Freedom as Creativity: On the Origin of the Positive Concept of Liberty

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The concept of positive liberty includes both the regulative autonomy to do what we will and the constitutive autonomy to become what we will. However, the latter represents the full meaning of the idea. Liberty in this meaning is a creative power: we are most free in the positive sense when we give our defining constitutive rules to ourselves. The original conceptual model for liberty as creativity did not belong to classical Greek tradition but came to us from Judaism. The religious idea of spontaneous, supra-natural, existential self-sufficiency provided the template for the idea of positive liberty, often described explicitly as a god-like power, by writers including Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Marx. The value of creativity became secularized in modernity as a core belief in politics, morality and the arts.

Introduction

One of the challenges in understanding our own ideas is the difficulty of achieving distance, as it were, from our own views. The difficulty may be expressed as follows: Is it possible to step outside of our ideas so that we may view their content as *objects*? If it is true that our ideas about the world are all that we can directly know about it, is *objectivity* toward our own ideas possible? The belief in the ideal of pure objectivity – a standpoint of truth beyond the vagaries and uncertainties of mere human ideas – is often considered today to be nad'ive, but perhaps there are strategies of analysis that offer imaginative ways to achieve a kind

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of distance from our own ideas that are not based on faulty philosophical assumptions about our ability to achieve an Archimedean standpoint of objectivity. Perhaps there are methods that allow us to gain a perspective on our own ideas that are not predicated on a belief in our ability to step philosophically beyond our limited human standpoint.

The history of ideas offers such a method. Our ideas about the world are all that we have, but by tracing the historical development of our ideas we can gain a new perspective on their content *from within*. By working our way through the history of contemporary ideas, we may by degrees gain a comparative perspective on our own worldview. The attempt here will be to focus on the development of one particular idea that is central to the modern understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Our worldview has many conceptual ancestors but the idea of freedom as creativity can be traced to a particular branch of our family tree of ideas.

The concept of liberty as creativity emerged in early modernity as part of a conceptual revolution in politics, morality and the arts. The artists of pre-modernity were replicators rather than creators, just as pre-modern moralists were followers of given rules rather than creators of their own rules. Only with the beginnings of modernity did spontaneous creativity come to be a political, moral and artistic ideal. The idea of liberty as creativity did not belong to the ancient conceptual legacy that modernity received from Athens, but came to us instead from Jerusalem. The modern artist, politician and moralist were born from the secularization of the belief in the supernatural will as the self-spontaneous source of beauty, lawfulness and goodness.

The Positive Concept of Liberty

According to Isaiah Berlin, positive liberty is a distinct concept that should not be confused with others like negative liberty and communal belonging.[1] To conflate these ideas in theory is to risk the loss of freedom in practice. Berlin's discussion led to a philosophical debate about the proper meaning of the concepts he described,[2] but his historical *method* of analysis has not often been followed. By doing so we may see that the idea of a *spontaneously* free human will did not belong to the Greeks. The archetype for the idea of positive liberty as theorized by thinkers like Rousseau and Kant came instead from Jewish and Christian thought.

Clearly, positive liberty is about more than the power to do what we want. It is more than *behavioural* self-determination or autonomy. True freedom in Berlin's positive sense is not just about deciding how to act or about choosing what to do. Freedom of action is too thin a concept to capture the full meaning of the higher ideal. To decide *what to do*, we must know *what we want*, which in turn requires knowledge about *what kind of beings* we are. Thus the question, "What should we do?" inevitably leads to the more

basic question, "What are our defining beliefs, ideals, wants and values?" For positive liberty to obtain, we must have the freedom to decide not just the regulative principles that guide our actions, but also the constitutive principles that define us.[3] The core meaning of positive liberty, therefore, is self-rule or autonomy not just as self-action or self-regulation but in the deeper sense of self-creation. To be free in this sense is to be the author (individually or collectively) of the constitutive principles that define our lives. We have positive liberty when we create our own rules, not just of acting, but of being.

The idea that one's defining or constitutive rules must be made by oneself (or in the communal version, made by one's group) is clear from Berlin's description of positive liberty. To be free in the positive sense is to see oneself in a certain way: "I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself.... I wish to be the instrument of my own ... acts of will.... 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."[4] One's actions are ruled by one's purposes, and one's purposes must be self-given. To be the source of one's own goals and ideals is to be self-creative.

Berlin's reference to the *will* in this passage is instructive. For thinkers like Rousseau and Kant, freedom of will was the central human power that enables us to be free in the positive sense. As Berlin's description shows, positive liberty is often conceptualized as a certain kind of *will power* – not just in the negative, suppressive sense that we are able to block certain wants – but in the positive, self-creative sense that we can generate our own defining wants, desires, values, ideals, etc. The willful creation of one's own wants and needs, in contradistinction to natural or physical ones, was a central idea to early positive libertarians.

Conversely, those early modern thinkers who downplayed the role of free will were not positive libertarians. An example typical of the empiricist tradition was Locke. It is true that at one point he described morality in terms of "self-determination," prefiguring Kant's argument, often summarized as "ought implies can," that if I am morally responsible for an action, it must be true that I could have acted otherwise.[5] But for Locke, self-determination was not seen as the kind of willful self-creativity in which we give our defining moral laws to ourselves. Locke's understanding of will power included only the power to suppress some of our natural wants in favour of others; for him, free will (a phrase that he disfavoured) was only a negative blocking-power. This suppressive power nonetheless was enough to render us responsible for our actions.[6] Because the idea of moral or telic self-creativity had no role in Locke's philosophy, he was not a positive libertarian.[7] The empiricist tradition focused on the wants and values built into human nature, as in the theories of Hobbes and Locke, or on the customary beliefs handed down as traditions, as in Hume. For them, we are free when we are unhindered in pursuing our *given* values, beliefs, and so

on. Thus the empiricists upheld negative rather than positive concepts of liberty.

Thinkers are less positive-libertarian to the extent that they diminish the role of moral or telic self-creativity in their overall political conceptions, and more positive-libertarian to the extent that this kind of self-creativity is central to their political theories. A *radical* positive libertarian, like Nietzsche, is one who sees the will to power (to use his name for positive liberty) as superior even to the laws of physics. A moderate, like Kant, is one who sees autonomy as active in more limited ways, but who nonetheless sees it as an essential human power. A *monistic* positive libertarian, whether radical or moderate, is one who sees it as the *single* highest human value.

To summarize, positive liberty in its core meaning is the belief that our defining *telos* should be self-created. The names given to this kind of liberty are revealing: self-fulfillment, self-creativity, self-realization, self-expression, self-development, self-actualization. In each case, the prefix "self-" is attached to a term connoting existence or growth. With this understanding of the core concept, we may see that positive liberty, understood as constitutive autonomy, was modeled in early modernity on a pre-existing idea of existential self-sufficiency.

The Source of the Concept of Existential Self-sufficiency

The idea did not belong to the classical Greeks. Platonic rationality for example was not at all a creative power. The intellectual soul had a special power of discernment such that rational minds could understand higher truths, but in no sense did Plato conceive of freedom as the power to give our constitutive rules to ourselves. He cannot have done so, because the idea of a *spontaneously* free will, whether of gods or of humans, was entirely foreign to the thought of ancient and classical Greece. In this tradition, gods and humans were free to be rational, free to discern the higher truths that ultimately governed the universe, but they could not be self-governing in the modern sense of giving these rules to themselves. The philologist Dihle by an analysis of primary sources concluded that the idea of pure spontaneous creativity was simply not present in the Greek tradition of thought: "The Greek creator or demiurge brings to reality only what reason evinces as being possible, and from all possibilities he always chooses the best one.... But he does not create *ex nihilo*. He molds what was without shape, he animates what was without life, he brings to reality what was merely a potential. And above all, he does not transcend the order which embraces himself as well as his creations. Biblical cosmology, however, was completely different. There is no standard, nor rule applicable to the creator and his creation alike. Creation results from the power of Yahveh and noth-

ing else. He can create, change and destroy as he pleases, and it is only because of His benevolence towards His creatures that He has set some rules for the universe."[8]

When Plato in the *Timaeus* used a creation myth to explain his metaphysics, his demiurge was limited in its power by the pre-existing rules of being. As described by Morrow, "Plato's God is not omnipotent, as is the God of Hebrew and Christian theology…. His aim always is to realize the good, but we are reminded again and again that his achievement is limited by what is possible…. The cosmos has always existed, and its cause in not a creator, in the Biblical sense, but a sustaining and continuously acting source of order and beauty."[9] The idea of spontaneous supra-natural creativity was not conceivable to Plato because he lacked the requisite idea of free will.

According to Dihle, the idea of a spontaneously free will, the liberty of which is seen in contradistinction to the determining principles that govern everything else in the universe, was simply not part of the Greek conceptual vocabulary. Neither the gods nor humans had this kind of freedom because for the Greeks, intentional acts were always conditioned by pre-existing factors. Dihle shows that the idea of spontaneity of volition was not something that even the greatest thinkers of the classical period could have understood, because they lacked the language to formulate the idea.

"The notion of will has no corresponding word in either philosophical or non-philosophical Greek…. The word "will" and its equivalents in modern language as applied to the description and evaluation of human action denotes sheer volition, regardless of its origin in either cognition or emotion…. The Greeks had no word of this kind in their language to denote will or intention as such…. Our term "will" denotes only the resulting intention, leaving out any special reference to thought, instinct, or emotion as possible sources of that intention. Greek, on the other hand, is able to express intention only together with one of its causes, but never in its own right."[10]

The idea of a constitutively autonomous entity was absent from the tradition of Athens. Plato's mythical demiurge was a shaper of pre-existing materials according to pre-existing rules but not a creator of rules *ex nihilo*. Dihle's work suggests, and an understanding of Greek moral theory confirms, that we should avoid rendering Greek words like *autarkeia* (meaning fulfillment or sufficiency in the things of life; hence also meaning contentment) as self-sufficiency in the spontaneously existential sense. When Plato described his demiurge using derivatives like *autarkes* and *autarkę* (*Timaeus* 33d, 68e), he meant that it was complete in its constitutive materials; he did not mean that it was the self-generative source of those materials *ex nihilo*.[11] This being might be called self-sufficient in the sense of fullness or contentment, but it was not *freely* self-sufficient in the positive libertarian sense. The more limited Greek idea of self-sufficiency might further signify moral completeness, in the way that a higher being or a higher level of reality would embody

all goodness; in this sense Plato's Form of the Good could be seen as self-sufficient. When Aristotle described the final good as self-sufficient, he meant that it was complete and fulfilled; Aristotle's idea of happiness is a state of self-sufficiency only in the sense of completeness. But neither Plato nor Aristotle understood self-sufficiency in spontaneously creative terms, in the way that a self-sufficient being could be the pre-existing *source* of goodness. The rules of order and goodness were eternal; a being could be completely good but it could not be the original *source* of good. In the tradition of thought to which Plato and Aristotle belonged, the rules of being came first and God came second – God was not the source of the rules of being. The active faculty of a godlike being for them was always reason, not will. The idea of *creative* self-sufficiency, or moral self-creativity, did not exist for in this tradition.

Similarly, Aristotle's idea of the Prime Mover as an uncaused cause was a more narrow explanation of physical motion: if there were not something fixed in the universe toward which things were continuously pulled, physical motions would not occur. This anchor-point theory of motion had nothing to do with spontaneous self-sufficiency. The source of the latter idea, and thus of the concept of constitutive autonomy, is not in the books of Athens but in those of Jerusalem. But if we were to add to the concept of an uncaused cause something that Aristotle lacked – the idea of spontaneous creativity – we can come much closer to the Biblical idea of a self-existent God. If causality is redefined in terms of creativity (*pace* Aristotle) such that to cause something is to create it *ex nihilo*, then the uncaused cause of the world is the uncreated Creator of the Jewish tradition. This God is the self-sufficient source of its own being and of all else. Thus the story of creation *ex nihilo* is implicit in the idea of divine self-sufficiency.

In Exodus 3:14, the God of Judaism identifies himself to Moses in Hebrew as "*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*." This is translated in the King James Version as "I AM that I AM," but better would be, "I AM such that I AM" or "I AM because I AM."[12] The central idea expressed here is that of existential self-sufficiency, from which all further acts of creation have their source. The monotheistic God who creates but is not created is the conceptual model for the concept of constitutive autonomy. Positive liberty in its deepest sense is modeled on the godlike power to be the self-sufficient source of the rules that define and govern our being. In modernity, this idea – different from the original in magnitude of power but similar in kind – became secularized as the idea that humans should be free to create their own basic rules of being. As Coleridge, led to the idea by Kant, put it, "*Sum quia sum*; I am, because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be, because I am." In a well-known passage, he continued, "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[13] The classical Greeks did not think this and could not have; think-

ers in western modernity came to do so do only because they inherited the idea from Judaism via Christianity and made it their own.

The Great "I AM" in Secular Modernity

To understand the special character of moral and political thought in our own time, it is instructive to know that the ancient Greeks, who otherwise were the source of so many of our ideas, lacked the concepts of spontaneous will and constitutive self-creativity. Because these ideas were absent from the great philosophers of Athens, we may conclude that that they are not self-evident, necessary or *a priori* truths that all advanced thinkers should be expected to know. To attain the idea of positive liberty it is not sufficient to live an examined life; instead, one must live a particular kind of life and examine it using a specific set of concepts. The lesson for modernity is that we have the concept of positive liberty only because we have a particular cultural history, which includes not just the reason-centred tradition of Plato but also the will-centred tradition of Moses.

Modernity was pluralistic in its roots, and so it is pluralistic in its political ideas. Berlin was right to see conflicts over the true meaning of liberty as leading to a modern clash of ideologies.[14] Today, the idea of self-creative freedom in politics contends against the more conservative beliefs that traditional, natural or religious rules should continue to govern human life. For negative libertarians, freedom is seen less in terms of self-creativity and more in terms of the unrestricted ability to satisfy the given wants of human nature (to give an individualistic example of the genre) or to follow without interference the traditional rules of one's culture (to give a communal example). For positive libertarians, nature and tradition are sources of imposed rules that must be overcome so that we can become truly self-creative. In a superficial sense, the latter idea seems to include negative liberty – we must be free from nature or tradition in order to achieve our higher freedom – but the negative freedom of non-interference here is merely instrumental to the true, positive liberty of creative self-rule. For negative libertarians, our defining *telos* is given by nature, God or tradition; for positive libertarians, it must be self-given.

In this view, to achieve the higher positive realm of liberty we must have the power to rise above the world as it is. Thus Berlin described positive liberty in one of its modern versions in terms of a dualism between the earthly world and a higher realm of being: "It is as if I had performed a strategic retreat into an inner citadel – my reason, my soul, my "noumenal" self – which, do what they may, neither external blind force, nor human malice, can touch…. I am free because, and in so far as, I am autonomous…. Heteronomy is dependence on outside factors, liability to be a plaything of the external world…. I cannot control the laws of nature; my free activity must therefore, *ex hypothesi*, be lifted above the empirical world of causality…. For … the essence of men is that they are

autonomous beings – authors of values, of ends in themselves, the ultimate authority of which consists precisely in the fact that they are willed feely."[15]

In this version of the ideal, positive liberty is explicitly supra-natural. The religious origins of the concept of positive liberty were clearer to the early modern formulators of the secularized idea than they are today. The idea of freedom from the perturbations and wants of the physical world, a God-like freedom above and beyond the world of time and space, was familiar to the eighteenth-century West. The God of the Jews and the Christians was thought to exist outside of time and space, which belonged to the lower orders of being that were his creation. Beyond the created realm with its flux and divisions was the higher realm of permanence and unity. Humans were free because they had been given freedom of will, and to this extent they partook in the supra-natural – that is, supra-temporal and supra-spatial – realm of self-sufficient existence, like God. In this form, the idea emerged that we must aspire to the higher realm of supra-natural self-determination if we are to be truly free. In the dualism between the lower realm of constrained being and the higher realm of liberty, the religious roots of the concept of positive liberty are most clear. The lower world is disjointed, agitated and ephemeral, but the higher one is (or will be) unified, calm and enduring.

This theme of lower and higher realms of being was repeated in various ways by the positive libertarians of early modernity. For Rousseau, this dualism was manifested in his personal spiritualistic yearnings and in his politics. For Kant, it was explicit and central to his thought as in the contrast between phenomena and noumena and between heteronomy and autonomy. For Hegel, the contrast was between the present and the future, with the self-creative Spirit emerging into unity and fulfillment at the end of history. For Marx, self-creativity took the materialistic form of labour, our self-productivity from which in the lower individuated state of being we have become alienated but with which we will be re-united to achieve the higher social realm of freedom. In each case, the lower mode of being is divided, restless and unhappy but the higher one is unified, final and contented.

Rousseau was a critical figure in the secularization of the idea of self-sufficiency, which was a recurrent theme throughout his writings.[16] He often described the higher realm freedom, as compared to the lower realm of enslavement, in explicitly religious terms; for example, "Nature commands every animal and the beast obeys. Man feels the same impulsion, but he knows that he is free to acquiesce or resist, and it is particularly in the consciousness of this liberty that the spirituality of his soul is displayed."[17] In a famous passage, he expressed the feeling of spiritual contentedness that comes when one rises above the lower realm of physical wants to enter a higher God-like state of being: "Everything is in constant flux on this earth…. But there is a state where the soul can find a resting-place secure enough to establish itself and concentrate

its entire being there … where time is nothing to it, where the present runs on indefinitely … and no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than the simple feeling of existence…. What is the source of our happiness in such a state? Nothing external to us, nothing apart from ourselves and our own existence; as long as this state lasts we are self-sufficient like God."[18]

Rousseau's "general will" may be the best-known example of constitutive autonomy in its communal form: by a unified act of will, we create the foundational rules of our political existence. Before Rousseau, the idea of the general will was a familiar religious idea: God's general will ruled the universe in orderly ways, but his particular will was responsible for miraculous interventions.[19] Rousseau's innovation was to locate the general will in the political community, as in an early description in the *Political Economy*: "The body politic is, therefore, also a moral being which has a will; and this general will … is the source of the laws … [and] the rule of what is just and unjust."[20] In this human form, the supra-natural divine characteristics of unity and permanence remain. In the *Social Contract*, the general will explicitly has the characteristics of the divine will; as highlighted in various subsection titles, it is described as infallible, indivisible, indestructible and absolute. To Rousseau's original readers, these would have been instantly recognizable as the attributes of God.

The idea of existential self-sufficiency as rooted in a unified and unchanging realm of reality, separate from and superior to the temporal flux and spatial divisions of empirical reality, was central to the thought of Kant. He tells us for example that, "Pure understanding distinguishes itself not merely from everything empirical, but also completely from all sensibility. It is a unity self-subsistent, self-sufficient, and not to be enlarged by any additions from without."[21] The role of the pure understanding is to provide the prerequisite conceptual conditions or structure for the acquisition of empirical knowledge. Thus pure understanding stands above mere "sensibility," which is the source of the contingent understanding that comes to us via sensory perceptions.[22]

The most familiar form of this dualism in Kant is in his distinction between phenomena and noumena. Kant in his critical period was careful to avoid describing the content or essence of the higher noumenal real of existence. Indirectly, however, by examining the requirements of the moral law within us, Kant allowed that we can reliably postulate three truths about higher reality: "All of them proceed from the principle of morality, which is not a postulate but a law…. These postulates are those of *immortality*, of *freedom* considered positively (as the causality of a being insofar as it belongs to the intelligible world), and of the *existence of God*."[23] We have the kind of freedom that Kant called autonomy only because we belong not just to the physical world, which is ruled by natural causal forces, but also to the Godly noumenal realm of existential and causal self-sufficiency.

In our earthly actions, we have *regulative* autonomy – we give to ourselves the rules that regulate our physical actions – but in our higher being it would seem that we have more than just the mere freedom of action. We cannot know this realm of existential freedom directly even by our pure speculative reason (which only sets the conditions for sensible knowledge), but through our practical reason we know we are free.[24] But if the noumenal is the realm of existential self-sufficiency, and if we have a dual existence in both realms at once, it follows (though Kant resisted the conclusion) that in our noumenal being we are *constitutively* free. Like God, we are constitutively self-sufficient. Thus the pious Kant, despite his own cautions against the intellectual hubris of mysticism, moved us toward secular modernity.

The secularization of the idea of supernatural creativity was encouraged by two religious beliefs, that (a) God's will is existentially self-sufficient, and that (b) God gave a spark of that power to humans. If the divine gift of free will is seen to confer not just behavioural but true existential freedom – if the endowment was genuine and not superficial – then the full secularization of the idea of positive liberty seems almost pre-scripted into the Jewish story of creation. The Christian idea of incarnation emphasized the idea of the supernatural power as embodied on earth and Protestantism, with its turn inward to find the trace of God in the soul, then hastened the move to modernity. In hindsight, however, it seems almost inevitable that some of the followers of the tradition of Jerusalem, emphasizing certain parts of the biblical story over others, would come to see themselves as self-creative.

After Kant, other writers in the tradition of positive liberty were less reticent to describe the substantive meaning of existential self-sufficiency. Hegel saw human self-creativity not in terms of participation a higher heavenly realm that permanently stands above our present being, but in the process of maturation of the human species. Absolute idealism is a monistic metaphysical system, but the dualism of higher and lower realms of being remained with Hegel in the historical distinction between the past and the future. Freedom comes at the end of history, as the World Spirit emerges into self-consciousness. His was no less a religious conception but his Spirit grew in the world, a world that for Hegel consisted of ideas. Human self-creativity became a historical progression in which the self-emerging *Geist* of humanity was and is in the process of coming into self-conscious being.

Thus Hegel retained the familiar contrast between the lower disunited, impermanent world of materiality and the unified finality of higher reality, though for him the move from the former to the latter occurs over time. For example, material objects seek to cancel themselves out by returning to the point of unity – this was the law of gravity at work. Just as the disunity manifested in the law of gravity is the essence of matter, the freedom of united self-existence is the essence of Spirit: "Matter possesses gravity in virtue of its tendency towards a central point. It is essentially com-

posite; consisting of parts that *exclude* each other. It seeks its Unity; and therefore exhibits itself as self-destructive, as verging towards its opposite [an indivisible point]. If it could attain this, it would be Matter no longer, it would have perished. It strives after the realisation of its Idea; for in Unity it exists *ideally*. Spirit, on the contrary, may be defined as that which has its centre in itself. It has not a unity outside itself, but has already found it; it exists *in* and *with itself*. Matter has its essence out of itself; Spirit is *self-contained existence*. Now this is Freedom, exactly. For if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not; I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself."[25]

For Hegel, who like Kant remained a religious thinker throughout his career, the idea of self-sufficient God-like freedom was at the core of his philosophy. In politics, the result was his concept of the state as the embodiment of Spirit: "The state is mind on earth and consciously realizing itself there … this essence is externally realized as a self-subsistent power in which single individuals are only moments. The march of God in the world, that is what the state is. The basis of the state is the power of reason actualizing itself as will."[26] This version of the idea of positive liberty was explicitly modeled by Hegel on the idea of an existentially self-sufficient God. For him, positive liberty was an inherently communal notion embodied in the self-caused process of coming-into-being of World Spirit.

When Marx performed his inversion of Hegel, the religious origin of the idea was obscured, but its genesis is clear in his early writings. The central point of Marx's inversion was to redefine the idea of existential self-sufficiency in terms of *labour*. In the section on "Estranged Labour" in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx described labour as the essence of human self-sufficiency: "Indeed, labor, *life-activity, productive life* itself … is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species – its species character, is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species character…. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will…. Through and because of this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species-life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousnesses, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world he has created."[27]

In his concept of alienation, Marx retained the familiar distinction between the lower realm of inauthentic existence and the higher realm of self-creative freedom. Alienation is the "tearing way from man the object of his production … degrading spontaneous activity, free activity" to a mere means of physical subsistence.[28] The essence of our species-life is to be self-productive, but when our productive power is commodified as wage labour we become alienated from our higher self-creative being, from the self-sufficient power of our productive life-force. Alienation

ends only when we are reunited with our power of self-creativity, which is the essence of ourselves. Thus the old distinction of lower and higher realms of being with Marx was rendered as the new distinction between inauthentic other-productive relations under capitalism and authentic communal self-productivity under communism. Social divisiveness belongs to today, but self-sufficient unity will come in the future.

In a well-known passage, Marx used the dualism of realms of being as a trope to contrast the lower life of civil society with the higher life of the political state. The metaphor is effective because the dualism remains in Marx's theory: life in civil society is privatized, egoistic and disjointed; only in political life can higher unity be achieved: "The perfected political state is, by its nature, the *species-life* of man as *opposed* to his material life. All the presuppositions of this egoistic life continue to exist in *civil society outside* the political sphere, as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in *reality*, in *life* a double existence – celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the *political community*, in which he considers himself a *communal being*, and in *civil society*, in which he acts simply as a *private individual*, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The political state, in relation to civil society, is just as spiritual as is heaven in relation to earth."[29]

The idea of a self-creative power – the core concept of positive liberty –provided Marx with the model for his idea of capital. Labour creates value in the form of the objects that it produces. When value becomes objectified in the form of tools or machinery, the process has begun whereby value is able to *create itself*. The input of labourers is still needed, but the output is far greater than before. Thus the magic of capitalism is self-creativity: capital is a special kind of value, a value that has the power to recreate itself. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx described "the power or activity which creates value by value existing for-itself – which lies in the concept of capital."[30] The problem with capitalism is that this self-sufficient power of value-creation is held in the hands of an elite. Once this special power is returned to the workers, a new self-sustaining society will be born.

All of our ideas are but a superstructural by-product built upon the foundation of economic relations; therefore under communism, by labouring together we will remake our idea of ourselves. The end of history for Marx was in social self-creativity, as it had been for Hegel, but in Marx's version the ideal of communal positive liberty was further secularized. Marx's theory had the advantage of concreteness, but his materialist theory introduced the problem of historical determinism. For Hegel, the forces of history could at least be described in terms of a free communal will, but for Marx the idea of human agency seemed to disappear altogether. Thus for many post-Marxists today, the problem is to find a new role for the old ideas of agency and responsibility.

Marx inverted the history of the idea of self-creative freedom. In his telling, it was not that the God-like power of existential self-sufficiency became secularized in modernity. As he told the story, it was that humans in pre-modernity had projected their own power of self-creativity to create the idea of God. Marx's inversion, borrowed from Feuerbach, was in the claim that the self-creative power of humanity was, in the history of religion, a projection of existential self-sufficiency *from* humans *to* God. Positive liberty had belonged to humanity all along. The biblical story of creation had it exactly backward: God was created in the image of man. This act of alienation, in which our own self-creativity is mythically given away to an entity apart from ourselves, must be reversed so that we can recover our true essence. Marx added an economic theme to Feuerbach's story, but the initial premise remained: existential self-sufficiency is the essence of humanity.[31] In the history of positive liberty, Marx's version is an old story told in a new way.

The philosophy of Athens lacked this idea; it is a story that came only from the faith of Jerusalem. The history of ideas shows that the idea of constitutive autonomy had a specific beginning in one particular religious tradition, and that it was secularized into a moral and political theory in one tradition of thought, centred mostly in one nation and in one culture, that of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany. Marx's theory is a relatively late version of the religious idea of existential self-sufficiency. Positive liberty is a post-Christian concept, an understanding that is based on an older story about ourselves and our place in the world.

In the arts, the meaning of the new concept of liberty is reflected in the desire of the artist no longer to be a reproducer or representer of given modes of beauty, but to be the creator of novel aesthetic forms. The idealization of the new and unique is the characteristic feature of contemporary art that distinguishes it most clearly from that of the classical era. With the rise of modernity and the secularization of the ideal of the spontaneous *power* of creativity, now recentred from the divine into the human as creator, the artist became the personification of Coleridge's "Great 'I AM!'" The new artist is the source of his or her own aesthetic, just as the Kantian autonomist is the source of his or her own moral and political laws.

Rousseau expressed the new romantic ideal of the artist who above all attempts to be unique: "I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality."[32] The artist must be against tradition, free to destroy in order to create; he or she must be a moral outlaw in order to be unique. This is the origin of the transgressive ideal in art in which the life of the artist is also a creation of novelty; thus the artistic life must be lived against the conventions of mainstream society. To transgress against the givens of one's times in one's life and one's works is the distinguishing mark of the artist as a romantic hero, who above all others is capable of originality and uniqueness. With this new belief, the artist has become not

the champion or representative of eternal ideals but a revolutionary against those ideals for the pure sake of creativity. Originality, the spontaneous power to create *ex nihilo* something that has never existed before, is the central ideal of the post-Christian artist.

The artist as a romantic hero is part of the broad legacy of Jerusalem as secularized in modernity. As Erich Frank explained, the idea remains despite the obscurity in our secular age of its religious source: "No matter how far present-day man may have deviated from Christianity, liberty, will, love – *these* he is not willing to renounce. More than that: it is precisely his insistence on freedom, his feeling of sovereignty, which is the driving force of modern philosophy. This we find with Descartes, in his indubitable *cogito*, which expressed the basic assumption of the new age, the independence of reason and the supremacy of man over nature; we find it in Kant's principle of autonomous morality; we find it in Marx and in Bolshevism, for which social revolution means the collective liberation of man; we find it in pragmatism; and we find it in modern Democracy, where the freedom of the individual forms the basis of all political activity. Even in the most secularized forms of modern thinking, then, free will and sovereign personality have remained preeminent ideals."[33]

Conclusion

The significance should not be understated of the recognition that one of the core moral ideas of modernity, and one of its central political values, simply did not exist in the classical Greek tradition of thought. Their moral and political worldview was very different from our own because they lacked the idea of spontaneous supra-natural willful creativity. The classical Greeks could not have understood the modern idea of human *values*, because they lacked the conceptual vocabulary in which one can actively *value* something. The *active* nature of the modern concept is recognizable in the way that the word "value" for us can be used as an active verb. The modern idea of unique human values is based on a conceptual model in which goodness *comes from* a creative will. I have the freedom *to value* something because I have the *creative* freedom of will to decide for myself the kind of being that I am. My defining values are a central feature of my being; my values are what make me a distinct individual. By finding or creating my own defining values, I *create myself* as unique person.

This freedom is the ability to be self-governing in the deep sense of constitutive autonomy. The adoption of this idea as a defining human characteristic was central to the revolution toward modernity in arts, politics and morality because it led to a new to our understanding of ourselves. The idea of liberty as creativity remains central to the values, though they be many and conflicting, of our time.

Notes:

1 Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford and New York: Fontana, 1969), pp. 118-72.

2 For an overview and response, see Berlin's "Introduction" to *Four Essays*.

3 The distinction between regulative and constitutive principles was introduced by Kant, though in a different context, in a number of his works in his critical period. See for example Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Pt. I, Bk. II, Ch. II, Sec. VII (AK [Akademie edition] p. 5:135). For an extended discussion, see for example the "Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic" in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (AK pp. A642-704/B670-732).

4 Berlin, "Two Concepts," p. 131.

5 "For here the mind, seeing the connexion there is between the idea of men's punishment in the other world and the idea of God punishing; between God punishing and the justice of the punishment; between justice of punishment and guilt; between guilt and a power to do otherwise; between a power to do otherwise and freedom; and between freedom and self-determination, sees the connexion between men and self-determination." John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Bk. IV, Ch. XVII, Sec. IV.

6 "For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires; and so all, one after another; is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others…This seems to me the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is (as I think improperly) call'd *Free will*. For during this *suspension* of any desire, before the *will* be determined to action, and the action (which follows that determination) done, we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge of the good or evil of what we are going to do; and when, upon due *Examination*, we have judg'd, we have done our duty, all that we can, or ought to do, in pursuit of our happiness." *Ibid.*, Bk. II, Ch. XXI, Sec. XLVII. All emphases in the quotations in this article belong to the original authors.

7 The word "telic" is used here as a summary term, derived from *telos*, to refer to goals, ends, values and so on. The freedom to create our own defining *telos* could be called "autotelic" liberty, while the freedom to achieve one's given goals (for example, the economics wants built into human nature or the values one inherits from one's communal traditions) is "heterotelic" freedom.

8 Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 1, 4.

9 Glenn R. Morrow, "Introduction," in Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1949), pp. xiv, xx.

10 Dihle, *Theory of Will,* pp. 18-25.

11 The preceding two sentences were assisted by the electronic resources of the *Perseus Project* (www.perseus.tufts.edu).

12 The latter of these two alternatives was suggested by Coleridge, who lamented the standard translation: "It is most worthy of notice, that in…the very first revelation of his absolute being, Jehovah at the same time revealed the fundamental truth of all philosophy…I cannot but express my regret, that in the equivocal use of the word *that*, for *in that*, or *because*, our admirable version has rendered the passage susceptible of a degraded interpretation in the mind of common readers or hearers, as if it were a mere reproof to an impertinent question, I am what I am, which might be equally affirmed of himself by any existent being." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London, 1817), pp. 268-9.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 268-9, 295-6.

14 Berlin, "Two Concepts," p. 131.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

16 For a comprehensive survey, see Ronald Grimsley, "Rousseau and the Ideal of Self-Sufficiency," *Studies in Romanticism* 10 (1971), 283-99.

17 J.J. Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men," trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella, in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, ed. Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1988), pp. 15-16.

18 J.J. Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker,* trans. Peter France (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 88-9.

19 Patrick Riley, *The General Will before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

20 J.J. Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella, in *Rousseau's Political Writings*, ed. Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York and London, 1988), p. 61.

21 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn (Amherst, NY, 1990), pp. 52-3 (AK p. A65/B89).

22 "In the transcendental aesthetic we proved that everything intuited in space and time, all objects of a possible experience, are nothing but phenomena, that is, mere representations; and that these, as presented to us – as extended bodies, or as series of changes – have no self-subsistent existence apart from human thought." *Ibid.*, p. 278 (AK pp. A490-1/B518-9).

23 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 110 (AK p. 5:132).

24 "I term all that is possible through free will, practical. But if the conditions of the exercise of free volition are empirical, reason can have only a regulative, and not a constitutive, influence upon it." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 449 (AK p. A800/B828).

25 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), p. 17. The interpolation in square brackets is by the translator.

26 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), para. 258A.

27 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 113. Emphases in original.

28 *Ibid.*, 114.

29 Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in Marx, *Early Writings,* ed. and trans. T.B. Bottomore, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 13.

30 Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, in *The Marx and Engels Reader*, 2nd edn., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p. 279.

31 "The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object." Marx, *Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 108.

32 J.J. Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. W. Conyngham Mallory (New York: Tudor, 1928), p. 3.

33 Erich Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), pp. 149-50.