

A common premise of recent Cif debates [ref to Porter, Gearty and any number of others] is that liberty and security must be balanced. Like all clichés, the rhetoric of ‘balancing’ combines truism with mild inaccuracy to mean all things to all men. In a further twist of historical amnesia, liberty is presented as individualist or right wing while security as state-centred or socialist.

Let me start with a socialist axiom which changes the terms of the supposed conflict: Freedom cannot flourish without equality and equality does not exist without freedom. Philosopher Etienne Balibar has coined the term ‘equaliberty’ to designate this amalgam of equality and freedom. Liberty as much as equality belong to the legacy of the Left and can be fully realized only in socialism. Fear, anxiety and obsessive security, on the other hand, are the fruit of liberty’s prioritization over equality.

Equality and liberty, the gifts of modernity, are conjoined twins intrinsically linked in presence and

absence. Take Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that all humans are born free and equal, repeating the French and American revolutionary documents. This is not a statement of fact. We are not born free but utterly dependent. Natality does not make equal. It throws us into a web of hierarchies, inequalities and constraints.

Article 1 is therefore a political maxim, a call to action: 'We are born in chains, let us come together (politically, socially, culturally) to achieve equality of freedom.' Only common political action (fraternity) can realize equality in freedom. Conversely when the one is missing the other automatically suffers. Soviet communism rejected political liberty and led to powerful ruling elites, the opposite of equality. The New Labour pseudonymous 'left' denied equality being relaxed about the 'filthy rich'. As a result, it has undermined freedom, as Liberty Central daily records.

While logically and philosophically inseparable, equality and liberty have followed different and even opposed trajectories. For liberalism, freedom with its negative and positive form is primary. Negative freedom is captured in Hobbes' statement that liberty is the absence of 'external impediments' [ref to Mary Midgley's Hobbes' articles]. The positive 'freedom to', on the other hand, was classically defined by Isaiah Berlin: 'I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind...to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's acts of will'.

Let us unpack these canonical statements. If freedom is the removal of external impediments to allow self-mastery, self is radically divided from the world, seen as alien and threatening, and from others, who are to be fended against or used. Modernity by unleashing individual freedom fuelled antagonisms without reducing humanity's dependence on external determinations. Premodern communities pacified conflict through their shared values and duties which gave the right answer to moral dilemmas and legal problems. But when right according to reason, God or nature was replaced by a set of rights belonging to individuals freed to pursue their interests, strong external limits had to be imposed on egotism [ref to my essays]. Strict law, strong police powers, prisons and the executioner are the indispensable accompaniment of freedom. Hobbes concluded that while the law is necessary for freedom, it is an external impediment which 'determineth and bindeth'.

This early admission that individual freedom needs powerful state constraints has been recently forgotten. But the paradoxical link between freedom and coercion has intensified. Egotistical freedom and indifference to others form the backbone of neo-liberal ideology. Liberty has been re-defined as freedom to choose our kids' school and meals, our doctors and traumas, our happiness pills and offsprings' DNA in the same way we choose cars and mobile phones. We are free if everything becomes a saleable commodity and we are equal if we can buy anything being sold as a matter of right (although not affordability). The postmodern injunction 'be

yourself', 'look after number one', 'greed is good' radicalises the divide between self and other. It spreads the belief that all desire should turn into rights, that no impediment should stop the realisation of will. But desire is moved by lack and is insatiable. A moral and legal system based on the legalisation of desire becomes nihilistic, fearful, violent.

Egotism as world principle increases inequalities and harms people and nature. In response to real and imaginary fears, law and order expands and is welcomed by those who identify the state with policing [ref to article about why keeping DNA info is a good thing]. The welfare state guaranteed minimum standards of living; the neo-liberal state guarantees security. It builds walls to keep the undesirables out and installs CCTV cameras to protect middle class integrity and freedom. Security is not 'balanced' with freedom. Its ubiquitous reign follows neoliberalism's untrammelled freedom which must be kept in check by ever-increasing coercion. 9/11 and 7/7 may have accelerated the securitization of life but the trend had already been well established.

AFFIRMATIVE FREEDOM

Liberal and socialist conceptions of freedom diverge in their understanding of liberty's action. Paraphrasing Marx, freedom is the insight into necessity (the work of social theory) and the political struggle to reduce and remove unnecessary inequalities (the work of socialism). The ancients believed that tragic or atrocious happenings were the work of

fate. For the moderns, destiny has become the accidents of birth, class, gender or race. They determine life's trajectory dispensing disease, hunger, oppression to many, a life of plenty to some.

The Hobbesian impediments of freedom result from inequality and necessitate collective action for their amelioration. Every major civil liberty, every step in the building of the welfare state was achieved largely through the struggles of the Left. The increase in self-determination and the improvement of life chances for ordinary people were applications of equaliberty. On the other hand, the use of political office for aggrandisement and enrichment, currently in the news, and the 'nanny state' are the opposite of socialism. Corruption results when dominant ideology turns private vices into public virtue and political office into another 'business' for gain. Overwhelming surveillance, the new vis anglais, and stifling over-regulation reflect the evolution of power towards a 'biopolitical' form. The reaction to feared 'pandemics' and anti-social behaviour are part of the same approach. Life itself, our flourishing and 'happiness' are now the targets of public and private power's intervention and regulation.

Liberal freedom offers limited protection against this type of power and can be easily misused. The right to property protects corporate greed and condemns millions to destitution. Privacy can offer a shield to atrocious domestic violence. Free speech can end up in Murdoch's monopoly. No abstract 'balancing' of freedom and security can give a priori

answers to conflicting claims. Some times freedom resists power, often it gets co-opted by power's 'benevolent' operation.

For neo-liberalism, we are free when we choose what has conditioned us, when every value, feeling and relationship turns into commodity. Choice is the handmaiden of necessity. For the Left, freedom as the highest moral achievement means to choose contra fatum, as Kant and Levinas, Marx and Freud agreed. Individual freedom means to act against our conditioning by nature or the 'second nature' of social conformity. Socialism adds that full individual freedom becomes possible when we break down hierarchies and inequalities through collective political action.

The idea of equality is more straightforward: each and everyone is unique and should count as one. The uniqueness of self is created in community with others. The other is an indispensable part of my identity and I am an intimate component of the integrity of others. Freedom is therefore not just negative or positive but affirmative: I am free when the others who make me what I am become equally free. This is the foundation of the maxim that there can be no freedom without equality and no equality without freedom. It remains the principle of hope for our times. And against any general balancing of 'freedom' and 'security', it helps judge in a concrete way whether this or that case of freedom or power promotes or weakens equaliberty.