

McGill University

Final Essay

Liberty, Exploitation, and Property

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"I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity." (Berlin, 1958). Since we exist only through our consciousness – since our thoughts are the only existence we can be certain of – we must extrapolate Berlin's concept of Negative Liberty to beyond the realm of just man and men. The concept of liberty in terms of consciousness would mean for it to be free of everything but itself. Our consciousness must be allowed to exist only within itself, and not within the constraints of a medium of existence. Therefore, we cannot be free so long as we are bound by our bodies. Following that logic, to be free is to be dead. Since this is mostly undesirable, and usually frowned upon in our current society, we must work to find some form of freedom within the material limits of our human body and our world, something more "practical".

Countries fall, political systems crumble, banknotes burn. But beyond anything else, we are beings birthed through the union of two others, held against calm heartbeats, raised by loving protectors, with no demands or caprices for reciprocity. *"[...] the intention and goal of mothering is to give of one's care without obtaining a return of a self-interested kind. The emotional satisfaction of a mothering person is a satisfaction in the well-being and happiness of another human being, and a satisfaction in the health of the relation between the two persons, not the gain that results from an egoistic bargain."* (Held, 1987). No matter how perfect the political system, human-attributed vices emerge from some absence of love, somewhere. If political actors were secure, in touch with their feelings, and thought only about how they could love more, they would never choose greed, and there wouldn't be anyone to offer them an opportunity for greed. A lack of human mothering creates unloved – and unloving – people. *"Human mothering shapes language and culture, and forms human social personhood. Human mothering develops morality [...]. Human mothering teaches consideration for others based on moral concern; it does not merely follow and bring the child to follow instinctive tendency. Human mothering creates autonomous persons; it does not merely propagate a species."* (Held, 1987). Social injustice, racial discrimination, all caused by a lack of love for another. But beyond that, even in the current imperfect state of things, where people do not see people but instead see adversaries, competition, threats; even then, to be loved, to know it, and to be able to reciprocate it, is the purest and most freeing feeling we can have. The opposite is the worst one can feel. Prison bars eventually rust, physical torture is temporary. However, a lack of love is most damaging to the human psyche. An unbearable feeling of imprisonment it is, to do any task, mundane or complex, when you have lost the love of a partner. It is difficult to want to enhance this concept of liberty-through-love, because one cannot simply ask for love. This is indeed very bothersome, considering how much one needs it. Overall, each individual must be educated in such a way that whether they are starving, freezing, or bleeding, love must continue to be given out. Held's mothering society is an interesting proposal for these ideas.

Exploitation is one of Young's five faces of oppression that I believe requires most urgent remediation. In our current capitalist society where labor is said to have a value and is exchanged for property, for money, to have exploitation of this labor is most problematic. Exploitation of labor means workers not being given the value of their work, thus advantaging only the work-givers. In a society focused on the care of others, those unable to work would be taken care of adequately, would not face social or societal discrimination. One wouldn't seek more power if one was cared for and if one were focused on caring for others. One's personal position in the societal hierarchy would be irrelevant. In a society focused on the love of others, we wouldn't have such problems as cultural imperialism, where people are treated unjustly because of their differences. Finally, in a society of love, of motherly care, violence would be non-present, just as there is no violence from mother to child (*arguably*). One could argue that exploitation would also be absent in a loving society, however if we are to consider how much the current economic structures rely on the fair compensation of labor, having exploitation would be fundamentally opposite and contradictory to the way our current society is built. Exploitation needs urgent remediation because other faces of oppression can stem from it. Furthermore, the problem of exploitation is fundamentally the exploitation of human lives: slavery. This is unarguably an unthinkable concept, since the humans exploited are equal in essence to the humans exploiting.

"[The bourgeoisie] has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage laborers." (Marx, 1847). I find it very unfortunate to walk into school each day and be faced with the discouraging reality that higher education has become a business. Students are clients having to pay unbelievable sums to be present. Positions of teaching have become attractive job offers, with great monetary advantages, at times inflated when compared to the value of the work.

Education should be the most essential focus of our species. The monetization of education shifts the goals of students, from a wish to expand their knowledge in a specific field, to a feeling of requirement for getting a higher-paid position afterwards. Academic research should have as its only aim the development of human knowledge. Every product of research should be a contribution to science as a whole. The monetization of research shifts the goals of researchers, from a wish to contribute to science, to a way to make a living, no matter the quality or pertinence of their work. The exploitation of academia, its resources, and its structure for monetary gain is, in my opinion, fundamentally wrong. It might not come as a surprise that I consider the "mothering society" to be an interesting proposal to alleviate exploitation. *"If the dynamic relation between mothering person and child is taken as the primary social relation, then it is the model of 'economic man' that can be seen to be deficient as a model for society and morality, and unsuitable for all but a special context."* (Held, 1987). If our society were built on the ideas of motherly care for others, we wouldn't think of inhuman concepts such as exploitation.

To me, the most important text for all to know and understand would be the Manifesto of the Communist Party. “*In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.*” (Marx, 1847). Most critiques of Communism stem from this main idea. For some, it is a source of fear – and sometimes even anger – to not *own* anything. Land is a common topic in this discussion. But nowadays, houses – or more generally, land – aren’t property. They are objects of fluctuating value, and it has become very common for people to acquire them for this value, in hope of making a profit later. They are capital and are nothing different from banknotes. We’ve seen both lose their value: Germany, 1923 or worldwide, 2008. On a more fundamental level, we must become aware of the absurdity of the concept of “owning” land. We have no underlying right of ownership of any piece of this planet, as we are born and alive because of it. So really, what *do* we own?

“*You will own nothing, and you will be happy*” is a sentence from a video by the World Economic Forum, that summarizes an essay by Ida Auken, a Danish politician. It has gained a lot of popularity lately, but while many view it as a curse, it will unintentionally become humanity’s biggest blessing. We shouldn’t *fear* to lose all our property to the state. We must *choose* to rid ourselves of it. Today, people use property to control people. When we are one day met with the predicted cataclysmic events, when societies fall, no amount of money will force anyone to work for anything. To learn to find value in interpersonal relationships and knowledge instead of temporary material possessions is to put oneself at advantage in a future where these material possessions are taken away or destroyed. Those who today have so little, are those who tomorrow will have the least to lose.

Works Cited

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Part 1: 550 (within the 400-500 +10% limit)

Part 2: 550 (within the 400-500 +10% limit)

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