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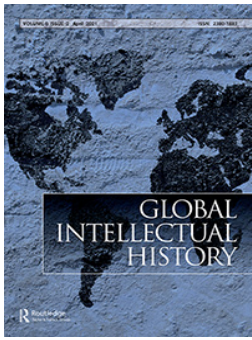
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Freedom and its diachrony

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Freedom: an unruly history, by Annelien de Dijn, Cambridge, MA & London, Harvard University Press, 2020, 432 pp., \$35.00 / £28.95 / €31.50 (hardcover), ISBN 9780674988330

Probably everyone involved with the related disciplines in the humanities for some time knows how difficult it is to discuss about liberty and freedom beyond one's area of expertise or the inclinations of personal view that one gradually develops on a topic taken to have been so intimately bound with the very desirability of human life throughout the ages. In these respects, it might not be a bad idea to agree with Annelien de Dijn's introductory comment that despite 'such an endeavour involv[ing] hazards [of this kind] ... they are worth undertaking' (p. 11), as one can tell out of her successful provision of an accessible account of the long history of freedom from ancient Greece to our times, undertaken with the aid of the careful documentation required, with a close hearing of latest advice, and proving her hard-won overall erudition about it. This being so, even though every specialist would be interested to see more lexical, contextual or argumentative nuance having found its way to the final text, perhaps some important gratitude can be due to the author, since such an informed treatment can largely facilitate the discussion between different views by urging each side to reflect upon the concrete interrelations of the various cases as well as to go on considering the relative standing of each view and the stakes that seem to lie beyond them every time. Adding to this, the general outlook of the work seems to be inviting to further elaborations of the multiple aspects of this great theme either by the author herself or by her engaged readers in the times to come. Hoping therefore to minimally contribute to such a cause, the following paragraphs will reserve some of the emphasis for a few issues that seem to be apt for such further inquiry.

Some of the ways in which the work allows for further thoughts can be discerned already in the introduction. In the first place, de Dijn is quite conscious that her studying 'the conventional West', an area fitter for attempting some uniform comprehension according to reigning academic standards, is far from insensitive to the emergence of recognizable notions of freedom and other ideas of affinity in various other settings across the times as well, from millennial Mesopotamia and the ancient Jewish sources

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to eighteenth century Indonesia. Similarly, the author maintains that she mainly examines the history of what she calls ‘political freedom’. What this leaves outside is the reportedly older ‘legal freedom’, defined as ‘how jurists distinguished between persons and slaves and how philosophers legitimated or criticized these differences’ (p. 6), as well as the posterior ‘moral freedom’, which corresponds to what is habitually referred to as ‘freedom of the will’. A thing to note is that it is not that difficult for readers to see how the one type of freedom contributes to the (re)appearance of the others and therefore rendering such connections more visible can certainly strengthen the account. In all cases, concentrating upon ‘political freedom’ seems to render the reservation of de Dijn’s contextualizations for the relevant events of political history rather sufficient for the cause and on a par with her minimal interests to stress method for such an extensive and already much-variably treated subject matter. Nonetheless, a crucial place where such concerns certainly had their weight has to do with the guiding thread of the narrative, which is no other than the fates of what de Dijn calls the ‘democratic conception of freedom’, an apparent compromise between popular North American academic vocabulary and the republican or ‘neo-Roman’ theory of liberty advocated by the author’s early mentor Quentin Skinner and the academic philosopher Philip Pettit, whose case de Dijn extends in a modified version far deeper in time by bringing to the surface strong grounds that have been missing from the relevant debate. It is this republican *qua* ‘democratic conception’, often explicated as ‘the debate about how to be free in a society or as a society’, whose fates de Dijn principally seeks to register up until its recent displacement by a said ‘counterrevolutionary conception’, and which seems to have urged her towards a rather emphatic employment of ‘freedom’ in place of ‘liberty’.

Chapter 1 is expectedly devoted to ancient Greece. The presented contrast between the Near Eastern and Homeric instances of ‘legal freedom’ as the avoidance of slavery, denoting established bondage, and the ‘political freedom’ invented by classical Greeks can be moderated by paying attention to the frequent references in the former case to collective fates and visible calls for action, leaving aside the very status of ‘legality’ in such settings. This would still leave the question of what made the classical *eleutheria* ‘political’, for which case de Dijn suggests that this period bore witness to the usage of ‘terms like “free” and “slave” to describe and evaluate types of government’, where freedom stood for ‘a condition that could be enjoyed by some types of government’ only (pp. 18-19). Even if one agrees with such an advancement of a conscious modification of the predicaments of the *poleis* at large, the insistence of viewing the entire case as ‘democratic’, flattering as it may sound to Greek readers, leaves strong questions on how Sparta is said to fit the pattern, suggesting thus that the reported reference to the Spartans’ free way of life by Herodotus was rather meant to designate a comparative self-perception of self-rule. The author seems to be at her best when identifying the causes of this change in distinguishing, according to Skinner’s renowned example,¹ between the increasingly polyarchic forms of rule in the *poleis* by the late 6th century BCE, which approximate them to posterior ‘republics’, on the one hand, and their increasing contacts with the Persian Empire by then, on the other, which seem to have decidedly bolstered freedom’s hold for Greeks, as fostered by war victories and by such authors as Aeschylus and, more importantly, Herodotus. The next step seems to be undertaken by the great Pericles in the *Funeral Speech*, who further domesticates liberty for Athens and turns

it into a more tangibly characteristic property of individual lives, whereas de Dijn very deservedly expands on the various ways in which all these processes were viewed by the large groups left on the outside. The chapter's passage to democracy's critics, somewhat readily framed as 'freedom's critics', raises thoughts since the Old Oligarch is accompanied with such democracy-leaning voices as very few sophists and Thucydides. In any case, de Dijn is quite analytical in bringing up Plato's much more intricate relations with democracy than usually thought, which actually end up suggesting how inconceivable the *Republic* and *Laws* would have been without it; whereas it is not that difficult to see Isocrates and Aristotle as standing also somewhere in-between reserved versions of democracy and the coming force of kingship. The latter seems to pass from Persia to Macedon and then to the eventual hold of the Hellenistic kingdoms, in whose times de Dijn notes the burgeoning of treatises *On Kingship* instead. Despite so, freedom was not altogether lost, since the author also notes the gradual development of what she describes as an 'inner' or 'moral freedom', which when chronologically reconstructed takes us shortly after Pericles to Euripides, Socrates and Diogenes the Cynic and their maintenance of a 'truer' freedom meant as the development of personal strength against passions, to be turned into a more intellectually consummate way of life by chosen will in the face of external adversities by Zeno the Stoic and the Jew Philo of Alexandria, which de Dijn takes to have been both 'capable of inspiring great moral courage in the face of absolute power' as well as to encourage 'political quietism' (p. 68).

Chapter 2 turns to *libertas* in the more singular settings of ancient Rome. The author notes the speculative and quite retrospective character of the evidence for the times of the Early Republic and its long Conflict of the Orders of patricians and plebeians, highlighting though that everything shows this transition from a monarchy to a system with elected officials to have been a major turning point (p. 75), and presenting the different standings of outsiders against it, including freedmen, matrons and the Italiote allies. Again, the claim of an earliest reference to 'political freedom' in 126 BCE can be moderated by the ways *libertas* was invoked both in defense of and against the Lex Oppia earlier that century, whereas the same part makes clear that Rome was far from 'democratic', despite Polybius' successful reconstruction of it as having a firmly established 'mixed constitution' that included an element of the kind. What one can keep from the discussion of the Middle and Late Republic is how both populares and optimates were prone to appeal to be upholding the received *libertas*, either, in the former case, via further reforms or, in the latter, by stopping claimingly self-interested demagogues, to the point of violent killings, suicides and the invocation of the freedmen's liberty's cap, all the way till the optimate resistance to Caesar and Cicero's *Philippics* against Marc Antony. Cicero also, with his own *Republic* and *Laws* and the appeal to a 'moderate liberty', can be said to have achieved a middle ground that both venerated the mixed constitution and remained supportive of reforms that would guarantee 'real' instead of 'nominal liberty', whereas a thing to further inquire, to the extent that the references are representative enough, is that the Roman antonym for 'free' seemed to have been that of *dominus* or 'master' rather than that of 'slave'. Among the causes for the republic's eventual turn to a principate, the said 'democratization' of military conscripts and the according creation of personally dependent armies stands out; but even so, the chapter unravels how much at the end of this process Octavian and many early successors thought best to nominally adopt titles and appearances fitting the republic

instead of overtly declaring themselves kings or emperors, including also the frequent framing of themselves as restorers of ‘liberty’, a recurringly powerful watchword ever since. Similarly, de Dijn notes how dissatisfied historians of the same times like Livy and Plutarch sought to preserve dignity for various figures and deeds from the republican past in ‘liberty’ terms instead, but by the time we reach Tacitus the emphasis turns to the recent loss of liberty and the breeding of ‘men ready to be slaves’ (p. 107). This same voice sees a different way out of the conundrum in his contemporaries Nerva and Trajan, who are said to have managed to mingle ‘principate and liberty’, indicating thus that no return to the older constitution was conceivable anymore. Dio Chrysostom finds best to offer these same emperors his *Kingship Orations*, where the crucial question turns to how to distinguish between kings and tyrants, whereas *dominus* becomes unproblematic for Roman heads later on. What follows is an account of the roles that early Christianity had in the eventual strengthening of this process, with a particular emphasis on Eusebius’ erection of a similar profile for Constantine and the new empire that was moving to the east. Stoic influence is already apparent since Paul’s call for passive obedience and his neutralization of the distinction between ‘slave’ and ‘free’ in the sight of God’s call, with Ambrose in Italy providing a republican nuance in preaching that Christians’ ‘liberty consists in the knowledge of wisdom’, and Augustine further in the South more reservedly depicting the original sin as the first cause of every ‘slavery’, including subordination to rulers. As de Dijn notes by covering some frequent gaps, what mostly prevailed in the surviving Eastern Empire was Eusebius’ view, whereas Augustine had a similar influence in the West, its succeeding kingdoms and restored empires. More considerable changes are said to appear only by the 11th and 12th centuries, with the Roman Church occasionally appealing to a ‘*libertas ecclesia*’, and similar references in urban environments like northern Italy. However, Aquinas’ opting to leave Italy for France and his predilection for monarchy are said to epitomize the limits of the case.

Liberty returns in Chapter 3, which deals with the Renaissance and the early modern times. The introductory role in the process ascribed to specific strands of Italian humanists from Petrarch onwards seems to leave aside further early sources brought up by Skinner,² but still the ‘substantial impact’ of the rediscovered Roman and Greek authors ‘on the political imagination’ of many contemporaries in finding value in upholding a ‘liberty’ and a ‘republic’ is beyond doubt (pp. 136-137). Machiavelli’s uncertain allegiances are a little readily subsumed to such a humanist and republican lineage from Bruni to Rinuccini, leaving unaccountable thus his different analytical outlook, the *Prince* and the broader princely literature. More generally, non-humanist interests on similar issues are framed as mostly stemming from humanists, both in public art and eventually in the various ‘Tuscan Brutuses’ and the waning uprisings against Italian princes under banners like ‘*libertas*’ and ‘*popolo e libertà*’. Such humanist case is said to have earned some firmer ground in ‘transalpine Europe’ by that time and afterwards, but again things are much more mediated and actually many associated scholars, like Justus Lipsius, found best to support quite absolute monarchies instead. The succession of subchapters here could be different and not leave the Reformation and natural law reasoning for after the substantial treatment of these scholars in mainland Europe and England, helping thus readers appreciate more fully the grave weights of the new emerging realities of the times. Hence, one could see more fully how Protestants in France are the ones to eventually draw on such insights and how these are modified, for instance, in

François Hotman's advocacy of the 'mixed government' of the peculiar 'ancient constitution' of Francogallia; how the authors in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Republic of the United Netherlands employ these in variously addressing their established kings and stadholders or restricted groups usually; how in England one finds the stated passage from arguing by 'traditional rights and liberties' to the eventual establishment of a 'free commonwealth' upholding 'just freedom'; a missing reference to the Levellers on the way; as well as the many differences between a James Harrington's distanced suggestions for a modern commonwealth and an Algernon Sydney's later defense of the 'natural right to liberty' and government by consent against the restored Stuart 'slavery'. What one gets for the Reformation *after* all these cases, instead, is the association of Luther and Calvin with an 'inner' and rather non-discussable vision of a 'freedom of conscience' and a relative downplaying of the roles of third movements and figures in the subsequent advancement of ideas of toleration and political change. As for the long elaboration of ideas of rights and natural law further from such trouble, these are mostly framed by de Dijn as 'natural rights' doctrines' and the appeal their authors enjoyed in the post-Reformation and early science world in advancing reasoned passages from an unsatisfactory state of nature to an analogically sounder civil state are treated as either 'more conservative [or] more radical than has typically been argued' by retrospective defenses of rights under the banner of 'limited government'. This leads de Dijn to place on the 'conservative' side Grotius' and Pufendorf's views on liberty, with Spinoza, Locke, and even Rousseau variously passing to its 'radical' side, approximating thus the humanists' said conception of freedom; whereas Hobbes' view that 'the greatest liberty of subjects dependeth on the silence of the law' (p. 177) is placed further beyond as a more distinctive case of limited influence.

Leaving also aside the Enlightenment and its own concerns with practical reform, Chapter 4 brings democracy back to the scene by turning to the late eighteenth century. This is the age of the 'Atlantic Revolutions', as de Dijn calls it by expanding Robert Palmer's concept of 'democratic revolution' to further include the Netherlands, Poland and Haiti next to the stirrings in British America and France. The accumulated historical carriage of ready (and widely circulated) associations of freedom with Europe's longtime heroic wars seems to lend some strength to viewing the case as 'the apogee of the Renaissance cult of ancient liberty' (p. 183), but qualifications are again in order. The original emphasis on such massively popular voices favouring de Dijn's narrative as Patrick Henry and his seemingly Cato-drawn 'freedom or death' watchword or Richard Price's fiery support of the American and further liberty causes as against 'slavery' can be both chronologically and argumentatively tempered by the parallel advocacies of 'rights' by Jefferson and Mably next to their liberty as 'anti-slavery' invocations; whereas even Price's own pro-Lockean defense of 'civil liberty' as 'anti-slavery' seems to have necessitated some quite synthetic reasoning in the wake of the more established meanings of the term in order to achieve its goal. Similarly, de Dijn also notes that even though such revolutions were striving to introduce constitutional establishments upon quite broad-based elections, these were more usually framed as 'popular governments' or 'republics' rather than 'democracies', and it is not that difficult to see how much self-consciously neoteric these were viewed by many of their introducers, such as Madison and the framing of his vision of a competent Federation for the United States as a modern representatives-based large 'Republic' that could hopefully go on

drawing support by uncountably different and mutually tempering sides throughout perilous times. The chapter also largely considers the limitations of this entire conception of freedom from the various standpoints of such thirds as the actual slaves and women, alluding at the same time to their sporadic entrance to the scenes as well as to the chances that the settings provided for arguing in their favour by analogy. Still, the declarations of rights and their prime argument by nature or reason rather than historical precedent are left for the end, with their importance understated vis-à-vis the assumed republican *qua* democratic character of the revolutions. Even so, one sees how Madison reiterates oppositional pressure by finding a strong reason for introducing the Bill of Rights in its serving as a tempering means against majoritarian ‘abuse of the community’, as well as how the French National Assembly ends up hastily pluralizing Mirabeau’s law-based draft of the Declaration of Rights, introducing the upholding of various individual rights in the process. Therefore, de Dijn is led to accept that such influence of Locke and Rousseau ‘did allow for the radicalization of freedom-talk’ (p. 225), even though aspects of this mode of arguing would be also employed against such documents by such French Revolution critics as the conservative-drawn Burke and the practical reformer Bentham.

Chapter 5 stays close to this period by bringing into focus the said making of the counterrevolutionary conception of freedom that has been broadly accepted ever since. Even if one subscribes to the making of something new here, many qualifications can enter the picture, as de Dijn herself suggests by seeing the case as entailing not only ‘hardline counterrevolutionaries’, but also ‘new intellectual movements’, such as the 1790s Federalism in the United States and liberalism in Europe. Regarding the former of these sets, it might be more interesting to observe how few conservative critics of the revolutions joined de Maistre’s rather Augustinian dismissal of liberty as a whole, turning instead to uphold versions of a ‘civil liberty’, said to have been already in place in Prussia, the Netherlands and Britain, as against the ‘political liberty’ they ascribed to the latest events, especially after the Terror in France put a tragic end to anything reminiscent of free speech or religious liberty, theorizing various defenses of their more familiar institutional arrangements for the cause, i.e. the least-interfering state against the individual way of life in the former two settings, and the lawful rule of the wise few or Burke’s checks and balances view in Britain. Turning next to the emerging liberals, a possible future expansion of the research to Europe’s South, where the very term ‘liberalism’ was actually coined, can allow for better accounting for how such people could feel in a position to ‘consider themselves the heirs of the French Revolution’ (p. 250) instead of reducing them to echoing counterrevolutionaries.³ Relevantly, one may appreciate Constant’s success in reintroducing the stakes in France as between an ‘ancient’ and a ‘modern liberty’, his support for many individual rights next to the ‘laissez-faire et laissez-passer’ trope, as well as his ultimate call for learning to combine the two liberties in the coming times. Next to de Staël and Guizot, further synthetic solutions increasingly drawing from the British constitution appeared also soon in Germany, moving beyond Hegel’s own recovered reform-mindedness in the *Philosophy of Right*. In Britain itself, the growing popularity of checks and balances would soon expand to embrace electoral reforms, which the aging Bentham would also impressively turn to advocate in more unqualified terms as ‘democracy’, but still with no necessary room for the language of ‘liberty’; shortly prior to Tocqueville’s finding a way out of Europe’s conundrum by seeing American democracy, with its own hazards, ‘not as the best, but as the sole means that remains

for us to be free' (p. 259). As for the United States themselves where no Terror occurred, the new 'Federalists' of the 1790s, disappointed early rebels with a growing interest to preserve, would gladly seek to introduce effective views of the French Revolution critics, against which such 'Republicans' as Jefferson and now Madison would defend the genuine character of the new establishment as meant to turn the people themselves into the most reliable keepers of their liberties. However, as soon as Andrew Jackson would turn the latter party into less institutionally-minded self-styled 'Democrats', a growing opposition of 'Whigs' would resurface as champions of a 'constitutional liberty' and the rights guaranteed by the Supreme Court.

Chapter 6 untypically condenses the last two centuries. The new short-lived uprisings in mainland Europe in 1848 and the suppressive regimes that mostly succeeded them seem to have rendered checks and balances not fitting anymore, as one can tell for France out of Édouard de Laboulaye's synthesis of Constant and Tocqueville taking place in more firmly democratic ground as well as out of Charles de Montalembert's suggestion to the Belgian Catholics to establish a 'liberal democracy' instead of the 'purely egalitarian' version. In Britain one finds the conservative-drawn Macaulay now seeing the 'pure democracy' of 1848 as having pushed France to lose its 'liberty' in order to preserve its 'civilization'. Relevantly, the only grave issue to be noted for democracy by Mill, an early advocate of female suffrage, and Bagehot was the possible suffocation of the learned and other minorities by ignorant vices; whereas in the decades to follow liberals, particularly in inner Europe, would see the greatest threats for liberty stemming from absolutism instead. This being so, de Dijn surprisingly misses afterwards the liberal character of the Third Republic, the Third Reform Act and the 'embryonic welfare' legislation they inspired, insisting mostly on the much differently educated partisan 'liberal thinkers who came to dominate public debate in the 1880s and 1890s' like the self-trained Herbert Spencer and the economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and their popularization of an anti-state and anti-socialist 'true liberalism' of the laissez-faire style. Respectively in the United States, the early emphasis on migrant Francis Lieber's syntheses of a post-Reformation version of 'civil liberty' as due to Christianity at large and with a particular resonance for the 'Anglican' against the 'Gallican' world reserves some attention away from the ways the new 'Republicans' rose during the Civil War and managed to change the political scene by abolishing slavery in the process, as well as how black advocates went on calling for 'rights' as a gravely missing necessity for full status. What one gets mostly instead again is the turn of conservatives to Spencer's latest European trend in the case of the self-made William Graham Sumner's advancement of an anti-state liberalism for the 'constitutional republic' against the said growing 'democracy's despotism'.

De Dijn seems most right when intimating that the occasioned gatherings of the many thirds into various political movements bring us even closer to our own times. This case begins with the women's movement and their invocation of the 'right' to suffrage next to Emmeline Pankhurst's 'freedom or death' speech. What follows is an effective arrangement of an often vaguely addressed series of movements into radicals, socialists, populists and progressives until their eventual integration into political parties. The appeals to 'liberty', 'freedom', 'rights', 'equality' and equivalents by the Radical and the Socialist Party in France or the Fabian Society in Britain disclose analogical arguing for reforms beyond the civic settings with a particular emphasis on the newly formed economic order, which through Hobson and Hobhouse would also rescue British liberalism from

the electoral demise of their Third Republic counterparts. On the way to its integration by the SPD, Marx's own criticism of 'bourgeois freedom' can be seen by now as a reiteration of 'civil liberty' talk, against which a rather utopian vision was seeking to take hold; whereas Lenin and the Bolsheviks' expanding on the 'proletarian dictatorship' following their civil war prevalence in Russia would produce different answers to their West, such as splits between Marxists, von Mises' defense of a laissez-faire liberalism, and, more gravely, fascism. In case one turns to the United States, on the other hand, a similar course with Britain would appear in the move from populists to progressives and Woodrow Wilson's call for a 'new freedom' that would 'bring the government back to the people', meant to be 'positive, not negative merely' (pp. 325-326). Against this call, William Howard Taft and Herbert Hoover would turn to a liberalism of individual rights, increasingly emphasizing property and entrepreneurial liberty, up until Franklin Delano Roosevelt would restore a broader sense for liberalism, when declaring, for instance, ahead of a landslide victory the 'pledge [of] ourselves to restore to the people a wider freedom' (p. 330). As for the two continents coming closer than ever before following the war, de Dijn is very strict with the difficult decisions that the Cold War liberals had to make, noting though that such broadly appealing voices were 'not necessarily against state intervention or the push for economic security' (p. 333). Accordingly, some important nuance finds its place as one moves from an Hayek to Berlin's recovered call for an 'ambiguous compromise' between welfare planning and individual liberty meant as genuine choice, on the way to his better-known syntheses, or to Aron's even greater pluralization of liberties as of a more contextual weight, contingent to the different situations and relative enough to even mind for possible 'extremisms' ascribed to liberalism or social democracy as well. In any event, innumerable other voices have been drawn to argue about 'liberty' or 'freedom' from their own standpoints ever since, such as Judith Shklar, the radical-leaning Arendt or the late right-wing and centrist 'liberal' publicists with whose uninformed views de Dijn seeks to engage at the epilogue by reminding them the deep intertwinement between 'freedom, democracy, and equality' in our age (p. 345). In this latter respect, the book brilliantly captures the persistence of liberty and freedom as a shared source of inspiration for so many minds, actions and souls.

Notes

1. See Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Volume 1*, chap. 1.
2. See *ibid.*, chaps. 1-3, mostly.
3. For 'liberals' and 'liberalisms' in the Iberian-speaking metropolises and overseas territories of the times, with few connections with Constant and associates and some more with British policy; and for Italian militaries adapting the Iberian experience to the Italian circumstance, next to further expatriates synthesizing revealingly selective features out of the French Revolution and the British constitution, see the relevant chapters in Freedon, Fernández-Sebastián and Leonhard, *In Search of European Liberalisms*, and Isabella and Zanou, *Mediterranean Diasporas*. More differently, for related ideas in the greatest in a series of very many and barely explored ethnic uprisings of Greeks against the Ottoman Empire, the Greek War of Independence, see the just-published Kitromilides and Tsoukalas, *The Greek Revolution*.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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