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Isaiah Berlin, Michel Foucault and the Politics of Neoliberal Freedom

Abstract. *Starting with a historical inquiry into the notion of freedom as a political concept, in this article I argue that neoliberal freedom has attempted to satisfy demands associated with two quite distinct forms of freedom, representing a new understanding of the concept. Drawing on Isaiah Berlin's lecture on the two conceptions of liberty – positive freedom to and negative freedom from – I consider their apparent heterogeneity, stemming from alternate relations towards individuals, and forming the basis of opposing political systems. Against this opposition, the neoliberal notion of freedom, as developed in the early works of liberal economists and their vision of a social market economy, is marked by a synthesis of politics and the economy, one that enables social regulation in conformity with market demands. Reflecting Foucault's argument that power operates through both productive and repressive practices, neoliberal freedom poses a new understanding of subjectivity, where individuals become 'entrepreneurs of the self'. By connecting personal freedom to rational action in the competitive marketplace, neoliberal culture can claim to grant both negative freedoms from the state and enabling freedoms to be a rational subject. With brief reference to contemporary political events, I point out some of the problems and implications of this form of freedom.*

Keywords: *Isaiah Berlin, Michel Foucault, freedom, power, neoliberalism, homo economicus.*

Raktažodžiai: *Isaiah Berlin, Michel Foucault, laisvė, galia, neoliberalizmas, homo economicus.*

Introduction

In this article, I offer a critical reflection on the modern, *politicised* conception of freedom. I emphasise its politicised character partly to highlight its complex relation to a multiplicity of disciplines, institutions and individuals, and partly to avoid any assumption of freedom as an abstract or transcendental given, a universal *a priori*. This approach enables me to consider freedom as practical concept, one productively and repressively involved in concrete struggles

of a political, economic and institutional kind – in short, at the level of historical-sociological relations. An important facet of the problems posed by contemporary state securitisation to the concept of political freedom stems from the fragility of the concept and its direct relation to both power and ethics. It is in *contrast* to the exceptional use of administrative state power (now the norm in political discourse) that the dominant market concept of freedom was developed. This development is a product of a specifically historical moment, and of the

idea that the concept can be split into a binary opposition, consisting of positive freedom (to do) and negative freedom (from interference). With this opposition and its relation to society and subjectivity in mind, I will argue that the concept of freedom represented by neoliberal marketisation is markedly different, cutting across imagined political or ideological divisions. As well as Isaiah Berlin's text and its interlocutors, the paper will draw on Michel Foucault's 1978–79 lectures at the *Collège De France*, and on the theory and practices of neoliberalism.

Olivier Clain traces the etymology of the term 'freedom' or 'liberty'¹ to the Latin word *libertatem* (the accusative of *libertas*), which refers to a 'free man' in contrast to a slave. Clain further notes that in Indo-European languages the root term 'lib', as found in words such as 'liberal' or 'libido', stems from the Latin word *libertas* and its sense of 'doing what one likes' (2016; 12–13). The implication here is that only certain individuals – those with the sufficient resources and mental and physical capabilities – are able to achieve recognition, pursue desires and experience freedom: freedom, once recognised as a form of privilege, comes to be regarded as a scarce good (Bauman 1988; 27). Notably, Clain goes on to show that throughout its history freedom has operated as a *symbolic practice* (Clain 2016; 10). Because of this, historical and sociological relations necessarily condition its practice, and freedom becomes a 'cultural entity' that we may not have a com-

prehensive view of, since it functions 'like a sign and embodies a collective proposition' (ibid.). Resisting concise definition, symbolic practices and collective propositions exist within certain socio-cultural paradigms, precluding any assumption of freedom as transcendental and universal. Therefore, as we begin to specify the concept, we can deduce two interpretations of freedom; one relating to freedom in its abstract, *legal* form, and the other relating to its historical, sociological and therefore *political* form. Its legal form is represented by the wider juridical structures of a society, whereas its political form manifests itself in the corresponding cultural practices and social relations, enabled or sanctioned by the law.

In my interpretation, what characterises freedom, in both its abstract and concrete forms, is power. Different forms of power are simultaneously at work in different ways, using different vehicles, which brings us to the writings of Foucault. Mitchell Dean describes Foucault's work as constituting a 'triangle' of power consisting of sovereign, disciplinary and bio-power, none of which takes precedence (2010; 122). The question of freedom was central to Foucault's later thought, seen in his ethical work regarding the care of the self and the subject's relation to power. During a late lecture, Foucault (2008; 63) loosely defined freedom as 'never anything other – but this is a great deal already – than an actual relation between governors and governed'. Similarly, in *The Subject and Power* essay, it is argued that 'at

¹ Throughout, these two terms shall be used interchangeably, with any necessary clarification provided as required.

the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom' (Foucault 2000a; 342). Thus to Foucault the relationship between power and freedom is not solely repressive, where power simply consumes freedom; rather, 'freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power' (ibid.). This understanding of power allows a distinction to be drawn between *relations of power* that are mobile, strategic and reversible, and *states of domination*, underscored by force and coercion.

Foucault demonstrated that power is everywhere, but this should not be translated fatalistically at the expense of agency or resistance. The distinction between relations of power and states of domination allows one to assess the ethical and the dangerous in certain discourses, policies and practices. It then becomes possible to transform power relations in order to reduce the prevalence of domination (ibid.). As Foucault puts it, 'if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere' (ibid.; 292). Ethical concern for oneself is thus the conscious practice of freedom. Foucault goes as far as to describe freedom as the 'ontological condition for ethics' (ibid.; 284) – that is, as an *ethos*, which affects our relations with others and the world, not to mention the self in relation to itself. This issue is at once philosophical and political. This issue of freedom's ontological significance is captured eloquently by Judith Butler when she asks:

'What, given the contemporary order of being, can I be?' If, in posing this question, liberty is at stake, it may be that staking liberty has something to do with what Foucault calls virtue,

with a certain risk that is put into play through thought and, indeed, through language where the contemporary ordering of being is brought to its limit. (2000; 10)

For Foucault, contained in the theoretical structure of the verb *to be* is the practical and ontological possibility that 'language could overflow its boundaries and affirm being' (2002; 366). Going beyond what is prescribed by dominant discourse, by norms, the concept of freedom opens up radical possibilities for transformation. This is particularly so if we understand subjectivity not as a substance but a form (Foucault 2000b; 290), and consider the ontological significance of the verb *to be* alongside the imperative command of freedom, which would be expressed as 'to be free'. In this sense, conceptions of freedom derive, as they always have, from ontological questions and views of subjectivity (Berlin 1969; 10).

Political freedom poses questions such as 'who and why should I obey', and 'what are the means and ends of social and political life?' Again, in conceptualising freedom I do not wish to characterise it as an objective, transcendental given, since 'we have to know the historical conditions that motivate our conceptualisation' (Foucault 2000; 290). I will therefore begin with a discussion of Berlin's 1969 essay *The Two Conceptions of Liberty*, the aim being to bring out a broader historical-political context for the discussion of freedom. Further, I see Berlin's work as directly relevant to contemporary political issues, perhaps most notably the chaotic attempts by Western powers to impose their concept of freedom on Iraq, and the resurgence of nationalist politics. Berlin's purpose was to

affirm Western ideological principles at the height of the Cold War, and to make clear the *heteronomy of the two concepts*, namely 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'. These are considered to be distinct and to stem from 'two profoundly divergent and irreconcilable attitudes to the ends of life' and the self (Berlin 1969; 28). Both seek to be interpreted and applied as absolute values, and Berlin concedes that morally and historically both hold 'an equal right to be classed among the deepest interests' of civilisation (ibid.; 29). In my view, the contrary movements that Berlin identifies here impart a markedly different understanding to the concept of freedom, one which may be seen as a prelude to the notion of neoliberal freedom.

Negative Freedom

'Negative freedom' relates to the limitations set by state activity and its relationship with the economy. To be free, in the negative sense, means 'not being interfered with by others. The wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom' (ibid.; 3). Understood as '*freedom from*', the concept has been central to moral and political philosophy. Berlin notes its centrality to classical liberalism, covering British thinkers such as John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith and also French writers such as Benjamin Constant and Alexis de Tocqueville, all of whom share the belief 'that there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated' (ibid.; 4). Against the abuse of power by dictators, or the ill-founded 'tyranny of the majority', negative freedom seeks to establish a clear frontier capable of separating the private life of individuals

from the wider public sphere. Minimally, this entails that government ensures only the state's security and allows for the 'liberty of religion, opinion, expression, property', arbitrary invasion of which would be despotism (ibid.; 5).

Negative freedom implies political organisation without an overarching *telos* that society must be orientated towards achieving (Plant 2009; 6). The alternative is the free market which, deemed unknowable in its totality by any master plan, functions as an institutional safeguard against the arbitrary use of sovereign power. Philosophically, this implies that our empirical knowledge of experience and the ends of life, be it divine, spiritual or political, must not be closed off or pre-prescribed. As Berlin argues, 'the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised is demonstrably false' (Berlin 1969; 30). In prescribing an absolute end, akin to a cosmological destiny, fraught attempts to realise it will inevitably involve the sacrifice of other ends. The implications are that the ends of life hoped for by men, women and groups are many and varied, and are not necessarily compatible with one another (ibid.). In order to balance this incommensurability, negative freedom is less to do with bold, revolutionary ideas or self-actualising empowerment than with the independence of the governed, pure and simple.

Oppression is not seen as stemming from a volatile economy and the reactions to it, but from the mere accumulation of power itself (ibid.; 27). To prevent this, liberalism became an international instrument that, through the expanding European marketplace, allowed

for the internal self-limitation of state power (Foucault 2008; 13). Crucially, the market is conceived as the guarantor of freedom, justice and progress, expressed in the liberal notion of *laissez-faire*, French for 'let go', and symbolising a direct political challenge to state control over the economy. Intervention from the state could only be disruptive to the professed 'natural order' and 'harmony' of the marketplace and international trade (Landreth and Colander 2001). This internal limitation of state power, which must instead consult the discipline of political economy for legitimacy and truth, is a significant change in the operations of power (Foucault 2008; 14). The 'free-market of ideas' is a disciplinary form of power, against the sovereign power of the monarch or police state. Hence, Foucault stressed the intimate connection between liberal freedom and the discipline of political economy (ibid.). With foundations in the pursuit of unlimited economic growth and utilitarian calculus (Clain 2016; 6), the implication is an empirical view of politics and subjectivity. Political and economic knowledge make possible questions of economic truth, as well as the need to limit state reason. Henceforth the market itself becomes a principal site of verification (ibid.); it becomes a discursive regime for political and legal truth.

In contrasting the two conceptions of freedom, and with their corresponding epistemological foundations in mind, Berlin makes use of the analogy of a divided self (Berlin 1969; 8–10). With negative freedom, an ideal ontology is deduced from the episteme of the market and the moral philosophy of liberal economists. Against the 'higher nature' of the

dominant, rational self (associated with positive freedom), Berlin juxtaposes the 'empirical' and 'heteronomous' self, characterised by irrational impulses and 'uncontrolled desires for the pursuit of immediate pleasures' (ibid.; 9). Subjects are understood as being driven by economic self-interest – that is as isolated and calculative, and thus as best suited to the free-market. This is the figure of *homo economicus*, the 'bartering savage' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]; 46); on this view the subject is an economic object of exchange, governed by materialist desires and less concerned with idealism, altruism or the collective good.

Positive Freedom

Whilst, without a prescribed *telos*, negative liberty may be most commensurate with cultural and religious tolerance (Berlin 1969; 31), there are limits to an individualist, negative conception of freedom (Taylor 1979). Firstly, it is unable to provide beings with an affirmative, meaningful understanding of themselves or culture, beyond the calculative materialism of economic discourse. Berlin points this out, conceding that 'it is true that to offer political rights, or safeguards against intervention by the State, to men who are half-naked, illiterate, underfed and diseased is to mock their condition' (Berlin 1969; 4). Furthermore, he argues that the connection between negative freedom and democracy is far more tenuous than many liberal thinkers would like to accept, noting that the demand for a private sphere of individual liberty may be sufficiently satisfied by a tyrannical regime or forms of autocracy (ibid.; 8). Out of this difficulty, there developed the *legal*

and, it must be noted, revolutionary approach to freedom. Expressed as '*freedom to or be*', positive freedom, consists in 'being one's own master' (ibid.). This is an affirmative, enabling idea, primarily concerned with enabling individuals, groups or society itself to perform and embody freedom.

Positive freedom begins from juridical law and the inalienable, imprescriptible natural rights of citizens. Together, these codify the extension and goal of state action, through a constitution of the sovereign (Foucault 2008; 39). Jean Jacques Rousseau theorised this as *The Social Contract* (1999 [1762]), stressing the sovereignty of the people, whom the government must serve through adherence to the 'general will' (ibid.; 69–70); what is being posited here is an inviolable agreement that must not be transgressed by government or its citizens, affording both rulers and ruled liberty and security (ibid.): here human beings are 'born free', demanding that our subjection to power be rationally justified. For Berlin, 'freedom is obedience' on Rousseau's view, but 'obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves' (Berlin 1969; 11). Thus all citizens and groups have a 'share in the public power' (ibid.; 26): this juridical, collective will, situated over and above any particular government, is the radical, potentially dangerous feature of positive freedom. The reason for this, as the Jacobins who drew on Rousseau's ideas amply demonstrated, is obvious. This will to freedom, analogous to a 'right of resistance', enables one to call for the revolutionary overthrow of government or the renewal of society, if the current order is seen as violating the inalienable rights of subjects: a

situation of civil war in response to the state of exception in Giorgio Agamben's sense is one example (Agamben 2005; 10).

Berlin further argues that positive freedom is grounded in a foundational idealism, traceable back to the Platonic notion of ideal forms, and gaining its fullest expression in G. W. F. Hegel (Berlin 1969; 29). In particular, what will enable the realisation of an ideal political system is rational knowledge of the historical process, and rational understanding of ourselves and institutions. On this view positive freedom, or the 'universal spirit' of world history (Hegel 2011 [1837]) will enable the creation of a 'perfectly harmonious society', via rationally intelligible laws administered by the sovereign (Berlin 1969; 15). As is well known, while for Hegel the nation state signified the culmination and embodiment of this freedom, Karl Marx would assert the need for further political and institutional development. Hence positive freedom implies a politics of strong state intervention in the market, associated with nationalist and socialist forms of government in the form of protectionism, regulations, tariffs, redistributive taxes and so on.

Underpinning this idea and the desire for self-mastery, is the argument that political life must have a *telos*, and must therefore be ordered according to a rational plan. A teleocratic order of this kind requires political organisation to be subordinate to an overarching end goal (Plant 2008; 7). For Berlin this view rests on a metaphysical belief that reason governs the universe; thus correct planning will 'coincide with full freedom' (Berlin 1969; 18). The idea that there exists one final, total formula for all

of social life, is akin to theological notions of the Promised Land to come. Indeed, Berlin likens this ideal state to the 'Garden of Eden before the Fall of Man', an Eden from which we have been expelled, but which is still longed-for (ibid.; 16). Assuming oneself to have the key to history, to have solved the riddles of the universe, is a great power, for which no sacrifice is too great. To the rational metaphysician, the empirical epistemology of negative liberty and the market, which abandons the notion of final unity in the ends of life is, in Berlin's words, 'a piece of crude empiricism' (ibid.; 29). For Berlin this argument, used by all dictators and tyrants to justify their actions, is worthy of condemnation, the logic being that 'I must do for men (or with them) what they cannot do for themselves' (ibid.; 19). This brings us back to Berlin's distinction between the divided self and the rational, transcendental 'higher self' of positive freedom, which must take charge of one's lower, 'empirical self': to dispense with one's alienated self in favour of one's higher self is an expression of the desire to be a rational subject and not a mere empirical object. On this schema, to coerce and force the empirical self into a correct order of conduct and behaviour is not tyranny but liberation (ibid.; 18).

Neoliberal Freedom

The early neoliberal thinkers were responding to the political crises of the 1930s. The fact

that across swathes of Europe the liberal ideal of negative liberty had been rejected in favour of planning and authoritarian state control meant that post-war liberalism would have to reconsider political freedom. As a result, *any form* of state intervention that tried to subordinate individuals to a plan and direct the market came to be viewed as a threat to freedom (Hayek 1990; 258). The English poet and social critic, Hilaire Belloc, was a forerunner of this line of thought: in *The Servile State* (2007 [1912]) he argued that whilst capitalism was unstable, attempts to balance and reform it would undermine and destroy the freedom it had established. The book was cited and praised by Friedrich von Hayek in *The Road to Serfdom* (2001 [1944]; 13), and sets out the essentials of the neoliberal objection to any form of state power over individuals and the economy. Whether in the form of Roosevelt's New Deal in the US, European Keynesianism or Nazi labour camps, any attempt to regulate capitalism is thought to pose a danger to personal freedom: as administrative intervention in the economy expands, the supposed political inevitability is that freedom is threatened and eventually undermined (Foucault 2008; 110–111).²

Rather than seeing *the state* as providing freedom to *the market*, the early neoliberal thinkers reversed the formula, seeing *the market* as providing freedom to *the state* (ibid.). This conception of freedom is not, however, simply

² Foucault notes how Wilhelm Röpke, an early neoliberal economist, published a bold analysis of the Labour Party's Beveridge plan, which established the welfare state and the National Health Service. Röpke's basic argument is that Britain was simultaneously at war with the Nazis while being in the process of repeating their political and economic formula.

classical liberalism revived (Burchell 1996), a point which is central to my argument against Berlin's presentation of positive and negative liberty as heterogeneous, clearly separate ideals. Rather the idea that the market is endowed with a natural essence, regarded by Walter Eucken as a 'naive naturalism', is explicitly rejected (Oksala 2016; 116). Implied in this line of criticism is an attempt to move beyond negative liberty and its limitations on state intervention, which resulted from a recognition of the need to take account of *subjective legal demands*. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek expresses this new attitude towards freedom in writing that:

the old formulae of laissez faire or non-intervention do not provide us with an adequate criterion for distinguishing between what is and what is not admissible in a free system. There is ample scope for experimentation and improvement within that permanent legal framework which makes it possible for a free society to operate most efficiently. (1990 [1960]; 231)

Plainly the terms 'experimentation' and 'improvement' pertain to the neoliberal idea that the capitalist market does not have a fixed, knowable essence; rather the market is the product of an economic-institutional framework, which must ensure the limitations of state power and the subordination of short-term, political

objectives to long-term legal principles – that is, legal safeguards against the state abusing its power, in the form of a legislative assembly. Therefore, 'if a law gave the government unlimited power to act as it pleased, all its actions would be legal, but it would certainly not be under the rule of law' (ibid.; 205). However, within this framework, states may pursue a range of interventions *that facilitate the market*, including such commonly associated policies as neoliberal globalisation, economic liberalisation, privatisation, transnational trade deals and flexible migration. The point is that interventions by the state, to be legitimate, must encourage the market, and must not directly encroach on it. As the social market economy, neoliberalism has a strong and active social policy of intervention. It is 'free' in the negative sense from central planning, but simultaneously presses outwards a wide array of positive, legal controls, designed to orient individuals and their social environment towards the market (Callinicos 2006).³ Carl Friedrich wrote of the neoliberals that they 'see economics as "embedded" in politics [...] convinced that economic and political systems are interrelated' (1955; 511). In this sense neoliberalism is regulatory and interventionist, a 'positive' or 'sociological' liberalism (Foucault 2008; 129–150).

³ In societies that have come under neoliberal influence, this approach to governmental activity can be glimpsed across almost all sectors of public life. To give a small-scale example, the approach can be seen in the literature on the increasing marketisation of higher education over recent decades, where bureaucratic policies of state management are driven by the economic logic of productivity and competition, but implemented in a manner resembling an authoritarian command system. In this process, there is no strict ideology or plan but active environmental intervention in accordance with the market, in which higher education resembles employment training, with students embodied as entrepreneurs. See Craig Brandist (2014).

Louiza Odysseos calls this process the ‘governmentalisation’ of the state, where law is used to *contract* the state but *expand* the practice of government, with a view to making subjects ‘self-governable’ (Odysseos 2010). For Odysseos, the example of human rights, can be seen as part of neoliberalism’s ontogenesis or development, where global, humanitarian calls for human rights reinforce the ‘discourses, knowledge productions’, and ‘law-making’ of neoliberalism, in other words *its own conditions for freedom* (ibid.; 750). More specifically, calls for a state to allow equality before the law or the right to a fair trial are in practice accompanied by demands for market liberalisation or for consent to freedom of enterprise. Here basic, positive freedoms and human rights are legally enshrined, provided they function laterally *alongside* neoliberalism’s internal rule of maximising the market (ibid.; 755). Through the production of *enabling legal* and *limiting economic* conditions, then, the market aspires to a synthetic conception of freedom. To quote Hayek on the indistinctions between forms of freedom; ‘though in some of the other senses it may be legitimate to speak of different kinds of freedom, “freedoms from” and “freedoms to”, in our sense “freedom” is one, varying in degree but not in kind’ (Hayek 1990 [1960]; 12). What we may glimpse here is a *style* of governmental coercion, where what becomes significant is not what is touched by the state but *how* it does this.

Likewise, in Foucault’s work on power, the important issue is not whether there is or is not power, but the *how* of its workings. In practice, neoliberalism closely conforms to Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power (Foucault 1977). Through training, examination and normalisation, the purpose of discipline is for the optimum circulation of power and control, with a view to increasing the efficiency of society (ibid.). Panopticism is the mechanism that ensures this ‘infinitesimal distribution’ of power relations (ibid.; 216), inducing individuals to self-monitor and correct their own behaviour.⁴ Indeed neoliberal freedom, taken as a blueprint for a type of government, is ‘imbued with the property of panopticism’ (De Angelis 2001; 36), the two fulfilling various overlapping functions. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault (2008; 66–68) draws attention to the importance of disciplinary control as an instrument in the liberal art of government, one allowing for the production and extension of freedom through mechanisms of additional control and intervention. He notes that ‘Control is no longer just the necessary counterweight to freedom, as in the case of panopticism: *it becomes its mainspring*’ (ibid.; 67, my emphasis). The aim of neoliberal policies is not to negatively deregulate the state’s efforts to control the market, but to positively re-regulate individuals and the social environment in conformance with the operation of the market. In this sense, freedom is ‘bound up’

⁴ It should be remembered that Jeremy Bentham was not primarily an architect but a utilitarian economist and public legal theorist. As such, for him panopticism was not an isolated phenomena with regional specificities; rather it was a general blueprint for society and, crucial to my argument, for a type of government.

with and produced by disciplinary techniques (ibid.). Irreducible to any one sovereign power, it rests on the assumption that the state 'has an imperfect knowledge of individual plans' (De Angelis 2001; 25), and that it must compensate for this imperfection through other mechanisms. As Hayek himself worded it, in a Foucauldian manner, 'coercion, then, may sometimes be avoidable only because a high degree of voluntary conformity exists, which means that voluntary conformity may be a condition of a beneficial working of freedom' (1990 [1960]; 12).

Looking for ways to augment their economic and military power, states became more and more interested in individuals insofar as they could be governed to assist in this programme. The task of regulating society and individual behaviour, however, which was initially the preserve of the police, became dispersed into the general social milieu (Foucault 2000b; 408–409). In this regard, we should draw attention to the increasing importance of technology in liberal forms of government, technology plainly being one of the main means 'by which the individual could be integrated into the social entity', ideally forming a symbiotic relationship, 'a political rationality linked to a political technology', as Foucault puts it (ibid.; 410, 416).⁵ Aihwa Ong has also noted the importance of technology in neoliberalism, regarding it as a 'technology of governing "free subjects" that co-exists

with other political rationalities' (2007; 4). The implication is that neoliberalism should not be reduced to an ideological distortion, imposed on individuals by a ruling class. Nor should it be expanded to an 'economic tsunami' of planetary regulation, through the de-territorialised flows of global markets (ibid.; 3–4). Instead, Ong rightly argues that neoliberalism governs through a technical assemblage, one which 'highlights the situated interplay of motion and contingency, of technology and ethics, of opportunity and risk' (ibid.; 5). The social application and economic function of new technologies is entwined with dominant political practices and policies. The development of new digital technologies, within a wider framework of neoliberalism, means that they are effective techniques in political relations towards individuals. Judea Pearl's Bayesian belief network program is an illustrative example of this (Arbib 2001). Primarily concerned with the development of artificial intelligence, programs such as this are an essential component for digital networking, used to monitor, predict and control swathes of data, desires and information now at the heart of cyberspace and the global free market. Such programs aim to 'model the environment as a collection of stable component mechanisms' (ibid.; 159), where their 'causal networks' function via a conceptualisation of the self as a cognitive processor of probabilistic reasoning (Pearl 1988).

⁵ Foucault generally uses the term 'technology' to refer to 'technique', suggesting for instance that we should not view liberal utilitarianism as a crude projection of ideology onto politics but a radical 'technology of government' (Foucault 2008; 41).

To give another example, in information systems, Hayek's idea of the market as a self-regulating system has been influential for the design of 'decentralised', self-regulating information systems (Eymann et al. 2003), which rely implicitly on a model of subjective agency based on economic discourse. Through certain modifications to information systems, 'it is possible to adapt personal behaviour, to the typical market behaviour' (ibid.; 1819). The panoptic principle, 'to see without being seen', inducing the desired behaviour, is a central tenet in the functioning of the neoliberal market. Technical, disciplinary freedoms enable and make up the productive, affirmative character of a market-based, digital culture. Surveillance and the competitive marketplace 'use projections of real life activity as data to feed the mechanism of control and co-ordination' (De Angelis 2001; 35). Bulk surveillance and population classification are indispensable for a global economy increasingly reliant on access to information networks and digital data to function. This act of reducing and quantifying individuals to marketable data, efficiently used by e-marketing firms, at the same time serves to expand practices of freedom, enabling more consumer choice and communicative possibilities. Joseph Schumpeter (1992 [1942]) himself argued that adaptability to technological innovation, driven by entrepreneurial growth, was central to the free-market model. This association, helped to establish a global political discourse, which is not static and unchanging but, within a broader, legal framework, is rather mobile, able to transform and reorganise itself according to new consumer

demands and scientific/technological discoveries. This is especially evident if we consider the importance of technology in enabling political networks of international financialisation.

The Individual as Rational Entrepreneur

In Berlin's (1969) account of positive freedom, individuals were conceived of as collective citizens akin to *homo juridicus*: as rational subjects of law endowed with natural rights. Against this, the negative conception of freedom presented a more private, economic understanding of individuals; the central figure here is *homo economicus*, the empirical object of utility and exchange. On a classical view, these two figures are politically distinct. However, there is an important shift in the neoliberal account, where individuals are regarded not as objects of exchange but as competitive *enterprising subjects*. Rigorous competition is to be the primary, regulatory principle of society. This means that 'what is sought is not a society subject to the commodity-effect, but a society subject to the dynamic of competition. Not a supermarket society, but an enterprise society' (Foucault 2008; 147). The ideal of *homo economicus* is at the core of this enterprise. Conceiving of individuals as enterprise-units, rather than solely as producers or consumers, forms the bedrock of neoliberal analysis. As Andrew Dilts points out, 'entrepreneurial activities and investments are the most important practices of the neoliberal self' (2011; 137), with a potentially infinite array of activities that can be utilised. This new conception of subjectivity was key to Foucault's whole reading of neoliberal

eralism not as an ideology or theory but as a 'governmental rationality' (ibid.; 131).

At this point, we must recall Foucault's comments on freedom that we began with, where it was noted that care for the self, having a productive, ethical relation to oneself, symbolised the conscious practice of freedom. Foucault's decision to dedicate his 1978–79 course to the question of neoliberal subjectivity should remind us of its significance; seeing this new model as the 'interface of government and the individual' (Foucault 2008; 253), I believe, brings to light the distinct overlaps and entwinement of the positive and negative demands for freedom, and allows us to connect human freedom to rational action in the competitive marketplace. As Dilts incisively argues:

the neoliberal analysts look out at the world and do not see discrete and identifiable firms, producers, households, consumers, fathers, mothers, criminals, immigrants, natives, adults, children, or any other 'fixed' category of human subjectivity. They see heterogeneous human capital, distinct in their specific attributes, abilities, natural endowments, skills. They see entrepreneurs of the self. (Dilts 2011; 138)

To be an 'entrepreneur of the self' requires individuals to be mindful and consciously aware of their actions. To be a marketable, successful enterprise, one must be individually responsible, economically profitable and hostile to authority that does not stem from the market. It is for this reason that Trent H. Hamann points out that Foucault was 'deeply interested in the space opened up by neo-liberal subjectivity, as a refusal of sovereign subjectivity' (2009; 48).

The theory of Human Capital is a central feature of this new understanding of the self,

being a metaphor for the worker as investor (Davenport 1999; xiii). As Theodore W. Schultz pointed out, when they abstractly theorise capital-income ratios in strictly quantitative terms, economists fail to account for the most vibrant, growing and qualitative factor, human capital itself (Schultz 1961). Of course the economists' aim is to seek to incorporate cultural values, general knowledge and creative skills into economic theory and policy. Schultz gives the example of post-World War reconstruction, when he and other liberal economists assessed the economic costs and implications of wartime losses for growth and recovery. Despite the all too visible and real destruction of 'factories laid flat, the railroad yards, bridges, and harbors wrecked', 'cities in ruin', Schultz admits that their assessments were significantly off the mark (ibid.; 6–7). To account for this overestimation of the economic costs he maintains that what was lacking was an acknowledgment of *human capital*, the technical knowledges, creative abilities and moral commitments of individuals involved in reconstruction. Economists seek to incorporate human capital – productive, everyday practices that are qualitative by nature – into economic discourse. The result is inextricably associated with the development of immaterial, informational, technologically-based societies.

Foucault went as far as to call the development of human capital theory an 'epistemological transformation' (2008; 222). Such theory entails a shift from classical economics, based on the mechanisms of exchange and utility, to 'the nature and consequences of what they [the neoliberals] call substitutable choices' (ibid.) – practical, lived choices in the everyday

lifeworld, which are to be conceptualised as valuable economic assets. Labour power is not a passive element in production, separate from the individual, and only recognised as a material, measured quantitatively through time (Dilts 2011; 134). Against the fixed, objective categories of economic theory,⁶ neoliberal analysis seeks to understand economic processes as *active subjective choices*. This tendency generates multiple 'terminological shifts' that enable qualitative human activity to be conceptualised through the language of 'capital, investment and entrepreneurship' (ibid.; 135). To give a few examples, from the viewpoint of exchange, labour abets a 'wage', a return for the time given as labour power. In enterprise terms, however, labour produces an 'income', a return on the investment of human capital made by the worker, which may in turn be re-invested productively in the form of consumption or some form of immaterial activity that provides satisfaction to the individual. Gary S. Becker called this conversion 'productive consumption', stressing the importance of understanding how individuals rationally allocate their time, with a view to future 'returns' on their investments of human capital (1965; 503). The key point here is that neoliberalism is not an analysis of the market, but of *individuals in the market*.

As a result, it becomes possible to characterise an individual's everyday formal and informal

relations *instrumentally*, within an entrepreneurial framework. Underscored by the compulsory logic of competition, this framework explicitly seeks to incorporate individuals into economic discourse as active *subjects* rather than static objects (Foucault 2008; 223). Foucault notes the underlying desire here to reconstruct 'warm, moral and cultural values' against the 'cold mechanism of competition' (ibid.; 242). That is to say, investment in human capital seeks to prevent feelings of alienation or powerlessness by harbouring points of integration and anchorage in the social environment, ones that legitimate and encourage one's 'entrepreneurial self'. To achieve this, active market interventions (such as the privatisation of public life) seek to reproduce signs and consent to neoliberal freedom, normalising competitive, market relations between individuals. At the macro level, this can be seen in World Bank prescriptions of 'political entrepreneurialism', which shift the focus from the production of goods to 'the production of educated subjects' (Ong 2007; 5). Or at the micro level, as already mentioned, there is the everyday dominance of digital data and self-tracking, which serve as free labour for tech companies and online marketing services, while promoting individual investment, competitiveness, rewards and punishments as the productive exercise of cultural freedom (Till 2014).

⁶ For the classical liberals, labour represents an abstract number of hours worked by an individual. Marx's critique of this abstraction, his labour theory of value, stresses the exploitation at work in the transition from the practical labour of the worker to the abstraction of productive processes. For neoliberal thinkers, however, this view still ultimately falls back on a realist conception that labour could be restored to its true value.

For the rational entrepreneur, there is an important link between technological innovation and the idea of human capital. As Ong rightly puts it, the function of this link is 'to administer people for self-mastery' (2007; 4). Schultz himself advocated the integration of 'the innate abilities of man' into an 'all-inclusive concept of technology' (Foucault 2008; 236f). Given this, the higher self, the demand to be recognised as a rational being, becomes an essential component in the neoliberal experience of freedom. Yet this is an irrational use of reason, when considered outside of the discursive grid of the market. Dilts notes that Becker himself explicitly argued that economic analysis of individual behaviour does not require 'actual rationality', since it can still function 'with a wide array of irrational behaviour', provided that individuals act 'as if' they are rational (Dilts 2011; 138). Hence, economic analysis can be sweepingly applied to irrational, empirical desires and unethical conduct, with the qualification that individuals see themselves as active, rational entrepreneurs.

Foucault (2008) traces *homo economicus* back to early English empiricism and its theory of human subjectivity as having its own irreducible will – that is, well before the emergence of economics as a specialist discipline. For Foucault this is the first appearance in modern philosophy of the idea of a subjective will, one which challenges that of sovereignty, be it in the form of God, monarch or despotic ruler (ibid.; 292). What we are concerned with here is an economic figure, one not concerned with limiting sovereign power but with stripping and appropriating parts of it, revealing a 'ma-

ior incapacity [...] an inability to master the totality of the economic world' (ibid.). Adam Smith called this the 'invisible hand', which in placing emphasis on the word 'invisible' can be interpreted as a political metaphor – indeed as a quasi-theological metaphor for the natural order (Baumol 1991; 246) – and which can easily be transfigured as the dominant idea that the economic world can be subject neither to a master plan nor to the collective good. Political order and sovereignty are thus rendered subservient to the market. As Foucault has it, economics is an 'atheistic discipline', 'without God' or 'totality', which poses a direct challenge to the exercise of juridical power over economic processes (2008; 282). Political movements such as nationalism, socialism and, I would argue, our own contemporary neoliberal state of securitisation, developed historically as a reaction and an attempt to reconcile this absence of an economic sovereign. Such movements are political attempts to solve the 'essential incompatibility' between the multiplicity of economic subjects and the totalising unity of the juridical sovereign (ibid.).

Applying the tools of micro-economic analysis to all areas of social life, the market remains the principal site of political 'truth'. The empirical knowledge thereby produced discursively refutes nationalist/socialist arguments for sovereignty or re-organisation, which would, philosophically speaking, be regarded as 'untrue'. Provided individual agency conforms to the broader legal framework of the market, it is not pre-determined or bound to any state plan and can be considered a product of *one's own, free and rational choice*. This is why in an economic, empirical sense of self, alongside,

flexibility and choice are central to the experience of neoliberal freedom (Bondi and Laurie 2005; 398–399). Freedom on this schema is synonymous with choice, simultaneously enabling an individual to ‘rationally’ allocate their investments and pursue their desires, reflected in lifestyles, cultural practices and consumptive choices (Dilts 2011; 143). The neoliberal figure of *homo economicus* acts here as an atomic island of rationality in an otherwise irrational, dispersed and unknowable sea of economic activities (Foucault 2008; 282).

Societies and economies are now made up of enterprise-units linked to neoliberalism and its *programme of rationality* for society and the economy (ibid.; 225). As Foucault notes in *The Care of the Self*, ‘it is the modality of a rational being, that establishes and ought to determine in their concrete form, relations between the governors and the governed’ (1988; 91). That is to say, in modernity, political freedom is judged practically, via the space afforded to human reason. Under the regime of neoliberal freedom, this modality is the rational, entrepreneurial self, negatively *free from* the state and positively *free to* compete and produce its own life, income, investment and consumptive choices. It combines philosophical elements from what are classically considered heteronomous concepts of the self and freedom. Here, two divergent ends of life, Berlin’s divided self, are collapsed into one another. This concord between the two is not without tension, however; in my view, we see here precisely the enduring and global dynamic of neoliberalism, as a *political rationality*, with a foothold in the discourses of both Left and Right in politics.

Conclusion

Relations of power necessarily contain the possibility of freedom and resistance. Our *subjective experience of freedom*, how we relate to ourselves, to one another and to power, is a pressing issue today. For Foucault the failure of political ideas should not lead to a non-political way of thinking, but rather to an investigation into *the ways by which we think politically*. Failure is not inscribed in political theories or ideas themselves but in ‘the type of rationality in which they are rooted’ (Foucault 2000b; 417). For Foucault, the ‘political double bind’ of Western political reason was to be found in the ‘individualisation and the simultaneous totalisation of structures of modern power’ (Agamben 1998; 5).

At the level of the individual, disciplinary power is not necessarily repressive, but potentially productive; in this article, I have sought to draw attention to the individualising power of neoliberal freedom, while remaining highly critical of neoliberalism itself. Moreover, while power can be regarded as a relation that produces freedom, we should remember that relations of power can become states of domination. Different forms of power coexist, even if one form may appear more prevalent. There are not societies of sovereign power, followed by disciplinary power or bio-power. Rather these forms dovetail, interact and make use of one another (Dean 2010; 122). Sovereignty is closely related to bio-power, to political control over life and the biological health of the population. This raises political questions concerning security and the concept of ‘deviant behaviour’,

‘the dangerous individual’ and ‘suspect populations’. It is here that we can identify some real problems with the neoliberal concept of freedom, ones which challenge its understanding of the self and reignite questions of sovereignty. These challenges can be seen in the normalisation of the state of exception and the growth of far-right nationalism. While these issues are complex and contingent, the expansion of state sovereignty over individuals is a consistent political phenomenon. Think of the phrase, ‘*Take back control*’, which is surely a desire and aspiration for more sovereign power.

Neoliberalism was predicated on the unconditional *separation of powers*, which is supposed to ensure that nation states cannot transgress the bounds of law. In Hayek’s own words, ‘a free society certainly needs permanent means of restricting the powers of government, no matter what the particular objective of the moment may be’ (1990 [1960]; 182). In our current situation, under the guise of security and the need to ‘*defend freedom*’, coercive state policies have been passed that allow for the rule of law to be subordinate to state objectives concerning the elusive concept of ‘terror’. Policies that give states exceptional powers of surveillance, detention, and the potential to abandon and reduce citizens and refugees to ‘bare life’ (Agamben 1998) or ‘illegal aliens.’ These powers can make democracies analogous to authoritarian systems. However, their implementation, or the conditions for them, has been consented to by parties from all across the political spectrum, and treated as a pragmatic issue rather than as a deeply important legal and philosophical issue. Further, the practices that many coercive

policies rely on for effective use, such as intense surveillance and population classification, are indistinguishable from the everyday commercial practices of the market. Predominantly these are freely practiced by individuals, and not directly reducible to repressive state policy, even though they enable and legitimate it. Here, disciplinary practices of freedom extend and are clearly embedded within broader, systems of bio-power and apparatuses of security, which in turn reinforce sovereign policies of social control.

The original vision of positive freedom, meant becoming empowered; through collective action it was possible to change society and the world for the better. In enabling individuals to ‘self-actualise’, strictly as enterprise-machines, in an economic framework that strips the state of influence and application, neoliberal freedom is limited. Such freedom is unable to provide for a richer understanding of ourselves and purpose in the world. Neither can it give due ethical consideration to the violence and volatility of political policies and economic processes, particularly in times of crises.

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SANTRAUKA

ISAIAH BERLINAS, MICHELIS FOUCAULT IR NEOLIBERALIOS LAISVĖS POLITIKA

Pradedant istorine laisvės sąvokos apžvalga, šiame straipsnyje siekiama parodyti, kad neoliberalios laisvės idėja pasiūlo naują šios sąvokos turinį. Joje bandoma suderinti skirtingus poreikius, kylančius iš dviejų netapačių laisvės sampratų, aprašytų Isaiah Berlino. Dvi laisvės sampratos – pozityvi laisvė veikti kažką ir negatyvi laisvė nepriklausyti nuo kažko – skiriasi ne tik savo požiūriu į individą, bet ir savo implikacijomis į politinių sistemų struktūrą. Kitaip negu ši priešprieša, neoliberalios laisvės samprata, kurią randame ankstyvuose liberalų ekonomistų darbuose apie socialinę rinkos ekonomiką, pasižymi ekonomikos ir politikos sinteze, kur socialinis reguliavimas subordinuojamas rinkos poreikiams. Pasitelkus Foucault argumentus, kad galia veikia naudodamasi produktyviomis ir represyviomis praktikomis, neoliberalią laisvę galima suvokti kaip koncepciją, siūlančią naują subjekto savimonės apibrėžtį, kur individai tampa „savivokos antrepreneriais“. Konkurencinėje rinkoje neoliberali kultūra susaisto asmeninę laisvę su racionalia elgsena, o tai jai leidžia sykiu reikalauti negatyvios laisvės (valstybės nesikišimo) ir įgalina racionalaus subjekto laisvą pasirinkimą. Šios laisvės formos problemos ir implikacijos iliustruojamos pasitelkiant nuorodas į dabarties politikos įvykius.

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