flight and a lack of respect for the law. The more people in the legal system, the better. Once they are in, they become more interested in the political system, resulting in greater stability and prosperity.

Quote

"I am not a diehard capitalist. I do not view capitalism as a credo. Much more important to me are freedom, compassion for the poor, respect for the social contract and equal opportunity. But for the moment, to achieve those goals, capitalism is the only game in town. It is the only system we know that provides us with the tools required to create massive surplus value."[199]

Literature

Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital*, Black Swan, 2001
Hernando de Soto, *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World*, Harpercollins, 1989

51

Fernando Savater

El valor de elegir
The Courage to Choose
2003

Author

Fernando Savater (1947) is a Spanish-Basque writer and one of the most read philosophers of our time. In the latter days of the Franco regime, he was imprisoned for political reasons, after which he worked as a journalist and, since 1983, a professor of philosophy in Madrid. He writes mainly about ethical issues and made a name for himself with his books *Ética para Amador* ('Ethics for Amador', 1991), *Política para Amador* ('Politics for Amador', 1992), *El valor de educar* ('The value of education', 1997), *Las preguntas de la vida* ('The questions of life', 1999), *Diccionario del ciudadano sin miedo a saber* ('Dictionary of the citizen without fear of knowing', 2007) and *Ética de urgencia* ('Importunate Ethics', 2012). Time and again he succeeds in explaining complex ethical issues in an accessible way, using quotations from historical thinkers as well as contemporaries. In his work he radically opposes fundamentalism, intolerance and extreme nationalism, which has prompted death threats from the Basque terrorist movement ETA.

Contents

In *El valor de elegir* (2003), Fernando Savater discusses what he himself identifies as the core problem of his oeuvre: the question

of human freedom. What is the significance of freedom for mankind? Are we free to choose evil? Does free will exist? Are there different kinds of freedom? And how can we, being free, shape freedom?

His book is a passionate plea for freedom, in spite of pessimists who portray the very notion as utopian, non-existent or suffocating. We are free to choose, but choices are not made in a vacuum; we are limited on the one hand by our own ignorance and on the other by coercion. The first problem is self-evident: we can't choose what we don't know. The second is determined by circumstances. The author gives the example of a captain who, in a violent storm, has to choose between throwing his cargo overboard or the risk of capsizing. This forced or, rather, involuntary situation is characteristic of many our 'voluntary' choices. Savater proposes that reality greatly reduces our notional freedom of choice, such that we do not take the action of which we approve the most, but the action to which we are least averse. This does not mean that the philosopher denies the existence of free will.

Freedom is linked with responsibility, however, even though many people tend to shift this responsibility onto 'the system'. When the conscience suffers due to a bad choice, many try to attribute their mistake to society, the media, a childhood trauma or a behavioural disorder. At that point, people are in fact renouncing their right to be an independent individual. Here, Savater identifies a typical human paradox: when we do well it is thanks to ourselves, but when we fail it is due to insurmountable circumstances, in spite of ourselves.[200] In this way, Savater touches upon the core of human vulnerability, showing how people partly restrict their own 'free will', as if they were afraid of it. Hence the success of totalitarian regimes and religions under which people ease their conscience by submitting to the will of the Leader, the Party or 'holy commandments'.

Savater opposes the restriction of free will by religious traditions and rejects the notion that it is man's duty to suffer and restrain himself. Instead he argues in favour of a form of hedonism,

or rather pleasure. He also argues convincingly in favour of democracy as the only political system under which we can choose as human beings. He rejects the popular thesis that all opinions must be respected in a democracy. It doesn't add up. All people deserve the same respect, but not all opinions. With this position he rejects two extremes: fanaticism and relativism. Savater therefore opposes any world view in which identity, race or ethnic group takes precedence over equality. With his opposition to the primacy of 'collective rights' over 'individual rights', he places himself firmly in the liberal tradition.

Savater denounces populism with its hollow slogans, such as 'what matters most is the will of the people'. It is with such words that populists play on feelings of fear and insecurity, presenting citizens with the idyllic image that, until recently, or perhaps long ago, we had it better and that we should aim to return to this supposed golden age. Free citizens are not in search of a common past, says the philosopher, but a new, common future.

Quote

"The political struggle of the twentieth century – and who knows how many future centuries – will undoubtedly still be about increasing the real freedom of those who, for the time being, can only enjoy it in a mutilated, inferior form."[201]

Literature

Fernando Savater, *El valor de elegir* ('The Courage to Choose'), Editorial Ariel, 2013
Fernando Savater, *La aventura de pensar, Debolsillo*, 2009
Fernando Savater, *Etica par Amador*, Editorial Ariel, 2011

52

Michael Ignatieff

The Lesser Evil
2004

Author

Michael Ignatieff (1947) is a writer, academic and former Canadian liberal politician. He taught at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Toronto. From 2008 to 2011 he was president of the Liberal Party of Canada and therefore also the opposition leader in his country. After an election defeat in 2011 he stepped down as a politician. He has made television programmes, published novels and written journalistic and scientific texts for *The Observer* as well as a number of books on international interventions and human rights. His focus is on the impact of the fight against terrorism on the rights and freedoms of the individual. He returned to Harvard University full-time in July 2014.

Contents

In *The Lesser Evil* (2004) Ignatieff discusses the difficult relationship between democracy and the use of violence to combat terror. Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, many Western countries introduced measures to combat terrorism. In the United States and Great Britain in particular, new exceptions were made to the prevailing rights and freedoms of citizens.

Whether or not these measures have led to an increase in safe-

ty – essentially their intended purpose – the question remains as to whether they have not done democracy more harm than good. Ignatieff is not an opponent of counter-terrorism. The formation of special units within the police to intervene is reasonable, Ignatieff feels, but the proper control of these units is crucial. This distinction is very important. Especially after the revelation that in the prisons of Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and Abu Ghraib in Iraq, many cases of mistreatment, torture and other human rights violations took place by the hand of American and British soldiers. In the event of a terrorist threat, citizens expect the government to take effective action against those responsible and complicit. At such junctures, the government undertakes measures in the interest of the safety of the majority of citizens. But within a democracy there are also limits to the power of the community over the individual.

In practice, democracies must not only consider the majority of the population, but each individual. This means that any measure that restricts certain rights and freedoms of minorities or individuals must be subject to review by the legislative and judiciary powers, and, Ignatieff explicitly adds, by the free press.[202] According to him, such exceptional measures are only acceptable if they are temporary, if they limit the damage as much as possible (hence 'the lesser evil') and if they are subject to critical supervision by an open democratic system. This position is in direct opposition to the American Patriot Act and British anti-terrorism legislation, under which suspects can be detained, without any specific charge levied against them, for an indefinite period of time, without legal assistance and without any form of trial. His position also implies that the collective detention and mass arrest of suspects is always wrong. Governments who implement such measures usually justify them with recourse to the 'state of emergency'. But for Ignatieff these actions can only be justified if they actually promote safety. For him, the executive power should behave like Odysseus, who ordered his crew to put beeswax in his ears and tie him to the mast as they passed the Sirens, so he could resist their seductive sounds.[203] A government must temper itself

as much as possible before submitting to the call of the majority to restrict the freedom of individuals, especially if this would be unnecessary.

Ignatieff is clearly not in favour of the use of force and condemns measures such as torture, illegal detention and illegal execution. Trials must be public; this is an essential feature of democracy. We must be careful not to squander, in the name of virtual security, the fundamental rights and freedoms for which our predecessors fought.

Quote

"In the tradition of liberal constitutionalism that descends from Locke, law's ultimate protection lay in morality, in the ability of citizens to rise to the defense of law when morality revealed law's exercise to be injust. Citizens, judges, and politicians all have moral responsibilities to protect a constitution when it is under attack."[204]

Literature

Michael Ignatieff, *The lesser evil: political ethics in an age of terror*, Princeton University Press, 2004

Michael Ignatieff, *Fire and Ashes: Success and Failure in Politics*, Harvard University Press, 2013

Michael Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World*, Harvard Unicersity Press, 2017

53

Irshad Manji

The Trouble with Islam
2004

Author

Irshad Manji (1968) is a Canadian writer, activist and lesbian feminist. Her mother's family comes from Egypt and her father's from India. She was born in Uganda. Under Idi Amin's rule, thousands of Muslims, including Manji, were forced to leave the country. She ended up in Canada, where she was raised and educated. She currently lives in Toronto. In 2004 she wrote the book *The Trouble with Islam*, garnering instant world fame and establishing herself as a critical voice regarding abuses in the Muslim world. She remains religious, but distances herself from the attitude of Taslima Nasrin, who 'adamantly believes that reform will only emerge when religion retreats', a view shared by many Western secular intellectuals.[205] Irshad Manji strives for liberal reform while preserving the Muslim identity.

Contents

Irshad Manji's *The Trouble with Islam* is a razor-sharp critique of Muslims who adopt the role of 'victim of the oppressive West' in order to cover up their own abuses. Manji writes a kind of open letter to the Muslim community in which she concludes that Is-

lam must reconcile itself with the diversity of beliefs and ideas in the world.

According to Manji, the Islamic world faces further hatred, violence, poverty and misunderstanding by others as a result of its oppression of women and religious minorities, anti-Semitism and the sense of superiority of many of its spiritual leaders. She argues that it must once again make way for free thinking and adapt to the twenty-first century. Manji juxtaposes the obscurantism and intolerance of radical Muslims, who base their actions on the 'unassailable truth' of the sacred texts, with the need for self-criticism on which renewal depends. Islam is the cornerstone of the identity of millions of people, including women. We simply have to change the way we deal with Islamic regulations, Manji maintains. The author calls herself a 'Muslim refusenik', borrowing a term from the Russian Jews who fought for decades for their religious and personal freedom.[206]

How can we accept practices such as honour killings, forced marriages, female circumcision, travel bans for women, chador and burka bans, the repression of religious minorities and even forms of slavery? Manji gives the example of lesbians in Iran, who are buried in the ground up to the neck and stoned by men and boys until death. As a lesbian herself, Manji responds by stating that Allah "makes excellent everything He creates". So why reject homosexuality? And why the hatred of women, Jews, Christians and non-believers? She focuses her attention not only on Muslims who interpret the Koran literally, but also on Muslims and multiculturalists in the West who remain silent about the many abuses they know are taking place in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Nigeria and other Muslim countries. It is not the West that keeps Muslims ignorant, she argues, but the Islamic countries themselves. "Is Islam the über-oppressor of creativity, dynamism and democracy?", Manji asks. "It would be too easy to just say no." No Arabian country has ever developed a state in which people are equal before the law. Dissenting opinions are seen as treachery. Innovations are suspicious and forbidden. Saudi Arabia has never signed the Declaration of Human

Rights and considers women to be inferior.

Manji hopes for a liberal reform of Islam that would result in every human being having the right to their individuality and no longer being regarded as common property. She asserts that the Koran can no longer be taken literally because human rights also apply to Muslims. She quotes Amin Maalouf, who said: "Traditions deserve to be respected only insofar as they are respectable – that is, exactly insofar as they themselves respect the fundamental rights of men and women."[207] At the same time, Europe must come to understand that Muslims can become integrated citizens, Manji asserts, admonishing all those who refuse to accept peaceful Muslims as equal citizens in our society. *The Problem with Islam* is a strong plea for liberal changes to be made in the Muslim world.

Quote

"Instigating change means not taking the Quran literally, and also not taking multiculturalism literally."[208]

Literature

Irshad Manji, *The Trouble with Islam Today. A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith*, St. Martin's Griffin, 2005
Irshad Manji, Allah, *Liberty and Love*, Free Press, 2011

54

Martha Nussbaum

Frontiers of Justice
2006

Author

Martha Nussbaum (1947) is a professor of Philosophy of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago and one of the most influential American philosophers of our time. She worked with Amartya Sen on the theoretical and practical '*capability approach*' to fundamental justice. Despite her admiration for the work of John Rawls, she strongly criticises his theory of justice as described in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). She has written numerous works on the relationship between philosophy and literature, human emotions, feminism, social justice and world citizenship. Her work has a great influence on contemporary liberal thinking.

Contents

In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006), Martha Nussbaum seeks out clarity regarding certain concepts of social justice. Her search is mounted based on three urgent issues: improving the position of people with physical and mental disabilities, guaranteeing a dignified life for all world citizens, and recognising the rights of animals.

These are three particularly difficult subjects that are often approached from either a utilitarian or a paternalistic standpoint, where the people and other living beings involved are regarded ei-

ther as having a certain utility value or as warranting benevolence and compassion, respectively. Nussbaum did not choose these subjects at random; they serve to test the soundness of her capability approach. Although she dedicates her book to the memory of John Rawls and acknowledges the great merits of the theories of justice in the tradition of the social contract – the most powerful theories we know today, according to the author – they do not offer adequate solutions to the three problems mentioned above. For Nussbaum, the central starting point is the Kantian idea that every human being is an end in itself and not a means to an end. As such, she clearly positions herself within the sphere of classical liberal thinking and therefore in opposition to socialist ideas on the subject. For her, it is not the group that is the primary subject of political justice, but the individual. "Moreover, my version of the capability approach has long asserted a basic principle of each person as end: in other words, the person, not the group, is the primary subject of political justice, and policies that improve the lot of a group are to be rejected unless they deliver the central capabilities to each and every person," she writes.[209]

This doesn't mean she understands freedom to be absolute. Some freedoms are important to her, but others are not – some are even harmful, such as the freedom to pollute the environment. Moreover, she rejects any overly one-sided fixation on negative liberties, as in the United States, and argues that all the rights that people enjoy must depend on active state intervention (for example, that the freedom of opinion requires education). In her capability approach, freedom implies that people are 'capable of doing something'; if they do not have certain capabilities, their freedom has not (yet) been achieved. The approach is based on ten minimum social rights that are essential for a life of dignity. In concrete terms, this concerns the following capabilities: to lead a human life of normal duration, to maintain good health, to be able to move freely, to exercise the mind, to connect with things and people outside of oneself, to form a conception of the good, to live among others without suffering discrimination, to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and nature, to

laugh and play, to be able to participate in political choices and to be able to acquire property.[210] Many would view this list as being theoretical, but this isn't quite the case.

In contrast to many forms of contract thinking, in which so much importance is attached to the procedure for arriving at a just society, here justice lies in the outcome, in the concrete realisation. And this outlook has significant consequences. It means that the community has to dedicate sufficient funds to making the previously mentioned capabilities feasible. In Frontiers of Justice, Nussbaum makes a plea for radical equality for people with disabilities, a full and meaningful life for all world citizens and rights for animals.

Quote

"They challenge us to produce a new form of liberalism, which rejects feudalism and hierarchy in an even more thoroughgoing way than classical liberalism did, rejecting the hierarchy between men and women in the family and the hierarchy, in all of society, between 'normal' and atypically disabled citizens."[211]

Literature

Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 2007

Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracies Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, 2010

Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Humane Development Approach*, Harvard University Press, 2013

Martha Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, Belknap Press, 2019

55

Anthony Kwame Appiah

Cosmopolitanism
2007

Author

Kwame Appiah (1954) is a Ghanaian-British philosopher who conducts research into politics, ethics and the philosophy of language. He has done pioneering work on the relationship between ethnic origin and society. In his work, he opposes all forms of racism. He gained world fame with his plea for cosmopolitanism in the book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2007). He now teaches at the University of Princeton. In 2012, Appiah received the *National Humanities Medal* from US President Barack Obama for his fight for universal human rights. In 2014 he published his book *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity*.

Contents

In *Cosmopolitanism*, Appiah searches for a model of ethics in a world of strangers. In his search, he advocates a humanist view of cultural preservation. Appiah takes the reader back to the fourth century BCE, when Greek thinkers took a sceptical view of traditions and customs and for the first time created the ideal of the world citizen.

The essence of cosmopolitanism is that we as humans have

obligations towards others, including those who are not among our immediate family or friends. Historically, cosmopolitanism has been in direct opposition to nationalism and patriotism. The author refers to the writer Lev Tolstoy, who said: "If we can eliminate patriotism, then we can eliminate war."[212] A notion that Appiah extrapolates to conclude that national borders are morally irrelevant. In this sense, the slogan eigen volk eerst ('our people first', used by the now-dissolved Flemish right-wing party Vlaams Blok the predecessor of Vlaams Belang) is an essential example of anti-cosmopolitanism. It is based on a notion of supposed superiority and assumes a substantial difference between one's 'own' people and 'others'. The slogan suggests that, as humans, we only have an obligation to those who belong to our historically formed family or community – to people who happen to have grown up in our vicinity or environment – and not to those outside of it. For Appiah it is clear: we, as humans, as cosmopolitans, have obligations to strangers.

In his last and most fascinating chapter he discusses these obligations. He refers to Adam Smith who, in his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), stated that people would be more concerned about the loss of their little finger than about the deaths of a hundred million strangers in a distant country: "We can't be intimate with billions; ergo, we can't make the cosmopolitan judgement."[213] A statement that seemed reasonable in the eighteenth century and even up until a few decades ago. However, the increase in information via satellite television and the internet has led us to become more and more involved in the suffering of people who would otherwise be out of sight and mind. It is precisely the awareness of abuses that increases our responsibility with regard to what is happening in the rest of the world. Appiah opposes the government policy of rich countries that, with their protectionism, keep other countries in poverty.

But the leaders of developing countries must also do their part. Like Amartya Sen, Appiah points out the essential importance of institutions and proper governance for the successful development of such countries. Unlike globalisation, cosmo-

politanism is an ethical attitude. It emphasises the connection of each individual to the rest of humanity; it is a form of world citizenship that emphasises the rights of the individual over those of a people, nation or community. In this sense, it is opposed to cultural relativism, which subordinates people to groups or communities, and to monoculturalism, which puts the preservation of one's own culture first. Cosmopolitanism is based on the idea that everyone is free in their own choice. It accepts no justification for infringing upon the rights or the will of the individual on the pretext of protecting group rights or safeguarding one's own culture.

Quote

"Cultures are made of continuities and changes, and the identity of a society can survive through these changes. Societies without change aren't authentic; they're just dead."[214]

Literature

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Penguin, 2007

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2011

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, Harvard University Press, 2014

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Paul Cliteur

Moreel Esperanto
Moral Esperanto
2007

Author

Paul Cliteur (1955) is a Dutch philosopher and professor of jurisprudence at the University of Leiden. He defends the values of the Enlightenment, such as freedom of expression, the separation of church and state, the right to self-determination and the equality of men and women. He is known as a staunch atheist who does not restrain from criticising the allegedly holy texts of the Bible and the Koran. Cliteur has a lot of influence on the liberal parties of the Netherlands and Flanders with regard to the integration of newcomers and the approach to religious radicalism. His published works include *Moreel Esperanto* ('Moral Esperanto', 2007), *The Secular Outlook: In Defence of Moral and Political Secularism* (2010), *Theoterrorism v. Freedom of Speech* (2019). In *The Secular Outlook*, Cliteur warns of the dark side of religion and makes a strong plea for an open society based on secular principles, in which the freedom of the individual is central.

Contents

In *Moral Esperanto*, Paul Cliteur opposes what he deems the overly tolerant attitude towards intolerant people in Dutch society. Our societies have become not only more multicultural, but a great

deal more multireligious. In recent years this has led to major problems, giving Cliteur reason to conclude that a basic consensus is urgently needed on a number of fundamental points. He makes an analogy with traffic laws, under which it is forbidden for motorists to drive through a red light and compulsory to observe the right-of-way rule. Similarly, he argues, a number of fundamental rights must also be accepted, such as freedom of expression, the separation of church and state and the equality of men and women. According to Cliteur, if we are to manage a multireligious society in the right way, we need to adopt a 'moral Esperanto', a language that everyone can understand and follow.[215] Many cultural relativists claim that the resurrection of religious fanaticism is due to social regression or other forms of marginalisation. But Cliteur points out that Mohammed Bouyeri, the murderer of Theo van Gogh, did not fit the bill. Nor was this explanation applicable, he argues, in the case of the hijackers of the airplanes on 11 September 2001 or the perpetrators of the attacks in London, who were well-educated and had every opportunity in Western society. For the murderer of Theo Van Gogh, this was a purely religious matter.

However, an autonomous code of ethics is not enough to ensure the harmonious coexistence of people with different cultural and religious beliefs. Equally important is to have a neutral government. Cliteur uses the French word *laïcité* to describe the desired nature of the state's authority, i.e. neutral with regard to religion. He refers to the initial ideas of the founding fathers of the United States who stressed the importance of a secular state in which citizens – even if they are of a minority – have individual rights and freedoms that cannot be constrained by religious provisions, customs and traditions. Religion is a private matter, Cliteur argues, that should not be funded by the community or be visibly present "in parts of the public domain where the state acts with a pretence of neutrality".[216] Here Cliteur is referring to the courts, the police, the army and official assemblies. He would like to see religion limited to the private sphere, arguing that if we want a harmonious society in which everyone can think and say

what they want, we need an 'autonomous ethics' and a 'neutral government'. According to Cliteur, this neutrality would mean "(a) not giving any religion an advantage over any other religion, and (b) not giving believers an advantage over non-believers, either".[217] According to the author, we need a 'moral Esperanto' as a beacon of light in these dark times of religious fanaticism and indifferent cultural relativism.

Cliteur has a significant influence on many contemporary thinkers who are aware that religion is on the rise again, potentially endangering the fundamental liberal values of the open society.

Quote

"Everyone is free to believe in witches, gnomes, elves, fairies, mermaids, love, the Absolute, the '*Ganz andere*' or in aliens. But when world leaders start wars based on messages they claim to have received from another planet, then you've got a serious problem on your hands."[218]

Literature

Paul Cliteur, *Moreel Esperanto* ('Moral Esperanto'), De Arbeiderspers, 2007

Paul Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook: In Defence of Moral and Political Secularism*, John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2010

Paul Cliteur, *Theoterrorism v. Freedom of Speech*, Amsterdam University Press, 2019

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Floris van den Berg

Filosofie voor een betere wereld
Philosophy for a Better World
2009

Author

Floris van den Berg (1973) is a Dutch philosopher, atheist and author of several books on human rights, secularism, education and animal rights. He was director of the organisation Center for Inquiry Low Countries, which advocates universal secular values. Together with his supporters he presented an atheistic message on a large billboard alongside the A4 motorway near Schiphol, which read (in Dutch): 'There is probably no god. Dare to think for yourself and enjoy this life!' With *Hoe komen we van religie af*? ('How do we get rid of religion?' 2009) he stimulated the debate on the role and impact of religion in society and the abolition of the blasphemy law in the Netherlands. Van den Berg is an ardent animal rights activist and the author of *De vrolijke veganist* ('The Happy Vegan', 2013). He actively promotes veganism, spurred by his humane and ethical principles.

Contents

In *Philosophy for a Better World* (2009), Van den Berg advocates for universal subjectivism as a means of reducing individual suffering and promoting happiness insofar as possible. His ultimate goal is highly ambitious. He seeks to make the world more pleas-

ant, just, beautiful, happy, healthy, free, animal-friendly, prosperous and sustainable. The author realises that this is asking a lot, but argues that his approach is the only possible way.

He is convinced that, in order to protect our world from an ecological nightmare, we must drastically change our lifestyles so as to avoid the repression and exploitation of living beings as much as possible. He prescribes urgent action and gives examples pertaining to various different contexts. The author's point of departure is the work of Jeremy Bentham, who held that nature had ensured that man lived under the control of two sovereign masters: pain and pleasure. It is a thesis that is also maintained by other philosophers, the difference being that they usually limit its scope to people of a certain nation or, at best, the global population. Floris van den Berg, however, goes much further and enlarges the moral circle to encompass all living beings – future generations included, for they too can suffer as a result of the actions we take today.

Van den Berg draws on Rawls' 'veil of ignorance' thought experiment. In it, people must attempt to imagine that they are on the cusp of being born into an unknown situation will they be rich or poor, black or white, male or female, young or old sick or healthy, heterosexual or homosexual? From this position of ignorance, they must determine how society should function. He asks the reader to consider whether they would swap their current position with the most disadvantaged person. If not, then they have a moral duty to improve the situation of that person. Here Van den Berg effectively extends personhood to all living beings that can feel pain, including future generations. Suppose you were a wheelchair user; you would certainly wish that public spaces were designed such that you can easily access buildings and shops. Suppose you were a woman in Saudi Arabia; you would want to have at least the same rights as men. As a homosexual person, you would wish for society to accept you as you are. As a coffee farmer in Ethiopia, you would want to get a fair price for your product.

"The point is that you should always be able to change places with someone else without anything changing morally," writes

Van den Berg.[219] Imagine you're a cow, he asks of the reader. Would you want to be bred in a cramped space, only to then be slaughtered and eaten? They who object to this on moral grounds – bearing in mind that animals also feel pain – can only draw one conclusion: that they must stop eating animals. Needless to say, the author is diametrically opposed to factory farming and the destruction of flora and fauna.

Which brings him to his final point: imagine being born 500 years from now. How would you want the world (and nature) to appear? In this way he extends the moral circle of humanity to include future generations, establishing clear link between liberalism and the ecological movement.

Quote

"If people are convinced (which they are not) that it is an ethical necessity to take account of the interests of future generations, the lifestyle of present generations should be sustainable rather that exploitative."[220]

Literature

Floris van den Berg, *Philosophy for a Better World*, Prometheus Books, 2013

Floris van den Berg, *Hoe komen we van religie af?*, Houtekiet / Atlas, 2009

Floris van den Berg, *De vrolijke veganist*, Houtekiet, 2013

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Alicja Gescinska

De verovering van de vrijheid
The Conquest of Freedom
2011

Author

Alicja Gescinska (1981) is a Polish-Belgian philosopher. Up until the age of seven she lived in the former communist Poland, where she grew up together with her parents and two sisters in a small apartment of four square metres. The family longed for the West and managed to flee to Belgium. Soon little Alicia felt a form of Ostalgie (nostalgia for the time before the fall of the Berlin Wall). She noticed that the much-vaunted freedom in the West was not all it was cracked up to be. What good are toy stores if you don't have the money to buy a doll? And what if, as a human being, you are unable or ill-prepared to use your abilities? In 2012 she attained her doctorate in Philosophy with the dissertation *Freedom and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Meaning of Human Agency in the Thought of Max Scheler and Karol Wojtyla*.

Contents

In her book *De verovering van de vrijheid* ('The Conquest of Freedom', 2011), Alicja Gescinska argues passionately and formidably for the positive liberty she considers necessary in order to lead a dignified and, above all, meaningful life.

Of course, people must first be in a position to develop and use their abilities, their talents. Poverty, for example, poses a real restriction of freedom in this respect, as Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum point out. "Consequently, they are only really free who possess the capability to make choices in line with their moral being, such that in their own actions they realise universal human values," according to Gescinska.[221] Negative liberty alone is not enough to be truly free. "Freedom always revolves around what a person is capable of," writes the author. "It is in the transition from what is to what could be that a person achieves self-realisation, conquers their freedom and gives meaning to their existence."[222] Central to her conclusion is the notion that humankind seeks 'not freedom but security'. This points to the conservatism of people who, in a certain way, are afraid of freedom. In this sense, for a great many people, negative liberty poses a threat. It is as if you would say to someone in the middle of a desert: "You are free." This is not a great deal of use without food, water or a compass to guide them. Absolute freedom is, as such, a fallacy.

According to Gescinska, education and training are therefore crucial. We must teach our children to use their freedoms effectively. "The big issue with negative liberty is its moral indifference," she writes.[223] "Negative liberty doesn't care whether someone does good or evil, whether they lead a masterful or failed life, so long as they do it in freedom and don't hinder others too much in doing the same. In this way the free space of negative liberty is synonymous with indifference and non-committance."[224] Yes, you have space to be free, but what happens within that space is apparently of no consequence. What use is it to the poor to have the freedom to eat what they want, if they have no means of purchasing food? What use is it to the illiterate to be free to read what they want? In this sense, freedom is always, as Gescinka says, 'a restricted freedom'. In this regard she agrees with the nineteenth-century French politician Henri Lacordaire: "Between the strong and the weak, between the rich and the poor, between the master and the servant, it is freedom that oppresses and the law which frees."

Blind trust in freedom usually leads to the freedom of the strongest being to the disadvantage of the weakest. The freedom of the stork is the death of the toad. This kind of 'freedom' leads to oppression and only its curtailment by laws can guarantee true freedom for many more people, especially the weakest. In this light, compulsory education and even compulsory voting are not obstacles to freedom, but gateways.

Those who do not make the vulnerable resilient, who do not offer them education, opportunities, care and protection, create a dual society comprised of a small group of 'free people' and a much larger group of 'unfree people'. In this way the free members of society would enjoy a privilege over the rest. And privilege can never be the foundation for a moral society. We are therefore obligated to commandeer freedom from those who abuse their power to keep people unfree.

Quote

"Far beyond the moral indifference of negative liberty and far removed from totalitarian oppression, are positive liberty and the conviction that we are freer the better, more meaningful and happy the lives we lead. That, despite and also thanks to everything, it's worth all the effort."[225]

Literature

Alicja Gescinska, *De verovering van de vrijheid* ('The Conquest of Liberty'), Lemniscaat, 2011

Alicja Gescinska, *Freedom and Persons: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Meaning of Human Agency in the Thought of Max Scheler and Karol Wojtyła*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Ghent, 2012

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Edmund Fawcett

Liberalism: The Life of an Idea
2011

Author

Edmund Fawcett (1946) is a British author and political journalist. Fawcett is the son of the human rights lawyer and professor of international law James Fawcett. He worked for many years as *The Economist*'s chief correspondent in Brussels, Paris, Berlin and Washington and wrote many articles on topics such as democratisation in Spain, Portugal and Greece, the end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany and the rise of Reaganism in the United States. In 1982, together with journalist Tony Thomas, he published *The American Condition*. He also wrote many texts for *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Guardian*. In 2014 his widely acclaimed book *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* was published, exploring the impact of liberal ideas on Western history over the past two hundred years.

Contents

Fawcett paints a fascinating picture of the rise and success of liberal thinking in Western society, despite a great deal of opposition. In the eighteenth century, despots, clergymen and nobility rejected liberal ideas, fearing the endangerment of their privileges. In the nineteenth century there was a general aversion to con-

servative and socialist groups. In the twentieth century, marked by the rise of totalitarian ideologies such as communism and fascism, liberalism threatened to disappear completely. Only after the war did liberalism make a huge comeback.

"Liberals believe in liberty. Indeed, they do. But so do most nonliberals," Fawcett claims.[226] How does liberalism differ from other ideologies? Liberals want to realize freedom in all areas of social life for individuals and not only for specific groups or peoples. Freedom in the field of ethics, independent of any divine authority. Social freedom, eschewing privileges and hierarchies. Freedom on an economic level, without state intervention, monopolies and protectionism. Freedom on a political level, without authoritarianism and absolutism. Fawcett himself does not give a fixed definition of liberalism, but identifies four characteristics: awareness of the constant conflict of ideas within a society, belief in human progress, respect for every person and their ideas, and a distrust of the concentration of power. "Liberalism is a practice of politics for people who will not be bossed about or pushed around by superior power, whether the power of the state, the power of wealth or the power of society."[227]

However, things started to go awry in the 1980s with the rise of a neoliberal orthodoxy. "Heedless deregulation, narrow market reasoning, and blind faith in the self-correcting power of markets had badly overreached," as we saw during the banking crisis in 2008. Today, despite the enormous successes achieved, liberalism is again under pressure. From libertarians, anti-globalists, nationalists, populists and extreme Islamists who reject the Enlightenment ideals. "Illiberal responses are visible on the far right across Europe, including Britain, and among Republicans in the United States."[228]

Fawcett realises that liberalism has lost its way. That does not alter the fact that liberalism is needed more than ever to solve the current problems. The liberal answer is in the universality of its ideas. If we want to have it better ourselves, then everyone must have it better. If we want more justice, then we must combat any form of injustice. If we want to honestly claim our right to self-

determination, we must stand up for the millions of people who can only dream of it. Liberalism is more than just an economic doctrine. It only has a future if it continues to defend the Enlightenment ideals in full. Our ancestors fought for freedom of belief and expression, for the possibility to climb the career ladder, for democracy and the right to self-determination. At the same time, liberals realise that they must put their hearts and souls into helping those who are struggling with unavoidable setbacks, such as those who are unemployed, poor, sick, retired or disabled.

Fawcett regularly refers to the work of John Stuart Mill, William Beveridge, Isaiah Berlin, Karl Popper and John Rawls. In an interview in *Prospect* from 2014, Fawcett describes himself as a 'left-liberal or liberal leftist'.

Quote

"Liberalism makes sense as a political practice, but becomes fragmented and hard to account for when taken for a doctrine in economics or a branch of moral philosophy, let alone when confused with evolutionary biology."[229]

Literature

Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism. The Life of an Idea*, Princeton University Press, 2014

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Johan Norberg

Progress
2017

Author

Johan Norberg (1973) is a Swedish author who studied Philosophy and Political Science. He maintained an anarchistic point of view before going down the road of liberalism. In 2002 he made an argument against anti-capitalism and for free trade with his book In *Defence of Global Capitalism*. A year later the British broadcaster Channel 4 made a television documentary based on his book. Since 2006 he has been a senior fellow at the Centre for a New Europe and a fellow at the Cato Institute. He is critical of the 'Swedish model' and defends the ideas of Milton and Rose Friedman, who outlined the harmful consequences of excessive government intervention. Norberg also signals the problem of unemployment among many immigrants, which in his country comes partly as a result of strict employment regulations.

Contents

A wave of fear and insecurity has swept through Western societies, fuelled by the worrisome reports we watch and read on a daily basis, which tell of terrorist attacks, globalisation, ecological disaster, the banking crisis, the Euro crisis, mass migration,

the influx of refugees, the closure and offshoring of big companies and so on. Populist, nationalist and extreme-right parties and politicians are on the rise. They plead for a strong, renewed nation state (think Brexit), protectionism, the closing of borders, the expulsion of foreigners. They adopt a remarkably pessimistic discourse and argue for a return to the past, to a time when, according to them, everything was much better. This pessimism manifests itself in an outright rejection of modernity and progress.

The book *Progress*, by the Swedish writer and liberal activist Johan Norberg, swims against this tide of pessimism and gloom. Norberg's message is radically positive and for many people counter-intuitive. As a species, Homo sapiens has made more progress in the past 100 years than in the first 100,000 years of human history. Over the past 25 years, 285,000 people have gained ready access to safe water. Over the past 50 years, world poverty has declined more than in the previous 500 years. However you measure it, almost everything is better than it has ever been since time immemorial. 'The good old times are now,' says Norberg, asking the reader to imagine being born about 200 years ago, in a world 'without medicines and antibiotics, safe water, sufficient food, electricity or sanitary systems.'[230]

Using figures, graphs and statistics, Norberg shows that we are making progress in every conceivable area. 'Poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, child labour and infant mortality are falling faster than at any other time in human history.'[231] Wars, crimes and acts of violence, too, are on the decline. According to the author, we are reaping the benefits of progress at an increasingly rapid pace. Thomas Malthus portended that mankind was doomed to famine. He underestimated 'its [humans] ability to innovate, solve problems, and change its ways,' writes Norberg.[232] The invention of artificial fertilisers, the expansion of trade, the ability to refrigerate and transport food and the granting of property rights to farmers were all incentives that would lead to higher productivity.

According to Norberg, democracy and human freedom were crucial in the centuries-long fight against hunger. He refers to

Amartya Sen, who observed that famines never occurred in democracies, but did occur in communist countries such as China. It was only in the 1970s and 80s, when Chinese farmers began to turn away from stifling collectivism and started working for their own benefit, that their profits increased and food shortages were no longer an issue. 'The freedom to choose one's work, and to reap the rewards, made all the difference,' Norberg writes.[233] Freedom is the motor of progress.

Norberg's book is a balm in these pessimistic times. With an infectious enthusiasm, he puts forth an arsenal of arguments emphasising that things are improving, further progress is possible and freedom is the decisive factor in this development.

Quote

"Progress started with the intellectual Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when we began to examine the world with the tools of empiricism, rather than being content with authorities, traditions and superstition. Its political corollary, classical liberalism, began to liberate people from the shackles of heredity, authoritarianism and serfdom."[234]

Literature

Johan Norberg, *Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forword to the Future*, Oneworld Publications, 2017

Johan Norberg, *In Defense of Global Capitalism*, Timbro, 2011

Johan Norberg, *Financial Fiasco: How America's Infatuation With Homeownership and Easy Money Created the Financial Crisis*, Cato Institute, 2012

The Foundations of Liberalism

This essay is essentially a compilation of the various standpoints broached in this book, reforged into one coherent whole. In it I would like to focus on the views that unite liberals, drawing on those of the classical and contemporary liberal thinkers discussed above. Consider it a personal vision of the essence of liberal ideology. At the core of liberalism is individualism and, in particular, the right of all individuals to self-determination. "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."[235] All people, regardless of their geographical origin, gender, religion, race or nationality, have the right to pursue their own path in life. No one can decide on behalf of another how to live, who to make friends with, which faith or set of beliefs to follow, whether or not to marry, whether or not to have children, which profession to practice, where to settle, which agreements to make with others, which choices to make in life or which actions to take. "That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[236] Freedom does not equate to lawlessness, however. "But though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of licence; though man in that state have an uncontrollable liberty to dispose of his person or possessions yet he has not liberty to destroy himself, or so much as any creature in his possession, but where some nobler use than its bare preservation calls for it. The state of Nature has a law of Nature to govern it,

which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions."[237]

The right to self-determination applies to every human being. The only exceptions are children, people with intellectual disabilities and people with dementia. The first group must be educated to become critical citizens capable of making their own choices. Under no circumstances should parents and educators carry out actions that would irrevocably restrict a child's free will in the future. People with intellectual disabilities and people with dementia must be guaranteed the most dignified existence possible and, where applicable, be treated as indicated in their will. Where the latter does not apply, such people must be helped to lead a life in which their human capacities are given every possibility to flourish, just as we would want for ourselves. Anyone with normal intellectual abilities must be able to judge, choose and decide for themselves.

The transition to adulthood is a crucial juncture in life. When adulthood is reached, the individual must stand on their own two feet and be responsible for every choice they make. From this point on, every human being has the freedom to do whatever they want, as long as they do not harm others or society. Human freedom is not to be equated with indifference or irresponsible behaviour that does not take into account the (legitimate) interests of one's fellow human beings. People do not live in a vacuum; they are part of a family, a neighbourhood, a city, a community, the world. And, whether they like it or not, they have various duties with regard to their fellow humans.

For example, they must provide help and support in times of need and, if necessary, significantly restrict their own freedom so as not to deprive others. Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative states every human being must act according to the maxim that

they would wish to become universal law. Freedom does not include the right to definitively waive one's own freedom. Adults do however have the choice of waiving their freedom insofar as they can still withdraw from this decision. In light of this, suicide is generally a problematic issue for liberals. Nevertheless, a person of sound mind may choose death if they have serious cause to believe that they can no longer live in dignity...

"The state does not have the right to interfere with the private life of citizens, as long as they respect the rights of others."[238] This one sentence summarises the essence of the concept of privacy. The number of government interventions, rules and regulations concerning the behaviour of citizens has increased enormously. This is a logical development, given that society, too, has become increasingly complex. In recent decades, however, the influx of restrictive measures has started to affect the privacy of the individual very directly. The application of new technologies creates not only a sense of oppression, but an ever-increasing lack of freedom in our actions. The fact that governments, companies and advertisers know more and more about our personal preferences and actions is a mounting problem. It is no longer a shadowy intrusion upon our private affairs, but a shocking, outright dismantling of our privacy that we do not contemplate as much as we ought to. Privacy implies a free and unbound way of life. A way of life that should always be respected, as long as the freedom and integrity of others is not violated. The growing number of control mechanisms now in place force us to conform and preemptively defend ourselves against the moral indignation of others. In this way freedom is becoming artificial. It is turning into a matter of conditioning and submission. And it is leading to a society of suspicion and distrust. New laws and rules should always include the necessary safeguards for the protection of privacy. The duration of counter-terrorist measures should be limited and subject, from the offset, to regular evaluation regarding their usefulness (cf. Michael Ignatieff).

Every human being is born with the natural right to freedom, but also with duties towards others and society. Those who want to be free must follow certain societal obligations, and those who follow societal developments are thus positioned to assert their individual freedom. There is no absolute freedom that exists separately from the society where one belongs or operates. The absolute freedom of one individual would inevitably lead to the compromised freedom of another. Consequently, the pursuit of the greatest possible freedom is not feasible for each individual. One's freedom is inextricably linked with one's duties towards their fellow human beings. "A person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury."[239] Individualism and solidarity are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the autonomy and the will of the individual are preconditional to true solidarity. And solidarity is needed, in turn, to provide opportunities to those who are not self-reliant. Autonomy means recognising the autonomy of others and helping them to be autonomous if, for whatever reason, they are unable to be so by themselves. It is for this reason that a quality education is so essential in passing down knowledge to children and raising them to become critically-minded citizens. That is also why we need a strong social security system to enable seniors, people suffering illness and people with disabilities to shape their lives, too. We must therefore encourage enterprising behaviour in order to enable to people to earn an income and give meaning to their existence. After all, having a job is "fundamental to human dignity, to our sense of self-worth as useful, independent, free people," as Bill Clinton wrote.[240] This is why our environment must be protected, in order to safeguard future generations' right to self-determination.

Our individual freedom goes hand in hand with our responsibility towards others. The duty to care for others is unconditional and does not expire because someone cannot claim a right to other people's help. This refers to the personal responsibility of each individual in their dealings with others and with society, and

thus their inner capacity to set limits to their own freedom. Every action, every attitude of human beings with respect to themselves and others should be based on the principle that this action does not limit their own human capabilities, nor does it compromise the dignity and integrity of others. No action can be ethical if it negatively affects the integrity of others. Freedom and ethics can only exist if the individual realises that they are neither superior or inferior to any other human being. Furthermore, every individual must realise that their life is only made possible thanks to others and thanks to the diversity of the biosphere, with all its plants, animals and raw materials. Consequently, we should be modest enough to recognise that we have the unimaginable opportunity to realise that which other living beings are unable to achieve.

According to Amartya Sen, membership of a group may be important, but even more important is the right of every human being to determine their own identity.[241] The emphasis here is on the fact that groups are comprised of individuals. Every human being is unique and has multiple partial identities. It is the free choice of each individual to give priority to the identities they choose. No one has the right to reduce a person to a single identity. Liberalism considers every human being to be equal. No man or nation is set apart from the rest and no one is born 'better' than anyone else. As Kant asserted, each man is an end in himself by virtue of his will, which is the basis of human dignity. Liberalism attaches central importance to the individual and not to the community nor, for that matter, any group, faith, people or race. There are no favoured origins, no birthrights or nepotism in liberalism. The only thing that matters is the talent and efforts of the individual, their capacity to progress. Liberalism advocates a meritocratic society, where everyone can lead a dignified life. It is one's future, not one's origin, that matters. Liberals do not seek out a common past, but a new, shared future. In this sense, liberals reject any form of superiority based on nationality, faith or lineage.

For liberals, social mobility of crucial importance. It cannot be accepted that certain people receive fewer opportunities to get ahead in life due to their birth, social background, gender, nationality or other external factors. Everyone must receive equal opportunities for self-development. Freedom is an empty concept if people do not have the means and structures to implement that freedom. This 'capability approach' is the only way to achieve fundamental justice. Having 'capabilities', in the sense of possibilities, is essential to leading a dignified life. A society that cannot guarantee its citizens these rights and freedoms to a certain appropriate threshold level is lacking and cannot be considered a completely just society. Specifically, this concerns the capability to live a human life of normal duration, maintaining good health, being able to move freely, to exercise one's mind, develop attachments to things and people outside of oneself, to form a concept of good, to live with and care for others without fearing discrimination, to care for and live in relation to animals and nature, to laugh and to play, to be able to participate in political choices and to be able to acquire property.[242] This is not an exhaustive list by any means.

Parents have a duty to educate their children so that they acquire the basic skills necessary to live harmoniously with others. Primarily, they should be taught to communicate through language, to show respect for senior generations, to protect the young and vulnerable, to share food and to able to distinguish between good and evil. Under no circumstances should a child's upbringing result in them no longer being able to make free choices at a later date. If parents fail to respect this obligation, the government must intervene in the matter, in the first instance by providing parents with sufficient support in their parenting duties. In this support, the parents must ultimately be recognised as having principal responsibility for upbringing of their children. It is only in exceptional cases that authorities can exercise force and intervene in the family's situation without the parents' consent. For example, parents should be forced to have their child vaccinated

or undergo a blood transfusion if this is necessary to safeguard the child's life and well-being, even if the parents have cultural or religious objections to this. In the same vein, parents should, in principle, be prohibited from having their children circumcised, even if their culture or religion imposes this as a custom.

Every child has the right to free public education. The aim of education must be to provide children with the knowledge and social skills to enable them to make their own choices later on in a critically rational manner. Education must be aimed at the emancipation of every human being and at teaching young people the values essential for their later participation in a democratic society. In this sense, liberals are reluctant to accept schools that produce 'believers' rather than critical citizens. Liberals find it unacceptable that the acquisition of knowledge should be hindered by certain cultural or religious commandments and prohibitions. The Enlightenment must be spread further, including through education, especially in those communities where any form of criticism and self-criticism is nipped in the bud.

The democratisation of education is and will remain an ongoing process. It is the most efficient means of giving children the opportunity to develop their talents and acquire a place in society that aligns with their capabilities, regardless of their social class. The ultimate goal in raising and educating children is to train them to become morally responsible persons who command their rational abilities to their fullest potential, both in their own lives and in their relationships with others in society. "To be free is to free ourselves from our ignorance, from our determination – molded by our genes and our social environment –, from the instinctive lusts and urges that we learn to control in the practice of living together (...) Freedom is the conquest of autonomy through education and upbringing that get us used to making choices and looking for innovations that are only possible in the community."[243]

Liberalism seeks to stimulate the process of emancipation and progress. By promoting education, culture, scientific research, communication, literature and music. By allowing each and every child to draw from the enormous treasure trove of wisdom and knowledge we have gained over the course of history and thus to give them the freedom to develop into critical, inventive and future-focused adults. Knowledge transfer is necessary for freedom. The government can help with this, not by linking thought and action to some preconceived vision, but by creating a framework within which people can reach their full potential. Hence the need for education and a proper upbringing, hence the importance of contemporary art, tolerance towards those who think differently, interest in foreign cultures and hence the need to break down borders. In this way, we can elevate ourselves and thus the whole of mankind to be truly civilised. Progress is needed to remove the various obstacles and diseases that hinder the right to self-determination. Liberals support all progress as long as human integrity, quality of life, biodiversity and the environment are not negatively affected. To make true progress, the positive developments made over the course of history for the benefit of humankind and human rights must be shared with the millions of people who do not yet benefit from them as much as others, if at all.

The values that the Enlightenment has given us are freedom of expression, the separation of church and state, the equality of every human being (and of men and women in particular) and the right to self-determination. We must continue to promote these values, to defend them and pass them on to new generations.

Liberals defend the rule of law and the separation of powers as conceived by Montesquieu. There is no freedom if the judiciary is not separate from the legislative and executive powers. If the judiciary and the legislature were merged, the power over life and death and the freedom of the citizens would have been surrendered to arbitrariness, because the judge would then also be a

legislator. Were the judiciary and the executive powers made one, the judge would have the power to oppress.[244] People are entitled to a humane criminal justice system such as that conceived by Cesare Beccaria, which put an end to the arbitrariness of the judiciary, the abuse of power and the religious dogmas that were characteristic of the Ancien Régime. Nulla poena sine lege ('no penalty without a law'), everyone is equal before the law, torture is forbidden, trials must take place in public, penalties must be in proportion to the offence committed, anonymous accusations are not allowed, the death penalty is not allowed, prisons must be humane and punishments should not serve the purpose of revenge.[245] These are clear principles that form the basis for a humane, civilised and just society.

All are free to believe what they want. Faith is a private matter and no person has the right to coerce another into a particular belief or doubt. Likewise, all are free to abandon or change their beliefs and to criticise any other belief. All beliefs are equally valid, as long as they do not incite violence or oppression. All beliefs, be they religious, political or social, may be criticised freely. This in turn obligates governments to take a neutral stance and their representatives to withhold from claiming the superiority of their particular convictions or religions. Similarly, government officials should dress in a strictly neutral manner and conspicuous religious symbols should be excluded from public buildings. The same applies to teachers and students in schools, which are, after all, the place where young people are supposed to be taught the equality of men and women and the separation of religion and state. Finally, religions and worldviews should no longer be publicly funded.

As far as the economy is concerned, liberalism advocates free initiative, private property rights, free trade and free competition. However, one's social and economic freedom does not extend to the point that it may hinder the self-determination of another. A truly free market does not tolerate excessive state intervention

or protectionism, nor does it allow market restriction or distortion, such as by the formation of trusts, cartels or monopolies. Governments should ensure the safeguarding of transparency and the prevention of market concentration – two important pillars of the free market. When it comes to freedom of transaction, the most important guarantee is that people can buy, sell and exchange their possessions or earnings and thus build up a certain degree of socioeconomic security. "Any theory or action that would restrict or restrict free trade goes against human nature and causes more harm than good, both for the individual and for the collective wealth of a society. The rejection of the freedom to participate in the labour market is one of the ways of keeping people in bondage and captivity," writes Amartya Sen.[246] Self-interest is the main engine for economic development, prosperity and employment. It ensures that people respond to real needs and undertake initiatives for their own benefit and for the benefit of society as a whole. Essential for liberalism is that democracy and the market economy function in a just manner and that their most severe effects are ameliorated, by state intervention if need be.

Liberalism advocates for a free market, protected by a rule of law, that operates within an ethical framework, because, left to itself, the free market is merely a caricature of liberalism and risks becoming an unfree market. Today's globalised trade is increasingly escaping the democratic control of the existing states. In a world without any actual borders, multinational companies have free rein, with all the social, ecological and societal consequences that this entails. Politics must maintain a grip on the market or else citizens – as consumers, as producers or simply as people – will be left behind and their rights and freedoms will be increasingly eroded. The government must create the framework within which this free market can operate, both nationally and internationally, by imposing and monitoring a number of minimum rules relating to competitiveness, as well as safety, health, social and ecological factors. The government itself must not become an economic

actor, except for "erecting and maintaining those public institutions and those public works, which, though they may be in the highest degree advantageous to a great society, are, however, of such a nature that the profit could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, and which it therefore cannot be expected that any individual or small number of individuals should erect or maintain," according to Adam Smith.[247]

"The system of private property is the most important guarantee of freedom," wrote Friedrich von Hayek.[248] Our civilisation would never have come so far without property and property rights. Without them, we would never have developed and implemented the innovations that afford us greater prosperity and well-being today. Such as better and safer transport, increased food production, better accommodation, medicines to combat illness, and all manner of leisure activities. Any form of prohibition of ownership or property is inhumane. The only exceptions are those material things that are of such importance to society, the environment and biodiversity that they must not fall into private hands, nor be exploited for self-interest or in the name of the so-called public interest. Not by any individual or government. The right to property is a central principle in liberal ideology and its absence is a contributing cause of poverty in many countries of the world. Many poor people are in fact very productive and have a number of possessions but lack formal ownership of them. "The major stumbling block that keeps the rest of the world from benefiting from capitalism is its inability to produce capital," says Hernando de Soto, referring to the lack of property rights among the world's poor.[249]

Liberalism is based on cosmopolitanism. The essence of cosmopolitanism is the recognition of our responsibility towards every human being. "We have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties if kith and kind, or even the more moral ties of a shared citizenship."[250] This relates to the connection of each individual with all others

across the globe, a form of world citizenship, where the emphasis is on the rights of the individual, not those of any particular people, nation or community. Cosmopolitanism is based on the idea that everyone is free in their own choice. It accepts no justification for undermining the rights or the will of the individual on the pretext of protecting group rights or safeguarding one's own culture. Liberals must continue to promote the ideals of the Enlightenment and make them universally applicable. Cultures are not equal. "The relativism that holds all moral values to be created equal is a short step from the nihilism that holds all talk of values to be superfluous," Susan Neiman observes.[251] Cultures that disregard fundamental liberal principles and human rights must be opposed, with words and economic pressure if possible, with force if necessary. Karl Popper put it as follows: "If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them."[252] Tolerance of thoughts, writings and other forms of expression is necessary. But as soon as actions follows words, a society must protect itself by having independent judges adjudicate the possible impact of such actions on its democratic foundations and on the universal rights and freedoms of the individual. Liberals have great confidence in the future. The ultimate goal is the freedom of all the people of the world. 'Nobody can be free as long as they are not all,' Erich Mühsam asserted.[253] A freedom that excludes certain people is not a freedom but a privilege and a privilege can never be the moral foundation of a free and just world. Liberals realise that this goal of freeing everyone is utopian and will never be fully achieved. The fight against the restriction of freedom has always been and will always be a reality. As such, it can know no end point in history. In any case, we must not look back and remain indifferent to the suffering in the world. "We can return to the beasts. But if we wish to remain human, then there is only one way, the way into the open society. We must go on into the unknown, courageously, using what reason we have, to plan for security and freedom. (...) Neither nature nor history

can tell us what we ought to do. Facts, whether those of nature or those of history, cannot make the decision for us, they cannot determine the ends we are going to choose. It is we who introduce purpose and meaning into nature and into history. Men are not equal; but we can decide to fight for equal rights. Human institutions such as the state are not rational, but we can decide to fight to make them more rational," said Popper.[254]

All these elements make liberalism unique as an ideology. Unlike others, its emphasis is on the individual and not any particular group. Liberalism is not intended to appeal to a particular class, nation, creed or race, but to all who, as individuals, aspire to a dignified existence in their own right. A liberal does not fear the changing world, but understands the need to adapt to it. A liberal has an optimistic view of the world and believes in the perfectibility of humankind. Not that we will ever realise the perfect world. In fact, so-called utopias have all too often led people into a hellish existence. The point is rather to strive towards improvement every day, with the power of our conviction that together we can make things better than they have ever been before.

How can liberals achieve more freedom, self-determination, justice, security and prosperity for all people? Are the challenges not too great? I do not believe so. In the past, through the power of conviction and together with other progressive and democratic parties and organisations, liberals have abolished slavery, banned the caste system in India, abolished the apartheid system in South Africa, granted women equal rights, ushered in acceptance for people with a different sexual orientation, broken down walls, created prosperity and reduced poverty. These are impressive results, and we can continue to achieve such feats in the future. What matters is self-confidence. According to Alan Wolfe, "the challenge that liberalism faces in the future is not to beat its rivals. Because of modernity it has already done that. The biggest challenge is to make liberals believe in liberalism again. They did that once, and it was then that they achieved great results by

overcoming economic catastrophes, building society, promoting equality of income, gender and race, and confronting their enemies with confidence".[255]

This self-confidence must encourage us to continue to defend liberal democracy with more power than before as the best model of society in the world. After all, the culture in which liberal democracy exists is superior to cultures that do not have a liberal democracy. According to Fernando Savater, it is a postmodern delusion that we cannot and should not compare cultures.[256] To paraphrase him, is a culture in which religions can co-exist peacefully not better than those in which they cannot? Is a culture not improved where women have equal rights, where one can marry the person one chooses, where political leaders can be unseated in a non-violent manner through free elections, where there is freedom of expression, where justice and solidarity exist, where there is concern for the environment and thus the interests of future generations, where our rights and freedoms are safeguarded, where the judiciary functions independently, where human integrity is inviolable, in short, where human rights are respected? Liberalism puts people first, above all else. Not profit, not the economy, not the market, not the state, not belief, not a certain people or race. Only people and their freedom to make their own choices. We need a more offensive liberalism. We cannot let ourselves be browbeaten by those who would abuse liberalism. We must reclaim the concept of liberalism and use it with every political choice that is made. We must always ask the question: "Does this particular measure lead to more freedom, to more emancipation, to more opportunities for the individual to give substance to their life's purpose, to more prosperity for people not only in our immediate surroundings but in other parts of the world?" If the answer is yes, then we must fight doggedly to have it instated. If the answer is no, then we must show our concern and convince the proponent of this measure that a liberal democracy is the most humane system possible.

Rather than keeping us in shackles, liberalism allows us to build a more liveable, free and just world for ourselves and others. Liberalism aims to achieve the greatest possible freedom, which is undoubtedly the most strived-for ambition of every human being, a condition difficult to define yet still conspicuous, especially in its absence. Primo Levi, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and many others understood this. As Mario Vargas Llosa wrote: "Like love, freedom is a rich experience that cannot be captured in a definition. But as impossible as it is to define her, it is as simple as identifying her, realising when she is there, whether she is real or false and whether we enjoy or lack her."[257]

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Dirk Verhofstadt (1955) is a Belgian political philosopher, publicist and professor Media & Ethics (Ghent University). He has written several books on the history of liberalism.

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