

Arendt on Positive Freedom*

Alexei Gloukhov

Associate Professor, School of Philosophy, National Research University Higher School of Economics
Address: Myasnikskaya str., 20, Moscow, Russian Federation 101000
E-mail: alexeigloukhov@gmail.com

Hannah Arendt's concept of freedom is exceptional in contemporary political theory. First, it is positive, which puts it into opposition to the both current versions of its negative counterpart, the liberal (Isaiah Berlin), and the republican (Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit) concepts of freedom. In particular, a comparison between Arendt's and Pettit's approaches allows establishing some striking points of antagonistic logical mirroring. Based on this, the notion of "schools of thought" is introduced, which plays an essential role in the subsequent discussion of Arendtian realism. Second, although Arendt's theory of freedom shares features that are common to the major continental thinkers, like Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, or Alain Badiou, her solution to the problem of freedom aligns her closer to the liberals. Third, I argue that one should consider this logical irregularity as evidence in favor of her political realism, rather than a trivial inconsistency. This realism is the genuinely exceptional part of her legacy, which may guide us eventually, with modifications applied, to a paradigm shift in the current political philosophy. Finally, I present an evaluation of her solution to the problem of freedom, and a brief follow-up to some seemingly-out-of-place Arendtian notions, such as "excellence" and "elite." Although in the final analysis, her solution seems to be artificial, it opens up a new promising area of research related to the notion of "benevolent excellence."

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, freedom, liberty, justice, virtue, excellence, elite

The originality of Arendt's views on freedom

Arendt's position on freedom is exceptional. Luckily, the reasons for its separateness seem rather trivial to explain. A quasi-standard account of the state of affairs in the contemporary theory of freedom has been established, having been crystallized after Isaiah Berlin's seminal lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958) (Berlin, Harris, 2002). According to this, there are two concepts of liberty that have manifested throughout Western history, the negative and the positive. Berlin himself was an adherent of the negative concept, defining freedom negatively as *non-interference*. Moreover, he demanded that liberal political philosophy should refrain from using or appealing to a positive concept of freedom. One cannot say that he did not succeed in convincing his peers. Since then,

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in the English-speaking political philosophy, few scholars¹ has proposed a positive concept. It has come to the point where some theorists began to doubt the very existence of an alternative to the negative understanding of freedom, arguing that a single concept of liberty, i.e., the negative, was more than sufficient (see: MacCallum, 1967; Nelson, 2005). This development was obviously against Berlin's original intention; for him, the positive concept of liberty was not only real, it was the gravest danger for humanity. Berlin believed that the positive concept, which he associated with the notion of self-mastery, was the foundation of the totalitarian ideology and therefore responsible for the most terrible crimes of our times. For him, negligence of positive liberty would be unthinkable; in a sense it would amount to suppression of the most significant lessons which the political experience of the 20th century ought to teach following generations.

Before we go to Arendt's position, another recent development unforeseen by Berlin is worth noticing. It is the unexpected rise of competition to the negative side of the liberty spectrum. Berlin thought that there is a place for only one negative concept of liberty (the liberal one), where freedom is defined as non-interference. However in the 1980–90's, the so-called "neo-Roman" or "republican" political theory was developed, mostly by Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit, who defined freedom negatively; unlike liberals, the republicans employed a different sort of negation, that of *non-domination* (see e.g.: Pettit, 2002; Skinner in: Miller, 2006). Practically, it means that republican freedom is highly normative and tolerates no arbitrariness of decisions whatsoever, while Berlin argued that liberal freedom is compatible with monarchy, at least in theory. Anticipating what follows below, Pettit's more radical views are particularly noteworthy, since, as he proposes, republicanism is a genuine alternative to a positive conception of freedom (Pettit, 2011: 716). At the same time, he tried to prove² that the principle of non-domination has priority over the principle of non-interference as the only negative definition of freedom. Against this backdrop, it is obvious that any position supporting a positive concept of freedom inevitably stands out. Therefore, Arendt's stance is clearly exceptional after she openly embraced the positive nature of freedom. However, this picture is oversimplified.

At this point, I need to introduce the auxiliary notion of "school of thought." It is a broad term, and I do not intend to change its meaning dramatically; nevertheless, the notion may prove to be necessary for my argument. Additionally, I ought to add a few words on dogmatism. Arendt loved imaginary conversations between a skeptic, a dogmatic, and a critic. She always sided with the critic (see e.g.: Arendt, 1982: 32). Nothing less would have been expected since her favorite philosopher was Immanuel Kant, who introduced the word "critique" into philosophy. However, a constant loyalty to the critical school of thought may in turn give rise to a new form of dogmatism utterly hard to discern, since it does not concern established views, but the established ways of forming the views. It is important to recognize the extent to which Arendt was indebted to her

1. With rare notable exceptions such as Charles Taylor, see his paper in: Miller, 2006, and obviously Hannah Arendt. See also: Christman, 2005.

2. Unconvincingly, as I intend to demonstrate in a forthcoming paper.

own school of thought — being a “dogmatic” in this sense — since this may be the only theoretically sound way to show the genuine originality of her views on freedom.

As mentioned before, almost every other scholar in English-speaking political philosophy preferred to work with some negative concept of liberty, so Arendt’s 1961 book published in English, containing her essay on freedom was unmistakably a rare species. Now, if we turn to continental parts of the Old World in the search for other tongues, the picture changes drastically. A few names are more than enough to mention here, those of Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, and Alain Badiou. These German and French philosophers might have different views on many matters, but they all (as well as Arendt) belong to the same school of thought which is sometimes called “continental philosophy.” Against this backdrop, some of Arendt’s most radical theses on freedom no longer show much originality. For example, consider her view of freedom as a “miracle,” i.e., a unique and short-living event in history; similar ideas do not come as a surprise to anyone versatile in Heidegger or Badiou (Heidegger, 2002, 2012; Badiou, 2006).

Once a certain level of dogmatism of this kind is recognizable in Arendt’s legacy, one can explain how two almost opposite theories — that of Arendt and that of Pettit — emerged, seemingly based on the same historical material of Ancient Rome. The explanation is simple. The same historical material was subjected to two different methods of interpretation, and resulted in two different schools of thought. It may serve as an important marker that whenever Pettit and Arendt happen to say completely opposite things about freedom, it is the case of scholarly dogmatism speaking on both sides rather than original political observations. Below, I will trace some anti-parallels between both thinkers, i.e., the points where Pettit and Arendt think inversely.

Arendt was one of very few political realists of the 20th century. Still, her thoughts contained dogmatic elements inherent to the entire philosophical tradition from which she came. This theoretical legacy allowed Arendt to say much more about positive freedom than it was ever possible to say from within the analytical framework. However, the same legacy might have blinded her vision of political reality, as it often obviously did to other representatives of the same school, beginning with Martin Heidegger.

Now we are a step closer to understanding why Arendt’s position on freedom is unique. The key notion is realism. As mentioned before, unlike many other representatives of the same school of thought, Arendt was a political realist. But what does this mean? She might have used the same patterns of thought as Heidegger, or Deleuze, or Badiou; however she was always keen to focus on the real political problems. Moreover, where necessary, she was ready to embrace “alien” ways of thinking rather than lose her grip on the issues. In the end, Arendt’s position on freedom was exceptional in comparison not only to the analytical tradition, but also to her own continental school of thought. For the sake of realism, she did not hesitate to break with the same traditions that nourished her.³

3. This consideration suggests a corresponding way of understanding the famous opening of her book: “Our inheritance was left to us by no testament” (Arendt, 1961: 3).

The essay "What is Freedom?"

Arendt presented two outstanding accounts of positive freedom.⁴ The first is her essay "What is Freedom?" (Arendt, 1961), and the other is her book *On Revolution* (1963) (Arendt, 2006). The essay is more abstract and theoretical. Here, the term 'positive freedom' was still employed as a synonym for the freedom of productivity, a Marxist notion. Her own concept of freedom turned out to be different. Her term of choice was "political," not positive or productive freedom. She began with the thesis that freedom is "the *raison d'être* of politics" (Arendt, 1961: 146). It was an intentional break with the liberal tradition in the vein of Berlin that always regarded politics as a threat to freedom. Arendt urged her readers to view political life as the true foundation of human freedom. Politics is not only dangerous; it is also a salvation, a unique chance for freedom to appear in the world. Again, a paradoxical argument like this, which is not acceptable in the analytical tradition, is a common feature within her school of thought. In fact, it is a loose variation of Hölderlin's verse "*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*" (from "Patmos"), favored by Heidegger.

Unlike liberal tradition, Arendt's political freedom is a "demonstrable fact." Not only does political freedom become obvious, but it also shines most brightly within the public realm. With politics being its necessary condition, freedom appears only when together with other people. The public realm provides a space where people may *excel* though their words and deeds in the expression of freedom.

Surprisingly, at this point Arendt digresses from this general course of her argument to almost marginal remarks on "excellence;" this is how, as she cares to register, she translates the key Machiavellian notion of *virtue* (Arendt, 1961: 153). The reference to the dubious legacy of the Florentine is even more remarkable, as Arendt almost immediately distances herself from it by noting that the meaning of *virtù* as human excellence is best rendered by the term "virtuosity." With that, her discourse gets back on the track; clearly the shift from "excellence" to *virtù* then to "virtuosity" is not a harmless conceptual substitution. However, the question is rather why Arendt began her exposition of positive freedom by starting from the dangerous term *virtù* or "excellence," and not directly from "virtuosity" in the first place. The fact that this detour was not accidental becomes evident in the final chapter of her book *On Revolution*, where the theme of "excellence" resurfaces through the keyword "*élite*" (Arendt, 2006: 275). It seems as if Arendt intentionally rejects the easier way to present her views on positive freedom in favor of introducing some dubious, compromised, and problematic issues. In such cases, one can spot elements of her mental discipline that helped her to stay in touch with political realism.⁵

4. Analytical philosophy approaches positive liberty only to criticize it. Therefore, the term itself, by being born within this school of thought, might be misleading. Since positive liberty is obscure for this tradition, this concept falls into dependency on its negative counterpart, behind which a tangible historical legacy can always be found. In a different philosophical language, more appropriate terms can take the place of "positive freedom." Arendt offered a variety of metaphors.

5. There is something unmistakably Platonic about endless detours resisting the easier way. It is not the right place to give sufficient proof, but I argue elsewhere that contrary to Arendt's declarative animosity

In the same essay on freedom, Arendt shifts with ease from *virtù* to “virtuosity.” Her list of virtuosic actions, which may take readers by surprise, includes flute playing and dancing, among other things. In the performing arts, political freedom shows itself. She insists that this is not the freedom of artistic creativity, because through the act of creation the work of art is separated from the artist whose creative process may evolve even in isolation from everybody else. On the contrary, the performing freedom always requires some sort of audience and has no other end than performance itself. Its very existence is precarious, as it emerges tangentially to all objective facts and structural conditions. Any musician can play the same melody that can be written down as score. However, the score neither anticipates nor guarantees a virtuoso performance. At the same time, the score and the structural conditions prohibit virtuosic freedom from overcoming its pre-defined limits. In the terms of her later book, freedom in this scenario forms an “island” or an “oasis” in the political reality. This freedom is limited and does not threaten with aggressive expansion.

Virtuosity is only the first on the list of notions Arendt uses to expound her understanding of freedom. Thereafter, she introduces several other metaphors, such as “beginning” and “miracle.” The absence of one universal notion of freedom in her theory is sound within her school of thought, unlike within the counterpart tradition, where a single definition like *non-interference* or *non-domination* is required. Predictably, it is not always clear to what extent her discussion of one metaphor overlaps with that of another. The terms are connected, not directly but through shared opposition, to what is also represented through a set of notions like norm, necessity, security, and automatism. Those notions are part of a distinct train of thought which is identified by Arendt with liberal legacy. Today, this counter-tradition must also include the normative republican theory. The theories of Pettit and Arendt, for all that they are seemingly based on the same historical material of the Ancient Roman Republic, have nothing else in common.⁶ Moreover, one can even say that the two thinkers are engaged in an invisible intellectual dispute. Whereas Pettit aims at discovering and setting new norms and regularities, Arendt is preoccupied with the search for exceptions and anomalies.

At the end of her essay, Arendt defines freedom as an “infinite improbability,” and explains that the periods of freedom have been very short in the history of humanity. Ironically, after having begun her essay with the hope to restore freedom within political life, Arendt ends it almost by taking such a hope away. In quite a different fashion from the liberals, she still presses, albeit indirectly, her readership to the same conclusion that

against everything Platonic, she was a deeply Platonic thinker, the main common ground for both being the political realism.

6. The legacy of Ancient Greeks does not play any significant part in the republican theory, but it does so in Arendt's political theory. Some scholars suggest a distinction worth tracing between “neo-Romans” (Quentin Skinner, Philip Pettit) and “neo-Athenians” (Hannah Arendt et al.), see: Larmore, 2001. Though this may contain a valid point, it is not immediately relevant to my argument. Roman legacy was of paramount importance for Arendt no less so than for the republican theorists. Any differences between the two positions are more reasonably derived from some common source like contemporary philosophy than from two singular historical experiences, which would block subsequent attempts to draw a comparison.

political freedom has virtually no chance in real life. Her argument might be full of sympathy for political freedom, but since the phenomenon is so elusive, her conclusions can make someone desperate or indifferent towards liberty.

The points of logical mirroring, in comparison with its antipode of the normative republican theory, mark the most logically charged parts of her argument. Yet, as previously mentioned, Arendt is a political realist; the reality of freedom, as it is presented in her essay, consists of its problematic character. Freedom is a problem and *that* is the reality of political life. A miracle may never happen in our lifetime. Does it mean that we may cease thinking about freedom? The answer is no, since freedom is a problem in the first place. Arendt discovers a dangerous side of freedom and wants to confine it. Unlike the miracle of freedom that may be experienced only by the lucky ones, the danger of freedom concerns everybody. Suddenly, Arendt departs from the language of exception and embraces the language of normativity. She seems to change sides while reproducing the typical liberal argument about the perils of positive liberty that is made manifest through the sovereign will of the community. Following Rousseau, she defines sovereignty as indivisibility. The tyrannical unity of the general will threatens to eradicate the individualistic multiplicity of political reality. Benjamin Constant, John Stuart Mill, and Isaiah Berlin all warned of this.

Remarkably, Arendt applied the term “sovereign” not only to communities, but also to individuals. She did not explain what kind of danger is to be expected from the individual’s sovereignty. However, it is certain that this option was not suggested through any oversight. According to her interpretation of intellectual history, the sovereignty of the general will crowns the long series of teachings about free will that were concerned mostly with individuals. However, what does the sovereignty of individuals mean? If sovereignty is indivisibility, then the indivisibility of the individual is a tautology. Moreover, here it is appropriate to recollect Berlin’s account of positive liberty. It is the indivisibility of the self that saves humans from political peril, since it prevents misuses of the inner split between the real self and an ideal self, instrumental to the rise of totalitarian power. The problem of freedom, as Arendt puts it, consists in understanding “how freedom could have been given to men under the condition of non-sovereignty” (Arendt, 1961: 164). The formulation of this question anticipates its answer. Freedom is said to be given; therefore, it is not earned by men. This answer brings Arendt’s position closer to those liberals who believe that liberty must be maintained and protected by the state.⁷

The essay on freedom features several stories that do not present a coherent whole. One story is told about freedom as virtuosity that is a pure experience of political life. Another story is about freedom as *virtù*, translated as “excellence,” and might be more appropriately translated as “sovereignty,” since it is precisely the subject matter of Ma-

7. Judging from his reply in the conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo, Berlin would be terrified by this conclusion: “You frighten me when you say that she [Arendt] is close to me” (Berlin, Jahanbegloo, 1991: 84). Earlier he admitted notoriously: “I do not greatly respect the lady’s ideas.” However, I disagree with Seyla Benhabib, that it was a “gender stereotyping” on the part of Berlin (Benhabib, 2000: li). He dismissed Arendt’s thought not because she was a woman, but because she came from a different school of thought: “She [Arendt] seems to be influenced by nobody else” [except “the German thinkers”] (Berlin, Jahanbegloo, 1991: 83).

chiavelli's *Il Principe*. This second story frames the first one, and through this interlacing, Arendt performs as a realist. She sees the source of the problem precisely, and offers a solution to it. Subsequently, there is a final story about freedom as a miracle and the "infinite improbability." Accordingly, Arendt mentions three problems concerning freedom. There is a problem of understanding that freedom coincides with politics. Then, there is a problem of sovereign freedom that becomes tyranny. Lastly, freedom is problematic in the sense that it is ephemeral and almost nowhere to be found in history. The first and the last difficulties are of a logical nature. They urge us to think of freedom in a different manner.

After we abandon the negative concept of liberty and embrace its positive nature, we are able to understand the meaning of political freedom and learn to value its exceptional presence in the world. However, the required change of logical tools does not only reveal the phenomenon of freedom to us, but also conceals it from us; as soon as we begin to understand freedom, we discover its unattainability. This goes even further since the readership may gain the impression that the only risk associated with freedom consists in one's individual loss. All that happens in the worst case is that we are deprived of a genuine political experience. This conclusion may lead to indifference and even suppress the understanding of the more insistent problem of freedom. There is no immediate link suggested between the personal underachievement of freedom and the danger of tyranny. The problem of sovereign freedom exists as if in a separate dimension. Arendt's dogmatism, which is nothing more than the legacy of her school of thought, sometimes tends to eclipse her own deep sensitivity of political reality.

Political realism in regards to freedom consists of approaching freedom as a problem. Here, one can register a curious mental reflection of the situation, with the fate of Berlin's words on positive freedom. Both the straightforward analytical reductionism (MacCallum, 1967; Nelson, 2005) and the hard-edged continental approach, exemplified in the miracle metaphor, tend to eliminate the problem of freedom.

The book *On Revolution*

An important development of Arendt's theory of freedom is outlined in her book *On Revolution*. Less abstract than her essay on freedom, this account of the American Revolution and the Constitutional process presents an outstanding historical example of the successful solution to problem of freedom, and particularly remarkable due to its temporal and ideological affinity to the paradigmatic case of terrible freedom failure — the terrors of the French Revolution. In this book, Arendt adapts the notion of "positive freedom" to her own theory. Being a step beyond liberation (which is the level of negative freedom), positive freedom is presented as an act of foundation for a new political order. The positive manifestations of freedom are expressions, discussions, and decisions of everything related to the political life, but the most illustrious case is the framing of the constitution.

Arendt explains why the American Constitution deserves the name of *Constitutio Libertatis*.⁸ This constitution's purpose was not solely to impose order, it was not only the supreme law. Indeed, it is a tricky moment for Arendt's argument, since within her school of thought, freedom is routinely defined in opposition to law and order. Order of any kind is the reversal of the revolutionary chaos; it is a counter-revolution. It seems that no revolutionary spirit may survive the constitutional process. The very first negative phase of every revolution, liberation, is the logical opposition to established laws. Therefore, the challenge of the "constitution of liberty" is to preserve the spirit of revolution while protecting political life from the dangers of tyranny and terror.

The Founding Fathers succeeded in solving this impossible political problem (which was nothing short of squaring the circle in geometry) only because they thought of freedom positively, and did not deduce it negatively from the legal framework. The purpose of the new constitution was not to limit the power of the sole ruler, but to create new centers of power. The most important element of the constitution was not the legal order itself, but the separation of powers. Law weakens power; the total domination of law can completely neutralize political life, reducing it to automatic procedures. Here, one can find another curious anti-parallel with the republican theory of Philip Pettit, who argues that depoliticization does not harm democracy (Pettit, 2004). On the contrary, Arendt insists, as a consequence of the separation, that fair competition among powers may only strengthen each of them. This is the key to the political puzzle. In order to preserve the power generated by revolution, the political center must be divided into several branches. While sovereignty is defined as indivisibility, the division of powers protects political freedom from tyrannical tendencies, and renders the freedom as non-sovereign.

In particular, Arendt noted the role of the Senate within the emerging political reality. Unlike its Roman counterpart, the American Senate does not have judicial functions following the principle of separation of powers. The Supreme Court holds authority, which is another important element of political life that saves it from the tyranny of the majority. The unique role of the Senate in comparison to the House of Representatives is that it functions as a mediator of public sentiments. The Senate stabilizes the system of political representation that otherwise could have become a hostage of volatility in popular preferences. The functional division between the chambers is a secondary feature behind the basic separation of powers. Whereas the primary division reflects the three different powers of the political body (thinking, willing, and judging), the secondary one reflects the opposition between knowledge (wisdom) and opinion. Hence, legislative deliberation employs two different logics, those of normativity and of spontaneity. The normative thinking secures the consistency of law-making, and the spontaneity of public opinions introduces the element of novelty. The House therefore plays a special role. The constitution foresaw two sources of political novelty, those of the executive power and public opinion. As soon as the House loses its ability to represent the diversity of views, political life becomes poorer in positive expressions of freedom. This might have led to a well-

8. The term itself was coined long ago by Henry de Bracton, who applied it to the *Magna Carta*.

known political drama from the past where the will of the monarch challenged the limits of legality. For the new republic, it would have been an obvious regress. Therefore, parliament should have become the ideal conscience that collects and preserves the whole diversity of opinions among citizens. Its part in political life may be compared to that of Socrates in Athens, who, according to Arendt's interpretation of the history of philosophy, became just such an ideal conscience for his polis. However, after him, philosophy was never again up to this mission, which was carried on only by political actors.

The American Revolution was improbably successful; still, its success did not last long if one measures it against the preservation of the initial revolutionary spirit. The purpose of *Constitutio Libertatis* was to found the public space where freedom might thrive. However, the established Constitution of the United States came to be seen primarily as an unchangeable law, and not as an invitation to political creativity. The judicial, i.e., the negative attitude to liberty came to prevail. Then, the rise of partisan politics impeded the House from fulfilling its mission as the reservoir of diversity. Moreover, the original sources of positive freedom — the town hall meetings and spontaneous associations — were not integrated into the new political framework, and as consequence, lost relevance. This later development corroborates Arendt's thesis from the essay that periods of freedom, which are as miracles in history, are always short-lived.

She registered at least one counter-trend, expounded in the political views of Thomas Jefferson who disliked that the Constitution became an object of worshipping and wanted to preserve a creative attitude to political life in the spirit of revolution. His idea was to implement the wards system of "elementary republics," where citizens were able to actively participate in discussions and decisions. In the end, it was supposed to serve as an alternative way to represent the diversity of opinions so that the spontaneity of social life would be shielded from the unifying forces of national political establishment.

Arendt's idea was different from Jefferson's; nevertheless, it was based on the principle of quasi-territorial division. She suggested a solution to the representation of positive freedom, which may remind her readers of Jeffersonian "wards," because, as she put it, freedom is always spatially limited (Arendt, 2006: 275). This thesis is a very unusual move for her school of thought. One can cite here at length Heidegger's "Art and Space," where the incompatibility between "space" and "place" is convincingly explained (Heidegger, 1973). This move goes against her own vision of freedom as a miracle, since a miraculous political event, being a point on the line of history, does not have any spatial dimension. Being spatially limited, freedom is not a miracle anymore; it is not out of this world anymore. It becomes material; this is why, as with any material body, it has its borders. Additionally, since every limitation is a product of some negation, a possibility opens to reconcile the positive understanding of freedom with the negative concept which is the focus of liberal theory. The spatial limitation turns out to be the theoretical mediator that allows the two concepts of freedom to become compatible while keeping a safe distance from one another. A similar thought may be found in Arendt's earlier essay on freedom,

where performing virtuosity was described almost as an “island” or an “oasis” of liberty within the public realm⁹.

Building on Arendt's solution of freedom problem

How can we evaluate her suggestion? Firstly, it is more likely to be a guide to the solution to the freedom problem than the solution itself. Basically, Arendt does nothing else than reformulate the issue. Instead of asking “How can freedom be thought of as non-sovereign?” a new question is implicitly introduced: “How can freedom be thought of as spatially limited?” Moreover, she has already answered it; it is always so. She cites no reasons for that claim, but whatever her reasons might be, this answer cannot be accepted.

In fact, freedom has almost never been spatially limited. One of her favored historical cases of political freedom, Periclean Athens, was a flourishing naval empire, steadily expanding its territorial domination over autonomous Greek states. In a speech which is hardly ever read in comparison to the famous funeral oration preceding it, Pericles teaches his audience that Athenians may never rely on the mercy of their enemies because they rule like tyrants in the Greek world (Thucydides II.63). Arendt was wrong when she claimed that the city borders were sufficient for Athenians to enjoy their political freedom (Arendt, 1990: 76). Whenever a free spirit is able to confine itself within limits, freedom is not compromised. Nevertheless, the paradox remains untouched; why should freedom ever restrict itself? Although the guide to the solution Arendt gives us may be perfect, this cannot be the solution itself.

Secondly, being a realist, Arendt moved away from what was expected based solely on her intellectual tradition. She discerned the freedom problem and intended to resolve it rather than to keep the allegiance to a certain way of speaking about freedom. One can even defend the incompleteness of her final stance, since we can hardly expect that a book would solve the freedom problem forever. Any solution must be political and not logical. However, a refinement based on her argument alone may be suggested.

The final pages of the book “On Revolution” are highly remarkable. While presenting the “islands” or “oases” of freedom as the elements of political reality, Arendt made another surprising move by introducing the word “*élite*” (Arendt, 2006: 275). The passage to this topic came out of necessity, so she went into a lengthy justification of this term, notwithstanding all dubious connotations. Her *élite* is obviously not the traditional oligarchy; rather, it is the political avant-garde, the most politically active part of the community who are willing and able to express and to experience freedom positively. The line separating the *élite* from other citizens is very important, because it can bring a double salvation; it saves the elements of freedom within the political realm, and it saves the majority of people from the perils of politics. In other words, it is a solution for both

9. Berlin had a similarly pessimistic view and used the same metaphor (“oases in the desert”) when he complained of the exceptionality of liberty in human history: “The periods and societies in which civil liberties were respected, and variety of opinion and faith tolerated, have been very few and far between — oases in the desert of human uniformity, intolerance and oppression” (Berlin, Harris, 2002: 218).

problems at the same time, those of positive freedom, which Arendt was preoccupied with, as well as for the problem of negative or liberal freedom.

It is appropriate here to return to that point in her essay on freedom where Arendt translated Machiavelli's *virtù* as "excellence." Excellence is what distinguishes individuals from their fellow citizens. It is what makes them *élite*. *Il Principe* tells of the successful prince who excels through his *virtù* that allows him to challenge his fate. Machiavelli's advice to the ruler was to be as unjust and perfidious as possible. In this case, the individual and the state sovereignty coincided, giving rise to tyranny. Why should this sovereign limit his freedom through spatial borders? On the contrary, the whole point of the treatise was to conquer more land and people, to unite a divided Italy. Therefore, this unfortunate parallel may badly discredit what is said about the *élite* in the finale of *On Revolution*. Yet, Arendt's argument drew a full circle going from "excellence" to "élite," marking the real problem with freedom, which she could not help but return to. How can the political difference, which is the most viable definition of positive freedom, be no harm to others? It sounds like a paradox, particularly after we recall that the ancients identified virtue with the good. In other words, how can the good be no evil? Whereas Berlin and Pettit seem to ignore this issue altogether on the ground that it is analytically impossible and therefore inaccessible within their theoretical frameworks, Arendt tries to deal with it realistically, but even she is urged to offer an extra justification for being attentive to a dubious theme like "élite."¹⁰

The question seems rhetorical and the answer seems obvious: how can the good be evil in the first place? If you are really good, it cannot bring evil, it cannot harm anyone. This consideration returns us back to the track with the logic of freedom rather than with the logic of justice and spatial distribution, which is typical for both liberal and neo-Roman approaches. In other words, we are back to thinkers like Heidegger and Deleuze. Does it mean that Arendt was wrong when she parted ways with her school of thought? Definitely not. In order to solve the problem, you must first see the problem. You cannot offer a solution to a problem that does not exist for you, as freedom (in a non-liberal sense) was never a problem either for Heidegger or for Deleuze.

However, why is it so important to speak about something like "benevolent excellence"? First, this is not a marginal phenomenon. Generally speaking, it shows that our political reality is not "flat," i.e., that people and political entities are not the same. They are different not as a consequence of some natural or social conditions, but because they want to be so. They want to excel among their peers in their unique ways. It is precisely their expression of freedom that makes them different. The practical applications of this approach are numerous. In connection with the issue of benevolent excellence, one can talk about American Exceptionalism, about the role of a public intellectual (or any other individual) within a community, or about the fate of liberal tradition or of the entire Western civilization within the complex post-modern world. In cases like these, people

10. As another contribution to the same subject, one can cite her essay "On Authority," also in: Arendt, 1961, where, quite unexpectedly, she defended the importance of authority in political life.

want to make a difference, which they understand as something good. It is here that the problem immediately arises of how can this good be no evil.

But how can it not? In what follows, I am going to elaborate on the point that seems to be at the center of the theory of freedom. There are two options; either we expect that some spatial limit is applied to freedom from outside (by structural conditions, by political institutions, etc.), or the limit is the result of freedom itself. The first scenario is the liberal or the republican one. It does not really matter if individual liberty is protected from the "outside" or constrained from the "inside." A quasi-spatial structure, be it the fixed set of basic rights or the laws of reason, will do the entire job to solve the problem of freedom. Sometimes Arendt is fairly close to presenting a solution of this type. However, questions always remain. Why does this structure have a priority over all others? In virtue of what? What makes it good? Hence, this solution requires something other than freedom to come into play. Tentatively, one can call it justice. Freedom and justice are two different and almost opposite political problems. In accordance with her school of thought, Arendt even argued that unlike friendship, justice is something anti-political (Arendt, 1990: 83). However, as we saw, her realism urged her to make compromises and to consider just spatial distributions as a possible political remedy.

Another option is to stick with the politics of freedom, and to expose justice as its secondary, though inevitable, effect. Against this backdrop, all negative concepts of liberty are better understood as integral elements of a theory of justice rather than of freedom. Finally, this is what makes Arendt's thought unique: in a certain sense, her theory was the only one in the 20th century that realistically confronts the phenomenon of freedom as freedom and not as justice. No moralism or universal principles are of help in this case, since freedom understood as excellence is clearly egoistic. In order to explain how a multitude that forms a political realm can emerge from the chaos of singularities, we have to extend our concept of excellence. In her Kantian seminars, Arendt used the notion of "exemplary validity" (Arendt, 1982: 76). One can say that any expression of freedom has its unique and exemplary value through which it excels in the world. But the world does not precede freedom as a common space where freedom is to be placed.

There was no political realm, nor did the word for freedom exist, before the Greeks discovered their free way of life. The word and the multitude were created as an effect of their difference, not only from other peoples, but also among themselves. They excelled not simply in words and deeds, but in very different speeches and forms of life. Although they spoke a common language with several dialects, they invented many new ways of speaking this language. Some were artificial creations or explorations of the very limits of understanding (as in sophistic), or they freely combined the existing dialects for artistic purposes (as in drama). In the end, political life in Greece flourished not because they had a common language from the beginning, but because they created multiple different artificial "private" languages, logical oases as it were, instead of just one. Insofar as their ways to express freedom were unique, they had no immediate cause to either interfere in others' lives or to dominate them. Such expressions of Greek positive freedom as phi-

losophy, the complex love relations, the fine arts, and so on, were genuinely exceptional¹¹. Since those achievements were new to the Ancient world and incommensurable with it, they were also just to it. Their justice was as if it was “deduced” from their freedom.

This is very close to what Arendt said about the American Constitution as *Constitutio Libertatis*. The space to distribute among the powers was not there before the powers were created. The powers, insofar as they excelled in their spontaneity and positive freedom, were able, for the first time, to lay out the political space of justice for the newborn Union. Perfect laws or perfect judicial mechanisms do not lead to good politics. On the contrary, political life (if only it is good and virtuous, meaning that it allows people to excel in their own virtues and to be genuinely different in their forms of life) promotes justice. Whenever we try to make a difference, there is a case for such benevolent excellence. If we think (as we ought to) about how our excellence can be no harm to others, the simple answer is to be as good as only we can; this seems to be the only path to salvation. Justice to others will follow from the virtue of positive freedom.

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11. Plato mentioned such fruits of the Greek liberty in his *Symposium*, 182c.

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Арендт о позитивной свободе

Алексей Глухов

Кандидат философских наук, доцент Школы философии НИУ ВШЭ
Адрес: ул. Мясницкая, д. 20, Москва, Российская Федерация 101000
E-mail: alexeigloukhov@gmail.com

Предложенная Ханна Арендт концепция свободы занимает исключительное место в современной политической теории. Во-первых, эта концепция позитивна, что ставит ее в оппозицию к обеим актуальным негативным концепциям свободы, либеральной (Исайя Берлин) и республиканской (Квентин Скиннер, Филип Петтит). Сравнение между теориями Арендт и Петтита позволяет указать несколько моментов выразительного логического антагонизма. На этом основании вводится понятие «школы мысли», которое играет существенную роль при последующем рассмотрении арендтовского реализма. Во-вторых, несмотря на то, что учение Арендт о свободе достаточно типично для континентальной школы мысли (Мартин Хайдеггер, Жиль Делёз, Ален Бадью), ее решение той проблемы, которую представляет собой свобода, скорее сближает ее позицию с представителями либеральной традиции. В-третьих, на мой взгляд, эту двусмысленную ситуацию необходимо считать скорее проявлением политического реализма, отличающего теорию Арендт, чем тривиальной непоследовательностью мышления. Именно политический реализм является по-настоящему уникальной частью интеллектуального наследия этого мыслителя. Осознание специфики ее подхода способно привести к серьезным изменениям в современной политической философии. Наконец, в финале статьи дается анализ сформулированного Арендт решения проблемы свободы, а также предлагается интерпретация ряда, на первый взгляд, неожиданных и даже не совсем уместных понятий (например, «превосходство» или «элита»), без которых тем не менее не обходится арендтовская трактовка свободы. Хотя в конечном счете ее решение кажется искусственным, оно открывает многообещающее поле политических исследований, связанных с понятием «благожелательное превосходство».

Ключевые слова: Ханна Арендт, свобода, справедливость, добродетель, доблесть, превосходство, элита