



Towards a correct delimitation of negative freedoms in the neoliberal context.

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Sissi Cano Cabildo

Faculty of Philosophy, Complutense University of Madrid. (SPAIN).

CE: sicano@ucm.es / ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9604-3109

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SUMMARY

In this paper I propose to analyze what would be the correct limits of negative freedoms to rebuild our civic culture from respect, recognition, justice and ecological responsibility. Throughout history we had seen many forms of dictatorial government where there was no margin for freedom while we are currently seeing in the neoliberal context practically the opposite, the legitimization of unlimited negative freedoms, especially with regard to freedom of expression and private property, becoming a rapacious individualism that underestimates respect, justice and the rights of others. It's no small thing...

Keywords: Negative freedoms. Boundaries. Thought. Respect and justice.

ABSTRACT



Towards a correct delimitation of negative freedoms in the neoliberal context In this work I propose to analyze what would be the correct limits of negative freedoms to reconstruct our civic culture based on respect, recognition, justice and ecological responsibility. Throughout history we had seen many dictatorial forms of government where there was no margin for freedom while we are currently seeing in the neoliberal context practically the opposite, the legitimation of unlimited negative freedoms, especially with regard to freedom of expression and private property, resulting in a rapacious individualism that underestimates respect, justice and rights of others. It is no small thing...

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Introduction

One of the concepts that has always been present in the philosophical dissertation has been that of freedom and it is not for less if we think that human existence has always been a continuous process of deliberations and decisions that finally lead us to think about freedom. However, throughout history we can see that freedom has been a polysemic concept, either because of the different contexts in which it has arisen, different languages and hermeneutic filters. Philosophical discourse is no exception, we have different conceptions of freedom in different philosophical currents such as teleologism, Christian philosophy, enlightenment, liberalism, existentialism, etc. Hence the effort of some great thinkers to clarify and schematize the main approaches to freedom, we have for example Constant's classic "From the freedom of the ancients compared to the freedom of the moderns" (2002), the approach to positive and negative freedom of Isaiah Berlin, the Arendtian distinction between philosophical freedom, liberation and political freedom, freedom as "non-domination" of Pettit, Skinner and MacCallum, among others.

In this article I will analyze the meaning of negative freedoms (Berlin, 2008) in the face of current problems and from this to show the moral narrowness of the neoliberal approach to freedom. Obviously, I will not cover everything that encompasses the concept of "neoliberalism" (which, incidentally, would be impossible to exhaust in 30 pages) but I will only focus on analyzing the sense



of freedom that the neoliberal approach postulates. I will refer to neoliberalism as the post-Keynesian capitalist period, which is built from the hegemonic discourse that sustains individual freedom and the unlimited right to private property, from which the process of liberalization of the economy, privatization, financialization, a drastic reduction of public spending and the intervention of the State in favor of the private sector is legitimized (Harvey, 2007).

Negative freedoms refer to the "power to do" of the individual in the face of the pressure/oppression of others and "neoliberalism" seems to assume that these individual freedoms must be unlimited, especially with regard to freedom of expression and private property, becoming a kind of rapacious individualism that demerits the humanist sense of freedom that classical liberalism originally defended, who thought of the freedom of all and therefore evoked the correct limits of individual freedoms.

Now, one might think that this exercise in philosophical dissertation on the decline of the sense of freedom is only an irrelevant semantic pretense but perhaps rather a first step in assuming responsibility and the consequent empowerment of freedom. Let's remember Berlin:

[...] Heine warned the French not to underestimate the power of ideas; philosophical concepts raised in the stillness of a professor's study room could destroy a civilization. He spoke of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as the sword with which European deism had been beheaded; he described Rousseau's works as the bloody weapon that in Robespierre's hands had destroyed the old regime [...]. It may be that political ideas are something dead without the pressure of social forces, but what is certain is that these forces are blind and lack direction if they are not clothed with ideas. (Berlin, 1988, pp. 216-217).

Historical monitoring of negative freedoms

Negative freedoms correspond to the absence of coercion to realize individual desires and thus are posed by Isaiah Berlin:



I will call its negative sense to the one who answers the question by the scope in which the subject is left or should be allowed to do or be what he is capable of doing or being, without other people interfering in it. (Berlin, 1988, p.40).

This margin of action that guarantees a certain freedom depends on others, be it the couple, the family, society, religious institutions or the state; but since the margin of action is never unlimited, it is understood that this approach is negative because there are always limits and conditions on the part of the context and the situation.

Now, precisely because of this negative sense of freedom one could think that freedom does not exist because it would be a semantic incongruity to speak of "limited freedom" or "conditioned freedom" and there is no lack of reason in this approach, so this sense of freedom is somewhat weak and negative but real; in fact, social and legal freedoms are limited by exogenous negativity. However, in order to avoid objections of a linguistic nature, rather than talking about limited freedom, Berlin speaks of negative freedom when referring to this less strict but functional sense in everyday use and in legal regulations. On the contrary, Berlin speaks of positive freedom to refer to another sense of freedom properly ontological, which points to the possibility of self-determination of the will, which transcends any form of determinism; but this sense of freedom is too complex and profound that it would justifiably divert the central theme of this article.

The negative approach to freedom does not refer to inner positive freedom, but refers to actions, it only refers to the possibilities we have to do what we want and that we can effectively do. Someone could say, for example, that he married freely insofar as no one prevented or forced him to marry, but from this approach nothing is said about positive freedom, the motivations or causes that led said subject to make that decision, if it was for some hidden reason in the framework of unconscious determinism, familial, neurological or historical.

The negative sense of freedom had its first philosophical foundation in Magna Graecia, later defended by Hobbes and especially by classical liberalism as we will see later.

From the Greek perspective of the *cosmos*, the world was conceived as the set of causally interconnected beings and therefore, in rational interdependence; even the human being as part of the cosmos could not self-determine spontaneously and independently of the logic of the world, he could



ignore it but not escape it. Thus, there was room for ignorance but not for irrationality. When the Greeks spoke of free men they referred to freedom in a negative sense, to refer to those people who could do whatever they wanted, unlike slaves or women. Men were considered free insofar as they had no obligation to obey but neither to command and in that sense they were independent, they did not depend on schedules or anyone in particular. But it is also true that very few enjoyed these negative freedoms.

Civil liberties as rights of all human beings were unknown to ancient civilizations. Among the Jews, Chinese, Greeks, Romans and all ancient civilizations, as Condorcet says, there was no notion of individual rights. What the ancients understood by freedom was compatible with the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the assembled multitude. Terpendander could not among the Spartans add a string to his lyre without the ephors being offended. We also see that a young lacedaemon could not freely visit his new wife. In Rome, the censors scrutinized even inside the families because the laws regulated the customs. Authors such as Hannah Arendt, Ryle, Hartmann, Wilson and Berlin agree that the approach to individual and self-referential freedom was unknown in Classical Greece. I quote from *The Life of the Spirit*:

Whatever the merits of the post-antiquity theories that place human freedom in the I want, the truth is that in the framework of pre-Christian thought it was located in the I can; freedom was an objective state of the body and not a *datum* of consciousness or spirit. Freedom meant that one could do whatever one liked, without being constrained by the orders of a master, nor by some physical necessity that required working for a wage in order to feed the body, nor by some somatic inconvenience such as illness or paralysis. According to Greek etymology, that is, according to the interpretation made by the Greeks, the root of the word 'freedom', *eleutheria* is 'to go to the air you want', there is no doubt that basic freedom was understood as freedom of movement. A person was free if he could move as he pleased; the criterion was the I-can, and not the I-want. (Arendt, 2002, p. 252).

Freedom in Greece also had a political connotation, such as public participation, typical of citizens; only that citizenship was an exclusive right, not everyone could access it; in fact most of the inhabitants of the *polis* were not free, very few were those who could participate politically. It took many centuries



to see political freedom as a right of all, if there is even still much to be done about it... the process of empowering citizens has had to overcome many sexist, racist, religious and class prejudices.

Already in medieval times, despite the philosophical proposal of Christian freedom, what was really carried out, were the freedoms of the clergy and the privileges inherited along with the title and the land. The function of the laws was basically to protect property, for it was property and status that guaranteed "freedom" as a power of action and participation.

Already in the seventeenth century we find the theoretical approach of negative freedom in the iusnaturalism of Hobbes: "by freedom is understood, according to the proper meaning of the word, the absence of external impediments, impediments that often reduce part of the power that a man has to do what he wants". (2017, p. 97). However, this approach did not become the promotion and expansion of individual freedoms, on the contrary it became the postulation of a total State, since Hobbes conceived the human being as selfish by nature, he considered that men were capable of ceding part of their freedom to the sovereign in order to survive. From this approach it was understood that reason allows us to understand and accept that there must be a power strong enough to bring order and guarantee the survival of all.

The process of empowering negative freedoms throughout history has been very slow and painful; we still have a lot to do about it today, on the one hand extending freedoms to vulnerable and excluded groups but also rethinking the correct limits of those freedoms. The freedoms that the constitutional government guarantees all have a negative character, so Berlin quotes from Bentham that "every law is an infringement of freedom" (Isaiah, 1988, p. 57) in that they coerce and protect from abuses of freedom. Limits on freedoms are to protect freedom itself, let us not forget that the freedom of the strong has generally led to the oppression of the weak; so it is necessary to postulate institutional mechanisms that protect the freedom of all.

Liberalism will be the philosophical current that properly supports freedom as the axis of its argumentation and its political proposal, not in vain is it called that; only that the freedom it postulates is above all in its negative sense. John Stuart Mill just begins the introduction of his emblematic work *On Freedom* saying:

The object of this essay is not what has been called free will, with so little fortune opposed to the so-called improper doctrine of philosophical necessity, but civil or social freedom, that is,



the nature and limits of power that society can legitimately exercise over the individual. (Stuart, 2017, p. 37).

That is, John Stuart Mill shows from the beginning of his work that he will not speak about the ethical and metaphysical approach to freedom, he will not analyze whether the human will is determined or not; rather, it will analyze the limits that individual freedoms should have in society. And this issue is no small thing, on the contrary it can be one of the greatest contributions of modernity, precisely because it gave direction to the recognition and legal protection of our individuality, to be unique and different from others; but also to respect the freedom of others and therefore, the consequent plurality.

And I am interested in rethinking this last point in relation to the neoliberal approach because it seems to me that individual freedoms have been distorted, becoming some kind of anarchic relativism, believing that individual freedoms by themselves should have no limits, as if it were legitimate to evoke one's own freedom to the detriment of the freedom of others. In other words, in the neoliberal context there is a tendency to believe that freedom of expression, association, press and creed do not have to consider respect for others as if this were a pre-modern and repressive moralistic prejudice. I return from John Stuart Mill a devastating reflection:

The only freedom that deserves such a name is to seek our own good by our own way, as long as we do not try to deprive others of theirs or hinder their efforts to achieve it. [...] Humanity benefits more if it is aware that everyone lives in their own way than if they are forced to live as it seems good to others. (Stuart, 2017, p. 58).

The liberalism of the twentieth century will continue to defend this sense of freedom and we see this in Berlin and Rawls mainly, but with the crisis of the Keynesian state the sense of freedom began to be commodified, focusing more than anything on economic liberalization and the right of unlimited private property. Let's think more carefully about it...

Freedom of thought

The first step to understand and value the sense of freedom is undoubtedly to dare to think. And although freedom of thought is not properly a negative freedom, it is its prelude because from what we



think and from what we do not think our actions will derive. Stuart Mill as a good liberal claimed freedom of thought to correctly exercise one's freedom. Some time later Emilio Lledó said in an interview: "What you have to have, mainly and primarily, is freedom of thought. What does freedom of speech matter to me if I say nothing but imbecilities?" (2013) .

In fact, all the great thinkers show and demonstrate the importance of thought (*Denken*), only that some like Hannah Arendt claim it for ethical-political purposes in that it can prevent us from any kind of manipulation pernicious for oneself and for others:

If thinking – the two-in-one of silent dialogue – [...] The manifestation of the wind of thinking is not knowledge; it is the ability to distinguish the good from the bad, the beautiful from the ugly. And this, in the rare moments when a critical point has been reached, can prevent catastrophes, at least for me (Arendt, 2002, p. 215).

Arendt analyzed the dangers of thoughtlessness from the follow-up of the Eichmann case, one of the main responsible for the holocaust and who in the trial assumed an irresponsible attitude, without any feeling of guilt or regret. In the trial as a lieutenant colonel of the SS he never presented personal arguments or criteria that explained his conduct, but tended to repeat clisés or slogans, catchy frases that he called "winged words", which showed his indoctrination; his evident taste for bombastic words made him an ideal subject for the use of "code language" and his repeated aphasia led him to apologize frequently saying: "my only language is bureaucratic" (Arendt, 1999, p. 79). Now, Eichmann did not have the psychological profile of a psychopath, six psychiatrists certified that he was a "normal" man, even one of them considered that Eichmann's psychological traits towards his family and friends were not only normal, but exemplary. Of what Arendt comments that the characteristic of this character was rather the thoughtlessness but not because he lacked the faculty of thinking but because of his apathy and conformism of accommodating bureaucrat. From where something terrifying emerged: that to do harm you do not need bad intentions, atrocities can be committed from vile stupidity, showing that the lack of thought can then have serious social and political consequences.

Thought is not constructed from intersubjectivity but is extremely personal, it is self-reflection; it moves between universals and invisible essences, it does not produce concrete results, it is an incessant source of unanswered questions. This ability will not discover once and for all what good and



evil are, nor does it provide any moral mandate or proposition, does not confirm, rather dissolves the established rules of conduct; but then what is it for? That thought or great thinkers cannot give absolute answers to the main human questions could discourage any search in this regard, and yet Arendt considers that there is precisely the charm, richness and creativity of human life; he even goes further by considering the pillars of truth pedantic and dangerous (God, progress, honor, nation, etc.) if many of them have legitimized injustices, deaths and wars, he said that "the most terrible errors have replaced the best known truths" (Arendt, 2001, p.21). It remains only to think and rethink the established, assuming a critical attitude is no small thing, on the contrary it may be the only resource we have left to face the bombardment of information from telecommunications and any telematic, religious, sexual, political or any type of manipulation. If we are going to defend freedom, let it be from thought and not from foolishness, let's look at it more closely...

Freedom of expression, respect and tolerance

In this section I intend to show the relevance of rethinking the limits of social and legal freedoms in relation to respect for others, especially in our multicultural context where it seems easy to get lost in relativisms or close ourselves in ethnocentrism. Without further ado, from relativism we would finally end up accepting everything, where any expression would be valid because it is assumed that everything depends on the glass with which one looks, and then one would believe that mockery and offense are only subjective; but the opposite reading would lead us to ethnocentrism and monolithic readings of life, typical of dictatorships and / or fundamentalisms and we already know the consequences ...

What is the middle ground that balances everyone's freedoms? While it is true that the liberal state has the function of protecting and guaranteeing individual freedoms from the tyranny of society, religion or the state; it is also true that these freedoms must be for all, not for a few; otherwise it would regress to a state society. Thinking about it, we appeal once again to the correct limits that individual freedoms should have in order to respect others. Freedom of expression, association and worship have been great conquests of history, for which many people have sacrificed, none of these rights have been achieved since the academic dissertation; but there has been blood, sweat and tears involved. Assata



Shakur said that: "No one in the world, no one in history has ever achieved their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of their oppressors"(Shakur,2013, p.48). So to trivialize freedom and distort its meaning would be vile ignorance or ingratitude towards the liberal legacy.

Freedom of thought would have to be reconsidered now more than ever given the advance of telecommunications... Issues such as consumerism, sexuality, addictions, violence and religion are unleashed in ICTs and we have seen the risks they entail in terms of harassment and ideological, political and religious manipulation, but then what is right? What is the politically correct meaning of freedom of expression? In the political debates of many countries, does respect prevail? When we see that in Italy in 2014, the vice president of the Senate, Roberto Calderoli compared the minister of integration Cécile Kyenge with an orangutan for its African phenotypic features, that racist militants threw bananas at the exit of an act and there was even a municipal councilor who proposed that she be raped so that she would suffer in her own flesh the crimes committed, supposedly, by immigrants(Ordaz, 2014). Is mockery politically correct? It seems to me that this is one of many examples in which one realizes that there is a lack of education for freedom...

Another question that comes up about freedom of expression is whether there should be limits to what we can say not only about people but also about their symbols and beliefs. A well-known example was the jihadist attack on the French magazine, which for many was an attack on press freedom. The slogan *Je suis Charlie* (I am Charlie) spread around the world, while for others it was the predictable consequence of disrespect for other people's beliefs, writers such as Peter Carey, Michael Ondaatje, Francine Prose, Teju Cole, Rachel Kushner and Taiye Selas saw in the publication a display of "cultural intolerance" (Caballero, 2015). What is the limit of freedom of expression in religious matters? It is worth remembering that the secular State is characterized by the neutrality it assumes in religious matters. The secular ideal wants to unite the people (*Laos*) on a double basis: absolute freedom of conscience and strict equality of rights among men, whatever spiritual option they choose: to be religious, agnostic or atheist. The secular state then is not the one that imposes atheism or some religious confession, but the one that remains neutral in this regard, when Stalin banned religion in the Soviet Union it came into contradiction with secularism, as Franco was imposing Catholicism.



Respect for national symbols is also another issue to be debated, an example of this was the imputation to a television presenter Dani Mateo because in a program the nose was blown with a flag of Spain (Gálvez, 2018). And I could continue with many more examples that would result in evoking how to make freedom and respect compatible in a plural society. These approaches had somehow already been glimpsed in classical liberalism, Stuart Mill said that: "The only part of the conduct of every man that is responsible to society is that which relates to others. As far as it only concerns itself, its independence must be absolute"(Stuart, 2017, p. 53).

But as I said in the introduction of this article my intention is to make a wake-up call to understand the importance of clarifying the meaning of freedom but without prescribing how to exercise it because my goal is not to moralize, nothing more alien to the freedom of others; if I give some examples of the ambiguous use of freedom, it is only because we must dare to expose these issues to criticism and debate.

With regard to freedom, the issue of respect inevitably comes to light and it should be clear that in a world that we all share, the freedoms of human beings can only coexist from mutual respect. But again, what is the sense of respect? It seems to me that respect starts from the recognition of the autonomy and freedom of others, it comes from the latin *respectus*: consideration and attention to the value of otherness. I couldn't say I respect someone if I overlook their will. Now, it is true that this will requires having a certain mental development, I suppose I do not have to explain that certain physical and mental illnesses prevent us from understanding the sense of respect and freedom; but among people with sufficient age and health to understand these issues, we must impute the irresponsibility of assuming all this with closed moralisms, innocuous candidness, supine arrogance or simply for rudeness, without more.

One thing is freedom of expression as the right to express your opinion, denunciation and criticism with arguments from reasonableness, the right to express your ideas and feelings and another is to offend people and their symbols with unclean words or images. I maintain without fear of falling into moralisms that the freedom of expression of the citizen and the artist also have limits in the face of respect for others. Respect is an ethical-political value because not only do I matter but everyone. And if respect is horizontal then it could be understood that there is no room for mockery and rudeness,



unless it happens from complicity, as when two people joke because there is mutual trust but it is very different from mocking someone without prior consent.

And with symbols something similar happens, if we think that symbols, (especially those that are of a religious or patriotic order) refer to images that have sacred value for those who represent them, it could be understood that symbols allude to the vulnerability of certain people and that for that reason no one should have the right to prohibit or mock the feelings of anyone, or to promote symbols of hatred such as the swastika. It is one thing to denounce corruption, some injustice or some crime and another thing is to attack the symbols that represent many other people who have nothing to do with the crime or injustice committed. To underestimate the feelings and beliefs of others would be to objectify otherness, to deny its humanity, to fall into reductionisms and monolithic readings that are far from respect, otherness and understanding of plurality.

Now, perhaps the understanding of these issues would be a very high pretension for the common mortal, desirable but too deep for the majority, that understanding that Octavio Paz understood as a kind of spiritual embrace. Perhaps the minimum and elementary thing that should be demanded of citizens is respect. The limits of negative freedoms would be marked by respect, enforceable by the individual himself or in the latter case, by the State.

In our multicultural context there are people who think that homosexuals are a lack of respect for morality, that criticizing the king is a lack of respect for Spain, that making caricatures of Muhammad is an unforgivable lack of respect, etc., with which it would be seen that we border on the relativistic emotivism that MacIntyre diagnosed in modernity. I wonder then if anything should be allowed... I guess not, there are practices that obviously threaten the integrity of the person, be it ablation, arranged marriages or gender violence, for example. It seems to me that it is of the utmost relevance to delimit the sense of respect and tolerance. MacIntyre said that tolerance is not in itself a virtue; if it is too inclusive it becomes a vice. And it is that finally tolerance by its own concept is permissive and therefore reckless, if it leads to tolerate anything ... Known is Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance:

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. By this approach we do not mean, for example, that we should always prevent the expression of intolerant philosophical conceptions; as long as we can counter them by rational arguments and keep them in check



before public opinion, their prohibition would, of course, be unwise. But we must claim the right to prohibit them, if necessary by force, for it may well be that they are not intended to impose themselves on us on the plane of rational arguments, but, on the contrary, begin by accusing all reasoning; thus, they may forbid their adherents, for example, who listen to rational reasoning, accusing them of being deceptive, and teaching them to respond to arguments through the use of fists or weapons. We must then claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We must therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate intolerance(2010, p. 585).

John Rawls at one point argues that a just society has to tolerate the intolerant in order not to become intolerant, and therefore unjust. However, it considers that society has a reasonable right to survival that prevails over the principle of tolerance: "[...] as long as an intolerant sect is not designated as intolerant, its freedom can only be restricted when the tolerant, sincerely and rightly, believes that its own security and that of the institutions of freedom are in danger" (Rawls, 1995, p. 202).

It seems to be seen then that tolerance leads to contradictions because finally there is no way to justify that there are things that should not be tolerated. In addition, another questionable aspect of tolerance would be that it is assumed from verticality, it changes a lot the focus of those who "tolerate you" to those who "respect you". If tolerance made any sense, it would be in the private sphere because given the contingent and imperfect human condition, we could understand that sometimes we make mistakes and that others should understand it in exceptional situations; perhaps we could understand a bad answer from the friend who has just lost his job, it is not that we justify it but perhaps we should tolerate it but another thing is the public sphere, where citizens must be clear about what we should not do, or allow, without picaresque.

In this regard, tolerance should also be distinguished from equity, since the latter is the justice applied to the specific case. Equity (lat. *aequitas*, *aequus*, equal) has the aspiration of equality and therefore in the criminal code for example, it appeals to mitigating factors, that is, to the particular circumstances of criminal responsibility that moderate the penalty indicated for a crime and that influence to prosecute and penalize equitably. One thing is the theft of a sick old woman in a



supermarket and another the scam of any politician; in this example then we would not speak properly of tolerating the old woman but of being equitable with her, unlike unjustifiable corruption and abuse.

Respect is a clearer value, it does not admit half measures, part of the recognition of the other, in his person, ideas and actions. It is not that you should respect others "sometimes" and / or "a little", but respect *factum*, without rounding.

However, respecting is not accepting everything but ensuring one's own integrity and that of others; it is not only a strictly personal value but is built from intersubjectivity; and in this sense respect is an ethical-political value because it is exercised from the recognition of otherness.

But according to MacCallum(1967), respect and freedom remain only in verbiage if some exogenous agent dominates you, in his essay "Positive Freedom and Negative Freedom" he criticized Berlin's two concepts of freedom to finally say that there is only one concept of freedom: absence of domination (with respect to agents, constraints and ends). In tune, Shapiro (2012) considers that freedom is achieved from non-domination: whoever controls the resources that people need to achieve their basic interests will have effective power over those people and even worse if we take into account that domination can occur without there being explicit orders from identifiable agents because it can occur involuntarily and unconsciously, embedded in structural relationships. Philip Pettit (1999) would be another of those who considers that negative freedom consists in non-domination, not non-interference. Personally, it seems to me that these readings of "non-domination" can be contradicted with relative ease because in any historical context there has always been dissent, people or groups that rebel, even in ultra-repressive contexts such as dictatorships or fanaticism. Incidentally, it was these exceptional examples that have just made history possible... People who have fought for their ideals, even though they are dominated and in filthy situations, be it Olympe de Gouges, Nelson Mandela, Luther King, Miguel Hernández, José Mujica or Malala Yousafzai, among others... It is not demagoguery to underline that the history of human rights has advanced thanks to indignation and dissent.

In addition, seeing freedom as non-domination inevitably passes through the hermeneutic filter of the inner freedom of the dominated, remember the dark approach that Mc Farlane's Berlin recovers: "knowing one's own chains is often the first step to freedom, which may never come if they are ignored or loved"(Berlin, 1988, p.40). It will not be strange then that there are Philosophies that reach freedom



by other means... Schiller for example said in the introduction to *Aesthetic Education* that "freedom is reached by beauty" (Schiller, 1990, p. 101). Perhaps it is the fact that only the aesthetic mood is capable of diverting the path of cold and objective causality. Berlin himself recognized that it was not only history but art that showed him the way to freedom; as evidenced by his friendship with Pasternak, Brodsky and Anna Akhmatova. Berlin once said that his relationship with Russian poets had permanently changed his view of life. When Akhmatova tells Berlin (in that encounter that her biographer Michael Ignatieff (1999) refers to as unique and unforgettable) of the execution of her husband, the arrest of her son, and how all this had inspired her poetry. From this conversation that lasted until dawn, Berlin knew how to see in Anna's will how a human being can overcome fate with the word and escape alienation with poetry... Anna revealed the humanization of Bolshevik savagery; perhaps it was to see in this Russian poet ostracized the ontological strength to say "no" to passive resignation and create poetic spaces to realize her autonomy. Thus Berlin mentions in the *Crooked Shaft of Humanity*:

[...] the glory and dignity of man are based on the fact that it is he who chooses and does not choose for him, that he can be his own master (although sometimes this fills him with fear and a sense of loneliness), that he is not obliged to buy security and tranquility at the price of allowing himself to be locked in a clean locker of a totalitarian structure that seeks to snatch responsibility, freedom and respect for oneself and others, in one fell swoop (Berlin, 1992, p. 190).

From Akhmatova I want to refer to how aesthetic culture grants the most complete autonomy to the individual will, in that it can only depend on itself. Of the things that aesthetic culture achieves is to put man in a position to do for himself what he wants, completely returning to him the unsubmissive freedom, which well invites dignity.

Berlin's critique of historical determinism, which was seen in his great study of positive and negative freedom, was surely enriched by what he saw in Akhmatova: that history does not predetermine subsequent hermeneutics, that a tragic fate can also be interpreted aesthetically; but for this, it would take a great soul where freedom breaks out.



By April 1948, Berlin was warned of the severe xenophobia against foreigners in Moscow, and so he cancelled any attempt to visit Akhmatova. In addition to the fact that by 1952, Leo (Isaiah's uncle) was arrested and accused of belonging to a network of British spies including his brother Mendel and his nephew Isaiah.

All this could only distance Berlin from totalitarianism and bring it closer to liberalism; it led him to fight against the narrow-mindedness of those who deny pluralism. For our philosopher, any society or nation is not a mere collective term that represents individuals who possess certain characteristics in common; human beings must rather be entities independent of the whole, which are recognized not by a universal essence but in their existence. Berlin is committed to freedom that rebels against the Iron Curtain; disagrees, in short, with any political fascism that seeks to impose single routes; distrust the security and omnipotence of omnipotent truths against the infinite richness of what pulsates and breathes.

Unlimited freedom of private property?

Now we enter the realm of freedom that is most important in neoliberal discourse: the right to private property. In this section I do not intend to question this right but rather to recall a remark raised centuries ago by classical liberalism: that the exercise of private property, as of all individual freedoms, should not overlook the freedoms and rights of others. In this sense, private property should in no way justify transgression of workers' freedoms and rights; in terms of working hours, wages and working conditions. And it seems to me that this should be evident to any citizen, government or political party. Locke said that:

[...] anything that is taken from the state in which nature produced and left it, and modifies it with its labor and adds to it something that is of itself, is therefore its property. [...] For this work, being undoubtedly the property of the worker, results in no man except himself being entitled to what has been added to the thing in question, at least when there are still sufficient common goods left for others (Locke, 2004, p. 10).

And this last criterion is the one that is not clear in the contradictions of the neoliberal world: 33% of food is lost or wasted in the "first world", also in 2018 1% of the rich of the world came to accumulate 82% of global wealth (Hope, 2018), or whatever the president of the Banco Mundial warned, David



Malpass (Wheatley, 2020) that close to 60 million people will fall into extreme poverty in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Is this level of inequality fair or minimally decent? I see no way to philosophically justify an economic-political system where a very high percentage of the population does not have the basic needs covered while a minimum has the unspeakable... However, thinkers such as Milton Friedman (1980) or Friedrich von Hayek (among other conservative liberals) would appeal to the advantages of a system that allows the unlimited exercise of the right to private property.

Locke rather believed that the foundation of private property is the work of every man (Locke, 2004, p. 15). And along these lines, it would be a grievance of the neoliberal state to allow exorbitant wages and assets that do not go in proportion to the work of the beneficiaries. Is this correct, fair or commendable? Financialization would be the clearest example of this, financial speculation has more to do with random factors than with work.

Although on the other hand, one might think that throughout history the source of wealth has not always been work, sometimes it has been the result of theft, betrayal and greed and that this is even part of human nature. But if we look at some anthropological data, not all cultures have seen it that way, some ethnic groups see as a serious fault the excessive accumulation of wealth, the *Kapauku* of New Guinea for example, come to murder selfish and greedy men, in this tribe they choose the village chiefs and the "great man" based on their generosity. Another practice that questions the right to unlimited accumulation is the *potlatch*, the exchange system of the tribes of the Pacific coasts of North America and the *Tsimshian* of Alaska (Kotak, 2010, pp. 196-7). Potlatch sponsors traditionally give away food, blankets, copper pieces or other items to gain prestige. In the nineteenth century for example, the *Kwakiutl* began to trade with Europeans and increased their wealth but they also spread European diseases so the population was reduced and it was then that they began to destroy items of wealth such as blankets, copper pieces and houses to avoid great social differences and distance themselves from friendly tribes. As can be seen then, in other cultures the destruction of wealth gives prestige while for capitalist society it would look less than absurd because from the "capitalist rationality" the objective is surplus value...

Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Idle Class* (1966) claimed that the Potlatch was based on an economically irrational impulse in search of prestige. (p. 76). But if we think about it, the search for prestige can be as irrational as virtual financial speculation, financialization becomes meaningless



speculation because the virtual world of the economy is infinite... Perhaps the interesting thing about the subject is rather to raise the consequences of both approaches, not only in human but ecological terms, unavoidable problems of the capitalist mode of production and the consequent consumerism. I quote some data in this regard: before 2050 greenhouse gas emissions would have to be reduced by between 40% and 70% to avoid the worst effects of climate change, according to the Paris Agreement; 42% of terrestrial invertebrates are at risk of extinction and every year, eight million tons of plastics end up in the oceans (Sánchez and Planelles, 2019). Is this rational or intelligent? It seems to me that in no way could the use and abuse of the natural and human resources that we are doing, allowing or legitimizing be justified. It is not demagoguery or rhetoric to evoke the responsible use of the right to private property.

Another of the issues that come to light in terms of neoliberalism is the hegemonic discourse that claims freedom in marketing but from the rationalization of economic interests. Consumer freedom should start from freedom of thought, not manipulation. But are the huge lines to buy the latest developments in telecommunications really necessary or are they just rationalizations of the search for a certain social status? It would be very good to distinguish between acting consciously from acting freely because it is one thing to be aware of what we do without realizing the unconscious manipulation of our will and another thing is to exercise the right to private property from informed deliberation. Inner freedom is always the hermeneutic filter through which any information passes, hence it is most likely the only and effective resource we have left to face the power of business elites and political and digital marketing. I hope to show that this freedom of thought is the knot from which the humanist profile opens, it is no small thing; thus we return to the beginning of this work, to the approach of the importance of the freedom to think and also to think about freedom.

Conclusion

Thinking and rethinking the meaning of values is never wasted time, on the contrary, it is the first step for humanist formation. And if the human is really valuable, unique and unrepeatable, it is largely because we assume in ourselves and in any other the right to exercise their autonomy and freedom. But freedom can become relativism that is legitimized from some postmodern and/ or posthumanist



approaches, where it finally seems that everything is subjective; or freedom can become rapacious individualism as in neoliberal ideology. In any of these options there are no glimpse of better possible worlds...

It is worth putting on the table axes of analysis of negative freedoms, especially with regard to freedom of expression and private property. Freedom as proposed by classical liberalism can and must be compatible with the freedom of others. Freedom is compatible with respect, justice, responsibility, solidarity and above all with hope; that by the way, now more than ever it must be built and this is only possible from the recognition of the possibility of change, that is, from the recognition of freedom. Arendt quoted from Char: "our inheritance is not preceded by any will" (Arendt, 1995, p. 75).¹

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¹ Arendt, Hannah. "The gap between the past and the future" in *From history to action*. op. Cit., p. 75.



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