



FREEDOM AND AUTHORITY

Intro to Freedom & Plato





Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*
(1830)



Are you free? ~ What is freedom?

- Is freedom found in political society or out of it?
- Is public freedom the responsibility of states or that of the people who live in them?
- What do we do when freedom is limited or overridden? Do we have the right to resist those who oppress us?
- The challenge to these questions is that there are so many ways to conceptualize freedom that it is unclear what the subject matter is!!

Kinds of Freedom

- **Self-control/self-attainment** – the mastery of one’s appetites.
 - *Is the alcoholic free? If you lock yourself in your room for days on end to play video games, are you free?*
 - *Training, discipline, and excellence opens the world up to you in ways that it wouldn’t otherwise be open.*
- **Living according to appropriate criteria** (natural law, reason, law of history)
 - *You are ‘free’ to ignore gravity, but true freedom is to understand the constraints that bind us: laws of nature, laws of reason*
 - *Poets say that there is freedom in constraint – rhyme and meter are formal constraints*
- **Free will** – the ability to direct one’s action to ends of their own choosing
 - *In some basic sense, you direct at least the most important decisions in your life; you are not determined to do anything*
- **A lack of physical obstacles to do something**
 - *Prisoners are not free because they cannot leave the prison; if someone locked the doors to this room, we would have some of our freedom taken away*
 - *Civil liberties: freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of movement*
- **Social freedom**
 - *Physical limitations that enhance overall social wellbeing. – if you have a broken foot you are not free to run*
 - *Social liberties: health care, education, retirement – if you are poor you are not free to attain social goods*
- **Internal freedom (self-liberation)**
 - *Irrespective of the external world, freedom is an inner posture of self-possession; there is some core part of us that is inviolable. Even a slave or prisoner could be free in this inner-most sense.*

Limits to freedom?

- **Self-control/self-attainment** – we are limited by our lack of discipline
- **Living according to appropriate criteria** (natural law, reason) – poor understanding of what the criteria of freedom is (bad education, deficiencies of reason)
- **Free will** – the inability to articulate your own ends; coerced or forced into certain behaviors, ends are pre-determined
- **A lack of physical obstacles to do something** – Being coerced and constrained, by the law or a superior will
- **Social freedom** – we are limited by social forces, conditions of society, a lack of access to resources that would enable you to do x, y, and z
- **Internal freedom (self-liberation)** – we are limited by our inability to assert our freedom from within

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Are limits mostly internal, linked to reason or discipline, or are they mostly external, linked to coercive structures, whether political or social?

Coercion takes many forms! Our sense of obligation may impinge our freedom.

The problem of obligation: what obligates us to obey an authority. *The problem of legitimacy*: what justifies the coercive power of an authority *De facto authority versus legitimate authority*

■ Associative obligations

- One accrues political obligations by virtue of group membership; e.g. in the same way children have a duty to obey their parents by virtue of being born to them, so too do individuals who come into political society

■ Instrumentalist

- Since political authority is necessary to preserve and protect rights, to enhance liberty (etc.), what matters is how effective the authority is; (Machiavellian political authority, Utilitarian political authority)

■ Consent

- Political authority is legitimate only if it has the consent of those who are subject to its commands; i.e. I voluntarily transact to obligate myself to comply with the state's commands can I be said to have a duty to comply with the state (Hobbesian, Lockean)
- Democratic consent – assumes conflicting attitudes to political ends, the only way to resolve these disagreements is by means of a decision-making process that is fair to the interests and opinions of each of the members (consent not to particular authority, but to legitimating process)

■ Reasonable consensus

- The principle of political legitimacy requires that coercive institutions be so structured that they accord with the reasonable views of the members of the society; plain crash, flight attendant example (Kantian)

■ Contradiction – there is no such thing as justified *political* authority

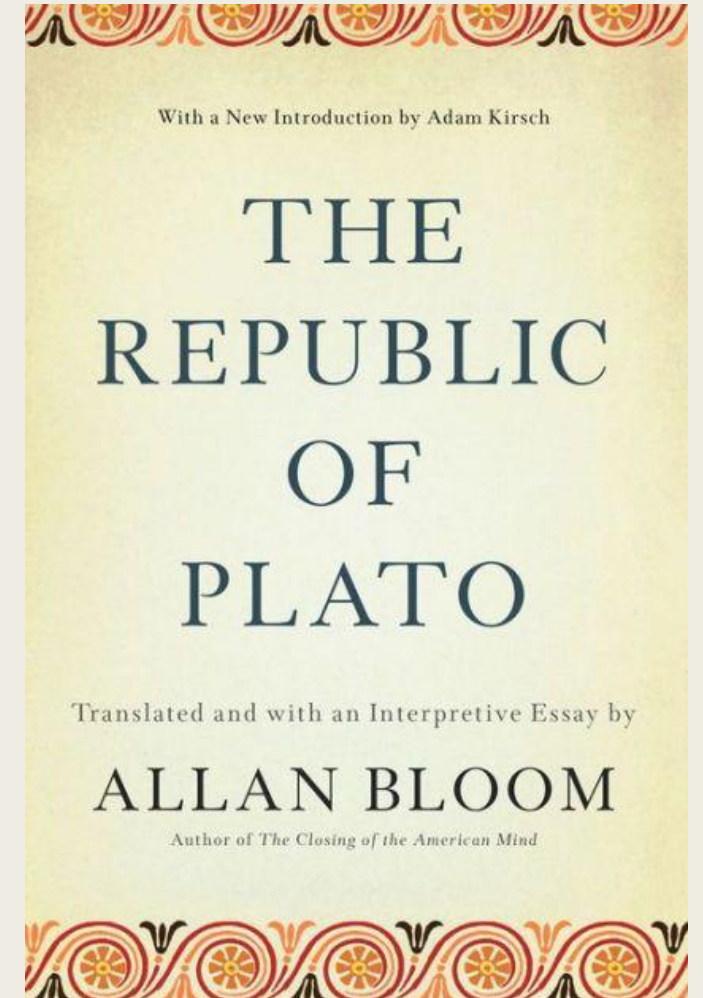
Philosophical anarchism, Marxism, Fascist/Hitlerian resistance (there may be other authorities...)

What is the relationship between liberty and authority?

- **There is an inverse relationship between liberty and authority** – the more authority, the less liberty there is; the greater the liberty, the less authority there is.
 - *Whether authority is conferred or asserted, the broader the scope authority has, the less free those people are subject to it*
 - *William Godwin on the conflict between moral autonomy and political authority: Improved individual judgment requires the ability of individuals to exercise their judgments freely, without outside imposition. The tyranny of the majority, the law, or representative judgments (any coercive force in society) stunt individuals' ability to make judgments, since coercion can only demand compliance rather than free thought. Institutions of coercion inhibit the personal and intellectual growth of individuals.*
- **Authority produces liberty** – liberty is only possible under the right conditions; legitimate authority produces, enhances, preserves liberty
 - *Unrestricted freedom produces too much variability and conflict. The regulative force of authority creates a space for human freedom. Appropriate constraints specify the appropriate scope of human action.*
 - *Proudhon: "The science of government rightly belongs to one of the sections of the Academy of Sciences, whose permanent secretary is necessarily prime minister; and since every citizen may address a memoir to the Academy, every citizen is a legislator. But as the opinion of no one is of any value until its truth has been proven, no one can put his will in the place of reason"*

Plato's *Republic*

- Politics is about identifying the elites, but this turns out to be a conspiracy – the philosophers *against* the public;
- Use the noble lie; trick them into thinking that there is an afterlife of rewards and punishments;
- Once they are contained, the philosophers will be able to pursue freedom of contemplation in private
 - *only philosophers are free; everyone else is still bound to the cave*
- Karl Popper claims that Plato is promoting an early form of totalitarianism, where powerful philosophers control the public; they don't rule for the sake of terrorizing but form some humanitarian purpose
 - *"I wish to make it clear that I believe in the sincerity of Plato's totalitarianism. His demand for the unchallenged domination of one class over the rest was uncompromising, but his ideal was not the maximum exploitation of the working classes by the upper class; it was the stability of the whole." (The Open Society and Its Enemies, p. 118)*



Platonic Freedom: 3 types

■ Democratic freedom

- *Simply freedom of an agent from impediments to a goal – freedom from external limitations to your desires*
- *You are free to articulate your own life plan, pursue your own vision of the good*

■ Aristocratic freedom

- *Rational or psychic freedom from irrational desires; freedom from base, material desires*
- *Having attained mastery over one's 'irrational' part of the soul, one can be properly directed in life*

■ Civic Freedom

- *Freedom of legal protection, freedom from arbitrary constraint*
- *Being a legal citizen, the opposite condition of slavery*
- *Civil freedom is most compatible with Aristocratic Freedom, Democratic Freedom looks more like what Hobbes called the state of nature/state of war*

- Central question for Plato is how is society constituted, what is the operative notion of freedom?

The Platonic notion of constitution

- For Plato, the ‘constitution’ of a political community was not a written document, but the something more like fundamental ‘composition’ – what the polity is made of, its genetic structure
 - *In English we still have the expression ‘**bodily constitution**’ which means the wellbeing of the body.*
 - *For Plato, regime types are built from the bottom up; the majority of a certain people-type will determine what kind of regime that political community will have.*
 - *A healthy political society is contingent on the health of all its members; the regime type is emergent; it reflects the composition of the public (political communities deserve their regime type)*
 - *Socrates, “Do you know that it is necessary that there also be as many forms of human characters as there are forms of regimes? Or do you suppose that the regimes arise ‘from an oak or rocks’ and not from the dispositions of the men in the cities, which tipping the scale as it were, draw the rest along with them?”*
- Five regime/soul types (*Republic*, Book 8): Discourse between Socrates and Glaucon
 - ?? □ Aristocracy □ Timocracy □ Oligarchy □ Democracy □ Tyranny □ ??
- This story of regime type complicates our understanding of politics

Aristocracy

- Low democratic freedom; high aristocratic freedom; high civic freedom
- Three parts:
 - *The ruling class, made up of philosopher kings (gold) – forbidden to own property*
 - *Auxiliaries of the ruling class: enforcers, soldiers (silver) – forbidden to own property*
 - *The people: own property, produce goods for themselves (farmers, merchants, craftspeople) (bronze or iron)*
- There is a rigorous education system designed to train individuals to live selfless and upright lives; the ideal goals are not material, but in the realm of ideas
- The lower classes' appetites are kept in check by the good education and good laws of the philosopher kings. (noble lie – be good)
- There is not much say over which class you will be born into – determined by something like DNA. The content of your soul determines your place in society. Very little social mobility or class shifting. If you are a merchant, you will be a merchant your whole life...
- Doesn't endure forever – even aristocracies degrade?

Timocracy

- Low democratic freedom; Moderate to low aristocratic freedom; High civic freedom
- Defects of birth and some misidentification (errors) on the part of the aristocracy allow Silver souls into the aristocracy – ‘axillaries’ those better suited to war and honor rise to power.
- Unlike Aristocrats who are oriented to Truth, by nature, this class of people value honor and conquest. Politics starts to become oriented to the material world. They seek to demonstrate glory through the arts of war. Timocrats are lovers of honor, so politics shifts to the emphasis of great deeds, recognition, fame...
- However, they remain contemptuous of public honors associated with money – you cannot buy honor; they spendthrifts, but they invariably acquire great amounts of wealth due to their great deeds
- Their children are torn between aristocratic values (people who aren’t concerned with status) and those who seek glory; slowly children begin to crave status and power.

Oligarchy

- Moderate democratic freedom; low aristocratic freedom; Moderate-low civic freedom
- The rule of the rich; those with property. Some of the children of timocrats see their fathers' immense wealth due to their honors. These corrupted children begin to value the money in itself, and they abandon the duty to honor
- Everyone pursues the good of being as rich as possible (the end is firmly located in the material world); The poor masses, who emulate this goal of getting rich, end up become indebted to the rich -- factionalism and conflict begins to arise between the rich and the poor
- Laws become lax, aristocratic freedom gives way to increased democratic freedom, people are encouraged to pursue whatever licentious behavior they wish (as long as they can afford it); ultimately, this society is destroyed by a greediness for wealth.
- Socrates: "Then democracy, I suppose comes into being when the poor win, killing some of the others and casting out some, and share the regime and the ruling offices with those who are left on an equal basis; and for the most part, the offices in it are given by lot."

Democracy

- High democratic freedom, no aristocratic freedom; high-low civic freedom (erratic and volatile)
- “In the first place, then, aren’t they free? And isn’t the city full of freedom and free speech? And isn’t there license in it to do whatever one wants?”
- “But... the content of the public is poor: “he also lives along day by day, gratifying the desire that occurs to him, at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another owning water and reducing; now practicing gymnastic, and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometime spending his time as though he were occupied with philosophy. Often he engages in politics and, jumping up, says and does whatever chances to come to him; and if he ever admires any soldiers, he turns in that direction; and if it’s money-makers, in that one. And there is neither order nor necessity in his life, but calling this life sweet, free, and blessed he follows it throughout.”
- Echoes of Marx (?) When the poor kill their masters, class conflict ends but what we see is not freedom. People are still slaves to their immediate desires (anticipates Lenin... purging of bourgeois sentiment).
- Society is destroyed by a “greediness for freedom” – “For surely in a city under a democracy you would hear that this is the finest thing it has, and that for this reason it is the only regime worth living in for anyone who is by nature free.”

Tyranny

- No democratic freedom; No aristocratic freedom; No civic freedom
- “Too much freedom seems to change into nothing but too much slavery, both for private man and city.”
- This is a transition thematized by Hobbes; he argues, when everyone is free to pursue their desires, this is a state of war; we need a strong sovereign to rule – Plato thinks that the kind of ruler who will emerge under these conditions is a tyrant
- In democracies, incompetence of rule and conflicting visions of political society lead to chaos, irreconcilable factionalism.
- The tyrant emerges promising to resolve all these tensions and problems (populist who emerges from lowly beginnings).
- “He must, therefore, look sharply to see who is courageous, who is great-minded, who is prudent, who is rich. And so happy is he that there is a necessity for him, whether he wants to or not, to be an enemy of all of them and plot against them until he purges the city.”
- “In fleeing the smoke of enslavement to free men would have fallen into the fire of being under the mastery of slaves; in the place of that great and unseasonable freedom they have put on the dress of the harshest and bitterest enslavement to slaves.”

Movement between regime types

- Regime types are inherently unstable. There is inevitable moral decay from virtue to slavery:
- As regimes degrade, they become more factional and conflictual:
 - *The honorable/dishonorable; the wealthy/the poor; the few/the many or the one and the many*
- Degradation is built into the human condition, found in our DNA -- Defects of birth, bad inter-generational education lead to the breakdown of society
 - *“Although they are wise, the men you educated as leaders of the city will nonetheless fail to hit on the prosperous birth and barrenness of your kind with calculation aided by sensation, but it will pass them by, and they will at some time beget children when they should not.”*
 - In the face of their fathers’ moderate and temperate attitudes, timocratic children seek to distinguish themselves by way of glory; still possess many of the temperate attitudes of their parents, but are excessive in the pursuit of glory
 - In the face of their fathers’ prudence with money, oligarchic children seek to distinguish themselves by way of attaining wealth; they are still somewhat constrained and limited in their focus. Their objective is more money (even if this is a bad focus)
 - Democratic children of the poor in oligarchic regimes wonder why they need to serve their fathers’ masters, the rich. They reject the slavery of debts in favor of total freedom. No limits to individual desire
 - The children of democrats feel tyrannized by the impulses of their fellow man; in this chaos they desire order – the chaos of democracy leads to tyranny

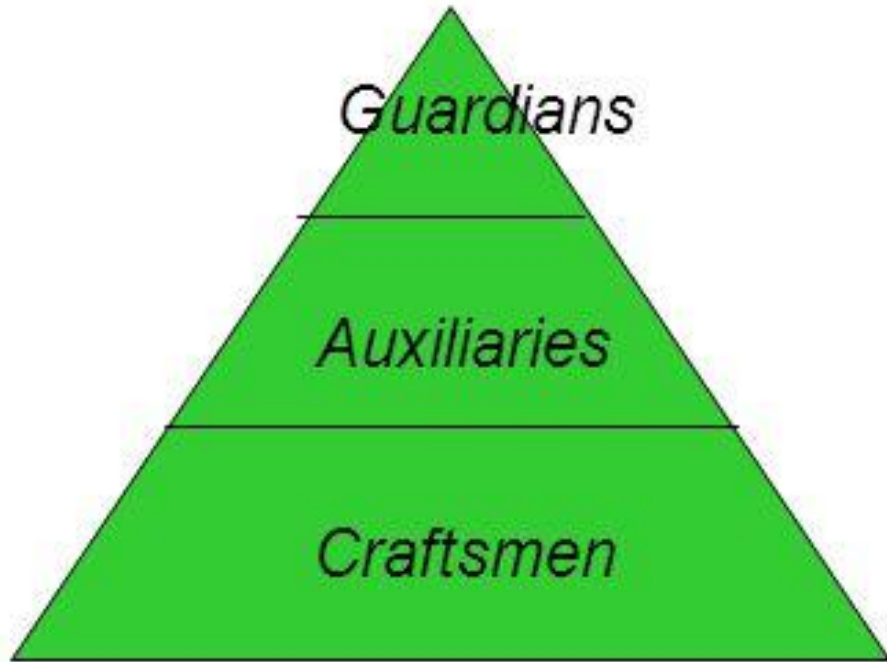
What does this have to do with freedom?

- Bodily constitution – the disposition of the people, the make-up of society and of political communities, all matters
- High Personal (democratic) freedom (1) is detrimental to Personal (aristocratic) freedom (2) and it ultimately undermines Civic Freedom
- The best regime is one in which the political leadership has an abundance of aristocratic freedom which it can build into society
- What is self-mastery?
 - *We've already seen the Allegory of the Cave – it has something to do with special insight; the eternal, the true – escaping the darkness of the cave, entering the world of the real*
- Two additional allegories:
 - *The Great Myth of Phædrus*
 - *The Ring of Gyges*

The Great Myth of *Phædrus*

- “We will liken the soul to the composite nature of a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the horses and charioteers of the gods are all good and of good descent, but those of other races are mixed; and first **the charioteer** of the human soul drives a pair, and **secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed**, but **the other quite the opposite in breed and character**. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome.”
 - **Charioteer** – symbolizes reason, the rational faculty
 - **First noble horse** – (white) symbolizes spiritedness (love of honor, glory, recognition)
 - **Second ill-breed horse** – (black) symbolizes desire and appetite (erotic, carnal, material excess)
- For an individual to be truly free, the charioteer (reason – philosophical rationality, contemplations) needs to be driving the team; he uses the strength of the noble horse to reign in the recklessness of the ill-breed horse.
- When spirited horse takes over from the charioteer, it cannot contain the appetitive horse on his own... things begin to break down
- The rational faculty is superior because it is the only part of ourselves that has access to the eternal and it can properly balance both horses

Does this formulation seem



Classes of City



Classes of the Soul

Revisiting the regime types in light of the chariot myth

- Aristocracy – perfect alignment of three parts of the soul; *driven by the charioteer of reason*
- Timocracy – minor misalignment, *driven by those spirited souls who seek glory and honor*
- Oligarchy -- Driven by the *appetitive desire of the few*
- Democracy -- Driven by the *appetitive desire of the many*
- Tyranny -- Driven by the *appetitive desire of the one*

Conclusion

- Next Thursday we will cover the Ring of Gyges and Aristotle
- For Plato, regimes reflect the constitution of the public; the kind of regime a political community will have stems from the quality of their souls
 - *The Parable of the Charioteer shows a properly order society will be governed by the rational charioteer;*
 - *Imperfect societies are driven by one of the horses – honor or appetite*
- The freest condition is one where the public is Aristocratic, but even still, no regime is perfectly stable. Regimes degrade and become less free
- There is a dynamic degradation, over time regimes will degrade