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# The Iranian Yearbook of
# Phenomenology

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# The Iranian Yearbook of Phenomenology

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# Freedom and the Imaginary Dimension of Society

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## Abstract

The notion of 'freedom' has gained an emblematic character in contemporary political discourse. It is, commonly, viewed as the central value and political goal of modern societies. Similarly, human rights documents conceive of freedom as their founding principle with universal validity. In contradistinction to this prevalent approach to freedom, this paper aims to demonstrate that freedom is, primarily, a political signifier with social-historical variability. One cannot, therefore, simply and uncritically assume that freedom has (or should have) universal validity or transhistorical significance. In the first section of this paper, the structure of the contemporary liberal discourse on freedom is discussed and called into question. In light of Arendt's interpretation of freedom and through her analysis of the public domain, I reflect on the social-historical variability of the meaning of freedom and its inextricable nexus with a particular form of society. In the second section and drawing on Castoriadis, the notion of 'freedom' is approached because of human signifying practices and the imaginary dimensions of society. This examination reveals in what way freedom—in the sense of a central social imaginary signification—contributes to the institution of an autonomous mode of society and determines the affective disposition and intentional vector of its inhabitants.

## Introduction

As with terms such as human rights, democracy, development, economic growth, the notion of 'freedom' has currently acquired an emblematic character with highly normative overtones. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights considers freedom both as one of its founding principles and a universal right.[1] Likewise, despite different interpretations and qualifications, political theorists, across a broad theoretical spectrum, treat freedom as a universally applicable concept with normative validity. This prevailing approach to freedom seems to suggest that the concept and question of freedom has been, socially and politically, available to all human societies in the same manner. Yet, once we view the history of the anatomically modern human spanning two hundred thousand years, we realize that the political question of freedom remained politically (with the exception of a few) unarticulated in a large number of human life-worlds.

The central idea of this paper is that the notion of 'freedom' should, primarily, not be approached as a universal or a-temporal concept. Instead, this notion should be considered as a social-historically created signifier, whose meaning or significance is tied to a particular politico-ontological configuration. To elucidate this claim, I begin the discussion by sketching the structure of the question of freedom in the prevalent liberal discourse on freedom. Drawing on Arendt, it will be argued that the liberal paradigm is, itself, historically shaped and directed by (theological) debates in the late-medieval era. To locate Arendt's historical reflection on freedom, I will discuss her interpretation of human action and the public realm, which she derives from the Greek social-historical context of the fifth century BCE. In view of the social-historical variability of the meaning and political significance of the notion of 'freedom', I investigate in what way the politico-ontological form of society is being shaped and directed in and through socially and historically fabricated signifiers, i.e., the *social imaginary significations*. Following Castoriadis, the notion of 'freedom' will be addressed as a central social imaginary signification, which comes into being as a result of the collective project of autonomy. And finally, I conclude with some observations concerning the psychical and social-historical conditions of this project.

## Universality of Freedom

The way the notion of 'freedom' has been framed within post-war human rights documents represents the prevalent tendency towards the juridico-political meaning of freedom in contemporary political discourse. In this regard, the most notable human rights document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), provides clear insights into the categorization of freedom. Let us therefore briefly investigate how freedom has been articulated in this document. To begin with, the term 'freedom' is mentioned more than twenty times in the Declaration. The document makes three universality claims with respect to the validity of freedom:

I. First, freedom is asserted as a core political principle that should be pursued and promoted in *every* nation globally. For example, the framers of the Declaration state: "whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights […] and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."[2] The declaration also indicates: "[…] Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms."[3] Accordingly, the promotion of freedom, in the sense of a political value, serves as the precondition for the realization of the rights and freedoms that are declared. Put another way, freedom should be considered as a universal principle in order for human rights to be respected and protected.

II. The second universality claim of the Declaration relates to the *designation* of freedom in the sense of a universal and inalienable right. According to the Declaration, "all human beings are born free" (Art. 1) and entitled to freedom, "without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, or another political or another opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or another status" (Art. 2). The universal quantifier in the phrase 'all human beings' implies that freedom is an entitlement belonging to every human individual. As such, the category of freedom contains 'all members of the human family and does not exclude anyone who is recognized as 'human'. In addition, the Universal Declaration asserts that the common understanding of freedom is 'of the greatest importance and forms a prerequisite for the recognition and full realization of this 'inalienable' human right.[4]

This general approach to freedom has been reflected in other human rights documents that are drafted on a regional and global level. These documents categorize different instantiations of freedom in the sense of freedom *from* fear, servitude, imprisonment or freedom *of* opinion, expression, association, assembly, and so on.[5] Being entitled to these individuated freedoms and rights requires us to be (considered as) *free* in the first place. Moreover, it should be noted that these individual and *individuated* freedoms are not without boundaries. In all cases, the established juridical order has full authority to set limits to individuated freedoms, for the sake of moral considerations, welfare, or when the rights of others are at stake.[6]

In this manner, the Declaration makes two equivocal claims concerning the juridico-political significance of freedom. First, while the Declaration states that freedom should be pursued as a political principle by all societies (regardless of the political form of the society in question), historical evidence shows that freedom has not been a central political principle in many (if not most) societies throughout history.[7] Second, freedom is conceived of as a natural *birthright* belonging to every member of the human family, regardless of actual circumstances or contingent conditions. While at the same time, for the realization of this freedom, it is required to have a common understanding of this birthright within the limits of an established juridical order. Obviously, the determinations of the juridical orders are not universal but contingent.[8] As such, an unconditional birthright is, paradoxically, being conditioned and limited by the force of contingent determinations.[9] Therefore, both formulations are paradoxical and put the self-evidence and clarity of the universal freedom into question, both on a theoretical and political levels.

## Liberty of liberals

Without going into the historical and psycho-social adequacy of this universalist thesis, one could raise the question of whether there is, in theory, and practice, a shared understanding of this political signifier. There have been numerous attempts to provide an affirmative answer to this question among liberal scholars. It should come as no surprise that the question of freedom (liberty) is central to liberal political theory. In his *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Berlin considers the question of freedom and its conceptual opposite (coercion) as the central

problem of political theory.[10] In a like manner, Rawls's theory of justice and his idealized state of nature (the 'original position') presuppose abstract human entities who reason based on the principles of liberty and equality. Notably, in spite of all arbitrary and irrelevant factors (such as race, class, gender and natural endowment), the only precondition for the construction of a theory of justice is to imagine citizens as equal and free.[11] The human-like creature of Rawls' original position is abstracted from all conditions that make her truly human, except from these essential principles. Similarly, there seems to be a general consensus in mainstream theories of freedom that this concept does have a universal normative character for every human being who is endowed with reason.[12]

The syntax and structure of the prevailing conception of freedom within the liberal paradigm are based on binary logic. With reference to Berlin's well-known binary distinction, one could refer to two distinct and competing conceptions of freedom; dividing the political field of freedom into 'positive' and 'negative' poles.[13] For liberals, it is only the negative pole that deserves the name and could be called 'freedom'. As Hayek unequivocally points out, 'while the uses of liberty are many, liberty is one.[14] Negative freedom is, semantically, associated with the *absence* of interference, coercion, or constraints. It denotes the area, in which, individuals can live and act without (external) constraints or human obstacles.[15] The absence of constraints, either in the sense of (human) obstacles or coercive arbitrary force defines our degree of freedom and entails to what extent we are free.

Following this binary categorization, negative freedom is contrasted with an opposite concept that is called 'positive freedom'. On liberal interpretation, positive freedom denotes our freedom *to* self-realization, self-mastery, or self-fulfillment.[16] This concept represents the *presence* of our true inner self, rather than an *absence* of external obstacles. It involves the very nature of our motivations since not all motivations contribute to the realization of the self.[17] In this sense, positive accounts stress the individual willpower to have control over one's own actions and desires: freedom is the 'expression of authentic and effective self-government'.[18]

According to liberals, this type of freedom implies a pre-given understanding of our true self, whose realization will be (and has been historically) imposed upon the individual by the state. Once we take

positive freedom as a political ideal, we pave the way for the justification of interference, coercion, or oppression. Therefore, positive freedom is incompatible with negative freedom. Freedom, in the positive sense, is the conceptual opposite of liberal's cherished freedom. Positive freedom is a very dangerous idea whose promotion leads to coercion. It could at best be regarded as a concept with no political relevance. [19]

Alternatively, some theorists seek to transcend the debate between negative and positive liberty by providing a single coherent scheme that encompasses both concepts.[20] As Taylor contends, having the opportunity to do things without external constraints implies that we are in the position to *exercise* control, in order to achieve what we want.[21] Positive and negative freedom are, on this view, not incompatible and reflect an overarching concept with two distinct poles.[22] The synthesis of two poles amounts to a triadic relation: freedom of an *agent* is always her freedom *from* some constraints *and* it is the freedom *to* do (or not do) something. [23]

Nonetheless, liberals insist that negative freedom is the only adequate conception, which is politically relevant and should be promoted in society.[24] All other conceptions of freedom are either reducible to this single concept or considered as inadequate, dangerous or politically irrelevant.[25] On this view, freedom should not be conflated with other political concepts such as democracy or equality. Freedom could be protected and advanced in different forms of government with diverse political institutions. As Berlin maintains:

"Just as a democratic community may in fact deprive the individual citizen of a good many liberties which he might have in some other society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a benevolent despot would allow his subjects a very wide area of personal freedom." [26]

For Berlin, one could be a slave or a subject of a despotic regime, and yet be able to enjoy freedom. For, so long as 'liberal-minded' master or benevolent despot chooses not to interfere in your affairs, there is, in practice, no external obstacle that limits your freedom. Although you are a slave or subjected to despotism, your negative freedom remains intact. Liberal polarisation of the domain of freedom is a theoretical reduction, which is operationalized to uphold a single normative concept of freedom. To put the liberal position in the context of human rights: *it is only negative freedom that should serve as the*

*central political principle for a well-ordered society. It is only this single conception that deserves to be considered as a human right.*

## Arendtian criticism

The above-mentioned semantic framework demarcates the general field of discussion within the contemporary liberal paradigm.[27] According to Arendt, this paradigm has its historical root in the Christianized and medieval (anti-political) conceptions of freedom, which were linked to a fundamental distrust and even hostility towards the public realm as such:[28]

"Was not the liberal credo, "the less politics the more freedom," right after all? Is it not true that the smaller the space occupied by the political, the larger the domain left to freedom? Indeed, do we not rightly measure the extent of freedom in any given community by the free scope it grants to apparently non-political activities, free economic enterprise, or freedom of teaching, of religion, of cultural and intellectual activities? Is it not true, as we all somehow believe, that politics is compatible with freedom only because and insofar as it guarantees a possible freedom *from* politics?" [29]

As she goes on to respond, political freedom should not be sought in present-day negative formulations, designating the area that should be left unaffected by the state or fellow citizens.[30] Nor should freedom be identified with human willpower, by which one controls one's own desires or realizes one's true predetermined self.[31] The concept of willpower and free will, which stems from medieval *liberum arbitrium*, signifies the power to rule over desire and passion. It is the power to arbitrate between right and wrong.[32] The willpower to command and direct one's own action is, for Arendt, not a matter of freedom; it is rather a question of strength or weakness.[33]

In contrast to the prevalent liberal framework, Arendt investigates freedom in its nexus with the politico-ontological form of society. Freedom has, in essence, a communal dimension as it only makes sense in the context of our common world. We become aware of freedom or un-freedom in our interpersonal relationships and communication with other human beings. On this view, freedom is the *raison d'être* of politics.[34] Politics consists of the practice of speaking and acting with others, in order to decide and create

something new. Freedom is the *raison d'être* of politics since it creates a space that is public. The public domain is the space of appearances, in which human beings *can* deal with their human affairs. It is this *public/political* life that makes our life as human beings valuable.[35] There are two activities that constitute the public/political domain: action [*praxis*] and speech [*lexis*].[36] Both activities signify the realm of freedom. Action is the activity that goes between men without the intermediary of things or matter. To put it another way, action is the human condition of *plurality*. Plurality is, here, the political condition of the human beings as 'to be among men' [*inter homines esse*].[37] As such, everything that appears in the public domain can be *seen*, *heard,* and *responded to* by everyone. This particular modality of the public realm implies that everyone sees, hears, acts, and deliberates from a *different* perspective, regardless of the position each person occupies in this world (rich, poor, peasant, lord, etc.).[38] The public space signifies the domain of freedom and embodies diverse perspectives, aspects, and modes.

On this account, freedom takes root in society once the public space becomes the site of action and speech. By the same token, freedom and politics are interwoven as two aspects of the same phenomenon.[39] Freedom manifests itself in deeds and words. It is the individual and collective capacity to call into being something that is not, already, present at hand.[40] For, to experience freedom among other human beings, public space has to be brought into existence. In order to become free, one must have liberated oneself from the necessities of life. In the Greek *polis*, as Arendt interprets, there was a sharp distinction between the realm of politics (public life) and the realm of household (private life); a distinction that disappeared in later eras.[41] The fact that freedom is exclusively situated in the political domain entails that necessity is, primarily, a pre-political phenomenon. As such, to be free means both not to be subject to the necessity of life and to the command of another person.[42] In addition, citizens are considered as equals in the public domain. The notion of 'equal participation in politics with equal legal protection' [*isonomia*] is conceptually and effectively intertwined with the very essence of freedom.[43] It is in the public domain that human beings transform into free and equal *citizens*. Citizens' collective capacity to call into being new things and new forms is their justification for self-given jurisdiction, laws, administration of public affairs, and so on. As

a result, the public domain is the condition of living in plurality: a place in the world where one has to distinguish oneself constantly by unique deeds, excellent words, and outstanding achievements. On this view, equal and free citizens can express who they are and what they *can* do.

Arendt's account of freedom contains a number of distinctive features. As Arendt puts it, freedom, unlike the liberal formula, is not located in the faculty of willpower. Instead, it designates the territory of the "I-can" rather than the "I-will". Nor is political freedom considered as the absence of human obstacles, which one should check and balance in view of the sum total of private interests. By contrast, freedom signifies the open public domain in and through which human beings collectively act, speak, observe, and above all, fabricate radically new things and forms, while, at the same time, respecting each other as equals. Freedom is, in this sense, guaranteed by participating in public life. Most importantly, Arendt reminds us of the social-historical variability of the meaning of freedom and its inextricable nexus with the politico-ontological form of the society in question. In fact, freedom was a political signifier that, historically, emerged in ancient Greece as a result of the eventful creation of the public space. And even within this community, freedom had a prevalent political significance for a rather short period of time.

It bears noting that Arendt's analysis of freedom is not trans-historical as it is embedded and related to the development of the Greek understandings of freedom between the eighth to mid-fifth century BCE. In particular, it demonstrates that once freedom appears as a central political signifier (which was, in fact, the result of Solonian and Periclean reforms), this notion connotes political equality, autonomy, and citizenship.[44] It is this use of the freedom that captures the essence of Arendt's understanding of freedom. On this interpretation, one could define free persons as equal citizens, who are entitled to participate in the running of the political institutions within the public domain, by virtue of their creative and deliberative interactions. To be sure, not every political community is characterized and signified by this idea of freedom. Likewise, not every type of society and human being considers freedom as the very foundation and final end of politics. In tribal communities, kingdoms in the Near-East and the Far East, or medieval feudal societies (to name a few), the political vectors that govern human behavior and the

social and symbolic arrangements are fundamentally different than the ideal of freedom. [45]

Arguably, viewed from the socio-psychical and symbolic point of departure, the political question of freedom could not even be raised as a meaningful political question in many societies throughout history. Therefore, one cannot simply and uncritically assume that freedom has (or should have) universal or a-temporal validity, as its liberal advocates and human rights ideologists wish to make us believe. This seemingly banal observation gives rise to the following ontological question: under what circumstances does freedom emerge as a constitutive element in the human form of life? This inquiry is the theme of the following section.

## Imaginary Significations

Ontologically speaking, the human life-world is not *the* world (cosmos) *as such*. Rather, it is a *social-historical* creation. To put it another way, the human life-world is the domain of society and history. Each society is a specific creation, in which new forms, significations, institutions, and types of human beings occur.[46] Society invents its means of material subsistence and reproduction for which it utilizes instrumental/functional schemata and categories. The human life-world is, in the Spatio-temporal sense, always subject to change and alteration with respect to something *to come*. This movement towards otherness is what we call history. The human form of life is historical in the sense that it undergoes a process of self-change. In the course of human history, this process of self-change has been rather slow. However, in the last few thousand years, this process has taken place rapidly and remarkably exemplified by radical technological and political transformations.

The social-historical dimension characterizes the mode of being of the human life-world. This dimension comes into being in *and* through the creation of institutions, including family, law, religion, ceremonies, language, norms, type of cuisine, means of production, customs, the form of government, and so on. All these institutions contain a complex network of significations, such as meaningful images, symbolic relations, emblems, commodities, social objects, relations of production, and so on. In the same way, each society creates a web of signifiers, such as totems, gods, mythological figures,

values, ideals, hierarchies, taboos, licit, illicit, sacred, and so on.[47] Each society, to use Castoriadis' terminology, establishes and articulates itself (its own proper reality) in and through *social imaginary significations*.[48]

Evidently, social institutions and significations cannot exist without those who create and reproduce them. The creation and preservation of social institutions and significations depend on actions, signifying practices, and interactions of human beings. Yet, society is not the sum total of inter-subjective relationships. Prior to every inter-subjective relationship, the individual is being socialized by internalizing the already established significations and institutions, which enables her to enter into society and participate in the social world.[49] Socialization is the process whereby the human psyche is forced to leave behind its isolated private world, in order to attain signifiers provided by the society.[50] As such, every individual embodies and represents, either actually or potentiality, the core institutions, and significations of her society. Viewed from this perspective, the human individual is a social-historical creation. On the one hand, society, as always *already* instituted, is primarily a self-institution that emerges from its capacity of self-change (history). On the other hand, the society *leans on* actions (saying, doing, making, fabricating, imagining, gathering, and assembling) of its members and cannot exist and transform without them.

Human society can do anything to impose its own significations, categories, and schemata on the psyche. It transforms and diverts psychical drives and desires in the direction of socially permissible signifiers, intentions, and goals.[51] However, what society is not capable of is creating the human psyche itself. The nucleus of individual and subjectivity is the psychical monad, which is irreducible to the domain of the social-historical. The presence of the human psyche is the very condition for the creation of the social-historical dimension, without which the continuation of society is, simply, impossible. But the human psyche is always susceptible to be shaped by the core institutions and significations of society. For, the human psyche has to be socialized, in order to survive. As Castoriadis makes clear, the human psychical monad has to replace its own world with imaginary significations, valued objects, orientations, actions and roles. This process takes place by way of education (forcing and instructing) throughout one's life.[52] In this way, the common world

and imaginary significations become meaningful for the individual; the human psyche becomes a social-individual. The social-individual is itself, a creation that is profoundly different and unique in every society. The variety of societies known to us reveal that the social institutions can make out of the psyche whatever it pleases, albeit God-oriented, *bene elohim,* labor-oriented, aristocrat and serf, citizen, capitalist, *eleutheros*, monotheistic, leisure-oriented, warrior, netizen, and so on. This heterogeneity stems from the fundamental difference in established social imaginary significations.

Social imaginary significations are not mental objects, which are produced in the human brain arbitrarily. They are those signifiers in and through which the human subject makes sense of the world, and for the same reason, most deeply identifies with. Imaginary significations are *social* signifiers, since all individuals make sense of them, within the context of their collective life-world. They are *imaginary* since one could not find a clear and distinct real/rational referent for them (consider e.g., 'God', 'capital', 'progress', 'economic growth, 'holy war', 'freedom', 'nation', and 'totem'). Imaginary significations are, for this reason, irreducible to functional, rational or biological categories.[53] Nonetheless, they are effectively present in everyone's affections, perceptions, drives, motivations, and intentions.[54] Human beings have an affective lived-experience of their gods, totems, taboos, mythologies, sacred entities, ideals, and so on. As such, imaginary significations designate the modality of the society and its form (*eidos*).[55] In this way, they create a *proper* world for the society in question, i.e., the trajectory of one's life up to death and the meaning of the world (*cosmos*) as an *understandable, suitable, and meaningful whole for us.*

Imaginary significations are called into being by the radical force of human imagination. The source of this creative force is the human psyche. Here, the term 'imagination' is used in two senses: the first sense refers to the capacity to produce images, forms, and figures in the broad sense. The second sense invokes the idea of invention and creation.[56] Imagination is, here, the capacity to make appear things, objects, and representations, whether with or without external stimuli. In other words, imagination is the capacity to create.[57] This capacity is manifested in our linguistic, artistic, and technical abilities, above all, the ability to *refer* by way of symbolic relations (signifier-signified), to *re*present in view of a pre-given form, archetype, or category, and to *produce/fabricate* with respect to a real/rational goal or function.

## Freedom as a social imaginary signification

In light of this approach, we could locate the notion of 'freedom' in the kingdom of social imaginary significations. As with other imaginary significations (such as 'nation', 'god', 'development', 'progress', '*asha'[58]*, '*dharma*'[59], '*li*'[60], 'capital'), the notion of 'freedom' contributes to the institution of a particular form of society, configuration of its core institutions and, above all, intentional and affective direction of its social-individuals. Accordingly, freedom characterizes the modality of free persons (citizens) and articulates the core objectives of free (liberal) societies. Its significance extends to deeper affective human dimensions resembling religious sanctity. In the course of our recent history, many struggles have been fought for the sake of freedom.[61] Wars have been justified for its realization or protection.[62] Many individuals aspire to it and are ready to sacrifice their life for freedom. By contrast, adversaries of these *freedom fighters* consider freedom as a dangerous and inferior ideal; an idol that has to be destroyed.[63] In turn, "liberal" societies and "free citizens" feel deeply insulted and threatened, since the core principle of their way of life is being attacked.[64]

Earlier, it was explained that all societies institute and represent themselves by way of and in view of their particular imaginary significations. Historical evidence shows, as Castoriadis contends, that most human societies have established and preserved themselves through the closure of meaning since they were incapable of putting their own institutions and laws into question.[65] By the same token, these societies generated conformal and heteronomous individuals. In these societies, we can speak of instituted *heteronomy*. From the viewpoint of society, heteronomy entails that the validation and justification of the institutions of societies originate from an extra-social source and refer to a trans-historical agency. This occurs once the contingent and creative origins of social institutions and significations are occulted and alienated by invoking extra-social categories, such as gods, *fatum*, the authority of ancestors, laws of nature, necessary law of history (Marxism), or the invisible-hand of free-market (capitalism). Occultation and alienation are processes through which the laws and social-historically fabricated significations appear as constants and universals.[66] In doing so, they acquire a transcendent status and quality. From the viewpoint of the individual, the closure of meaning and heteronomy characterize and articulate a

predetermined individual whose thought and life are predestined to be governed by the operation of repetition. Heteronomy is effectuated by minimizing the force and capacity of creative imagination that is present in every human being. This process amounts to symbolic, cognitive, and instrumental closure, which is evidently reflected in routine daily habits, sequential collective rituals, monotonous means of production, and repetitive architectural and artistic forms. Another symbolic effect of heteronomy is that the tradition and the already established institutions of society are sanctified. Consequently, the socialized psyche has very few sources at its disposal to question them. [67]

By contrast, freedom appears on the political scene once interrogation and inquiry emerge as an active human disposition, whereby one could interrogate established significations, representations, and norms of society and their possible grounding. This new human disposition disrupts the normal course of events and initiates new unforeseeable and unpredictable beginnings, which lie beyond social rules and pre-given possibilities or automatic processes. This enigmatic rupture marks out the transition from heteronomous to autonomous society. Autonomy drives from Greek '*auto- nomos'*, meaning to *make* one's own laws and knowing that one is doing so, without any appeal to pre-given foundations.[68] In this sense, autonomy is not to be conflated with the Kantian discovery of the universal and timeless law once and for all. By contrast, it is the unlimited self-questioning with respect to laws, commands, and their justifications. Autonomy signifies a politico-ontological modality whereby one, reflectively and deliberately, gives to herself the laws of one's own existence.

To bring about this mode of being one must have the actual possibility to participate in the formation of law, both on the personal and collective level. To be sure, those who have become capable of challenging and criticizing the established significations of their society set the wheel in motion. Yet, the individual capacity to make*, to do, to institute,* to say, and to imagine, becomes an actual human possibility, on the condition that politico-ontological changes have already happened (or are about to happen) within society. Therefore, the process of autonomous self-change depends, only partly, on individual self-questioning, reflective disposition, and creative actions. Yet, this process also requires the presence of an open political domain–

–at least in the seminal form—which makes the manifestation of such actions possible. To this end, freedom has to become a widely accepted signifier that is being experienced, pursued, aspired, and lived by members of society. In view of this new ontological vector, an autonomous society moves towards its self-institution, without any appeal to extra-social sources or reference to trans-historical agencies.

## Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to rethink the notion of 'freedom' via an alternative route. In doing so, freedom was not approached as an atemporal, static concept *in abstracto*, but rather treated in the sense of a signifier that has been social-historically created. My purpose was to demonstrate that since freedom is not a trans-social or trans-historical concept, the question of freedom, only, makes sense in forms of life, in which this imaginary signification has gained (or could gain) political significance. Following Arendt, it could carefully be argued that the prevalence of freedom as an imaginary signification concurs with the emergence of the public domain. This realm represents the domain of signifying practices, in which creative deeds and discourse flourish. The public domain is the space of appearance of free and equal fellows: a political space that is being shaped and reshaped by means of creative collective saying, doing, making, imagining, and fabricating. It is the domain where free and equal citizens self-reflectively act together, in order to institute their way of life. On this interpretation, being free means being a member of this life-world.

   Still, the appearance of societies in which its members put their institutions and the validity of its significations into question is to be considered as an enigmatic rupture. This rupture stems, although partly, from human imagination, i.e., the human capacity to bring into existence things, significations, representations, institutions, which were not present within the schemata of the already instituted society. However, political forms of society that are characterized by freedom are exceptional cases; even in those societies, there is no psychical, social, political, or ontological guarantee for its perpetuity. The history of ancient Greece shows that freedom can lose its political significance, either as a result of external influences or self-alteration of society. In fact, the first radical critics of political freedom were not

strangers, but the Greek philosophers of the highest caliber, including Plato and Aristotle.[69] Similarly, it is not unthinkable that the emblem of freedom would not pale into insignificance, especially within an emerging Spatio-temporal mode of being that is, gradually, being instituted and directed by omniscient algorithmic systems and omnipresent virtual panopticons.

## Notes

[1] UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III) preamble & article 1.

[2] UDHR. preamble

[3] Ibid.

[4] UDHR. preamble.

[5] Ibid. art. 9;

Cf. ICCPR art. 9; ACHR art. 7; ECHR art. 5; ACHPR art. 6

[6] UDHR. art. 29.

[7] See for a comprehensive analysis: Panikkar, R. (January 01, 2008). Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept? *Human Rights: Critical Concepts in Political Science, 1,* 178-199. (Original work published 1982)

Cf.: Arendt, H. (April 01, 1960). Freedom and politics: A Lecture. *Chicago Review*, *14*(1), pp. 30-31

[8] For example, The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (CDHRI) affirms universal freedoms as an integral part of the Islamic religion. Here, the determinations of freedom are defined according to Islamic law (sharia). Organization of Islamic Conference. (2002). *The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam*. Geneva: Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Preamble

[9] For example, The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) restricts the domain of freedom and defines its limits: "The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary for a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary." Council of Europe, *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, as amended by Protocols Nos. 11 and 14, 4 November 1950, ETS 5. Art 10.

[10] Berlin, I. (1958). *Op.cit.* p. 168

[11] Rawls, J. (2001). *Justice as fairness: A restatement*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. pp. 14-16 and pp. 21-22

[12] Cf. Carter, I., Kramer, M. H., & Steiner, H. (2007). *Freedom: A philosophical anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 383-285

[13] Berlin, I. (2008). *Op.cit*. Chap. I.

[14] Hayek, F. A. (1978). *Op.cit*. p. 19.

[15] One of the early modern definitions of negative freedom could be found in Hobbes. "Liberty, or freedom, signifieth properly the absence of opposition (by the opposition, I mean external impediments of motion); and may be applied no less to irrational and inanimate creatures than to rational." Hobbes, T. (1998). *Leviathan* (J. C. A. Gaskin, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. chap. XXI.

[16] Berlin, I. (2008). *Op.cit*. pp. 178-181

[17] Christman, J. (January 01, 1991). Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom. *Ethics*, 101, 2, p. 359

[18] Christman, J. (February 01, 2005). Saving Positive Freedom. *Political Theory, 33* (1), p. 88

[19] Kioupkiolis, A. (2009). Three paradigms of modern freedom. *European Journal of Political Theory*, *8*(4). pp. 478-480

[20] Bringhurst, P. & Gaus, G. (2018). Positive Freedom and the General Will. In D. Schmidtz & C. Pavel (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of freedom.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 41

[21] Taylor, C. (2007). What's Wrong with Negative Liberty. In I. Carter et. al. *(*Eds.*) Op.cit*. p. 162 (Original work published 1979)

[22] Ibid. p. 314.

[23] MacCallum, G. C. (July 01, 1967). Negative and Positive Freedom. *The Philosophical Review*, 76(3). p. 319

[24] Berlin, I. (2008). *Op. cit*. p. 36

[25] Gray, J. (2015). *The soul of the marionette: A short inquiry into human freedom*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. pp. 161-162

[26] Berlin. I. (2008), *Op. cit*. p. 176

[27] Cf. List, C., and Valentini, L. (2016). Freedom as independence. *Ethics, 126*(4), 1043-1074.

See also: Miller, D. (1983). Constraints on Freedom. *Ethics, 94*(1), 66-86.

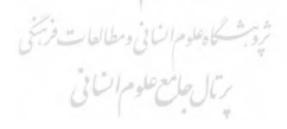[28] Arendt, H. (April 01, 1960). Freedom and politics: A Lecture. *Chicago Review*, 14, 1, pp. 30-31.

[29] Ibid. p. 30

[30] Ibid

[31] For a recent account of freedom in which the concept of will plays a key role, see: Pettit, P. (June 12, 2015). Freedom: psychological, ethical, and political. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy.* 18, 4. 375-389

[32] Cf. Thomas. (1948). *Summa Theologiae*. Taurini: Marietti. Part I, Questio 83.

[33] Arendt, H. (April 01, 1960). *Op. cit.* p. 32.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Arendt, H. (1958). *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 24.

[36] Arendt, H. (1958). *Op. cit*. p. 25.

[37] Ibid. p. 7

[38] Ibid. 57

[39] Arendt, H. (April 01, 1960). *Op. cit*. p. 30.

[40] Ibid. p. 41.

[41] Arendt, H. (1958). *Op. cit*. pp. 30-31.

[42] Ibid. p. 32.

[43] Ibid. pp. 32-33.

[44] Cf. Nippel, W. (2016). *Ancient and modern democracy: Two concepts of liberty?* (K. Tribe Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 33-35

[45] It should be emphasized that this assertion does not imply that the question of freedom had no relevance in other regions of the world outside the Greek context. Historical evidence shows that freedom was a major topic of discussion in cosmology, mythology and eschatology, even before its common use in Greece (Cons. e.g., the Sanskrit notion of *Moksha* or the Avestan *Azata*). My point relates the somewhat enigmatic nexus between freedom and political form and organization of society. For a discussion, see: Klooger, J., & Howard, D. (2009). *Castoriadis: Psyche, society, autonomy*. Leiden: Brill. pp. 292-294

[46] Castoriadis, C. (1997). *The Castoriadis reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. p. 332.

[47] Castoriadis, C. (1987). *The imaginary institution of society*. (K. Blamey, Trans.). Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. pp. 273-274.

[48] *signification imaginaire sociale* Ibid. p. 354.

[49] Ibid. pp. 143-144.

[50] Castoriadis, C. (1997). *Op.cit*. p. 315.

[51] Castoriadis, C. (1987). *Op.cit*. pp. 310-311.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid. pp. 364-365.

[54] From this perspective, they show similarity with Lacanian master signifiers.

[55] Castoriadis, C. (1997). *Op.cit*. p. 334.

[56] Ibid. P. 321.

[57] Ibid. p. 322.

[58] *Asha* (*arta*) is a fundamental political and religious term of the old Iranian languages, which could loosely be translated as 'truth', 'existence', 'righteousness', 'order', and 'good conduct'.

[59] *Dharma* is a central concept in the Indian culture with multiple meanings, including (but not limited to) 'cosmic order', 'law', 'justice', 'righteous act', 'right way of doing'.

[60] *Li* is a key notion in the Confucian tradition, which is untranslatable to European languages. It is often associated with rites, 'cosmic law', 'good custom', and 'right manners'

[61] For example, this central role is underlined in the tripartite motto of the French revolution ("Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité"), which was later incorporated in the constitution of many countries and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[62] In a remarkable speech George Bush (the 43rd President of the US) explains the reason for the declared "War on Terror" as follows: "Freedom and fear are at war. The advance of human freedom -- the great achievement of our time, and the great hope of every time -- now depends on us." Bush, G. W. (2001). Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People. Retrieved from

http://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/
20010920-8.html

[63] For example, one of the prominent conservative Islamic clerics
considers freedom as an *idol* that has been fabricated by the United
States, in order to be worshipped by nations. To preserve the core
values of Islam, as he contends, it is a religious command to resist and
demolish this idol. Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, M. (2014, May 9). The US has
made freedom into an idol for nations. *Tasnim News* Retrieved from
http://tn.ai/363920

[64] The spontaneous and collective reactions to the Paris attacks (2015)
in the form of slogans, "Je Suis Charlie" and "Je Suis Paris" or
political statements made by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, "this
attack on freedom is not just against Paris. It targets us all" are
exemplary cases revealing this point.

[65] Castoriadis, C. (1997). *Op.cit.* p 311.

[66] Castoriadis, C. (1987). *Op.cit.* p. 109.

[67] Klooger, J., & Howard, D. (2009). *Op. cit.* pp 11-13.

[68] Castoriadis, C. (1997). *Op.cit.* p. 316.

[69] For Aristotle, see: Aristotle. (1998). *Politics*. Oxford: Oxford
University Press. 1310a

For Plato, see: Plato (1987). *Theatetus: Sophist*. (H. N. Fowler, Trans.).
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 172C-D

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