

Freedom and Government [1940]

THIS PAPER WAS published first in *Freedom: Its Meaning*, which was planned and edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen, and published by Harcourt, Brace and Company, in New York in 1940. In addition to Russell, there were forty-one other contributors, including Dewey, Whitehead, and Einstein. In 1942, George Allen & Unwin published an abridged and rearranged edition of the book, to which two chapters were added, but Russell's essay was not edited in any way.

The manuscript has not been found, but there is a manuscript outline in the John G. Slater Bertrand Russell Collection, housed in the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library in the University of Toronto. It consists of one sheet headed with the title above and signed by Russell. Its contents are as follows, with all abbreviations expanded:

Anarchy:	Poland and League of Nations. Progressive Schools. Anarchy in international affairs.
Definition of Liberty:	Montesquieu: "The political liberty of the subject is a tranquility of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite that government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another." Motor traffic, law.
Matter of Degree:	complete freedom only for omnipotence. Technique makes us more interdependent, therefore need of more regulation.
Organizations:	Trade unions, Fascist and Communist Parties. Toleration of intolerant? Organization of Brutes. Government such as not promote desire for rebellion.
Freedom of Opinion:	Not only no legal penalties, but no obstacle to employment. Importance of allowing heresy. Intellectual progress. Ed-

ucation: teach thinking, not orthodoxy.
Not only one opinion among teachers.

International Government: Fallacies of Nationalism. Congress of Vienna and Cig(?) Liberalism. Culture, education, enlightenment, freedom, sacrificed to nationalism. Unity of civilization. Dark times now. There will be *no* progress till international government. Technical grounds.

Russell gave a lecture based upon these notes at a college or university in California on 7 May 1940. At its conclusion a student member of the audience, Edmund A. Hennessy, asked Russell for his notes, and Russell very graciously signed them and presented them to him. The editor of this volume purchased the notes from the late Mr. Hennessy's son.

The American edition of the book is the copy-text: it has been collated with the English edition and the results are reported in the Textual Notes.

LOGICALLY, FREEDOM AND government might seem to be antitheses, since compulsion is of the essence of government. Anarchists, of whom Kropotkin is the intellectually most respectable, have, on this ground, advocated a complete absence of government. They have believed that such collective decisions as are necessary can be adopted unanimously, without any need of powers of coercion vested in a majority or aristocracy or monarch. But history is not encouraging to this view. The two most important examples of its embodiment in a constitution—the kingdom of Poland and the League of Nations—both

10 came to a bad end. Anarchism, however attractive, is rejected as a method of regulating the internal affairs of a State except by a few idealistic dreamers. *Per contra*, except by a few idealistic dreamers it is accepted as the only method of regulating international affairs. The same mentality that insists most strongly on the necessity of subjecting the individual to the State insists simultaneously on the complete independence of the sovereign State from all external control. Logically, such a view is untenable. If anarchy is bad nationally, it is bad internationally; if it is good internationally, it must be good nationally. For my part, I cannot believe it to be good in either sphere.

20 Belief in freedom, as a practical force in politics, arose out of two main sources, religion and trade. Religious minorities, wherever they had little chance of becoming majorities, turned against persecution; and traders objected to the curtailment of their profits by grants of monopolies to courtiers. The liberal philosophy that arose from these two motives was, at first, very moderate and restrained. The degree of liberty demanded by such men as Locke and Montesquieu is much less than exists in modern democratic states. Thus Montesquieu, quoting Cicero, says: “Liberty is the right of doing whatever the laws permit, and if a citizen could do what they forbid he would be no longer possessed of liberty, because all

30 his fellow-citizens would be possessed of the same power.” This may seem an inadequate degree of liberty, if it is not supplemented by some principle as to what the laws are to permit. In France, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the exercise of the Protestant religion was illegal; it cannot therefore be said that the right to do what the laws permitted conferred any effective liberty upon French Protestants.

Nevertheless, the right to do whatever the laws permit is a very important part of liberty. It was secured in England by *habeas corpus*, which was a barrier to kingly tyranny; it did not exist in France under the *ancien régime*. In our own day, Jews in Germany, kulaks in Russia, and national-

40 ists in India, have been punished by the executive without appeal to the law courts, and therefore without proof of criminality. This sort of thing is forbidden in the American Constitution by the provision about “due process of law”. Montesquieu’s intention is to maintain that a man should

be punished only by the law courts, and that the law courts should be independent of the executive. The American Constitution, whether deliberately or by inadvertence, has made the law courts also to some extent independent of the legislature, and in this respect has gone beyond what Montesquieu advocated in the passage quoted above. In other passages, however, he gave a wider and more constructive definition of liberty, for instance: "the political liberty of the subject is a tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety. In order to have this liberty, it is requisite the government be so constituted as one man need not be afraid of another." This definition of political liberty could not be improved upon, and I shall accept it in what follows. 10

Political liberty, however, is only one species of a genus, and there is no reason to regard it as more desirable than other species of liberty. Political action may promote or restrict other kinds of liberty as well as the political kind; we cannot therefore judge of political action solely with reference to political freedom, even if we consider freedom the sole proper end of politics.

Freedom in general may be defined as the absence of obstacles to the realization of desires. Complete freedom is thus only possible for omnipotence; practicable freedom is a matter of degree, dependent both upon external circumstances and upon the nature of our desires. Stoicism and all kindred philosophies seek to secure freedom by the control of desires and by confining them to what the individual will can secure. Political theorists, on the contrary, for the most part concentrate on the external conditions of freedom. This may be a source of error if the subjective part of the problem is forgotten. If all the men guilty of crimes of violence were transported to an island and left to form a self-governing community, they would need a much more stringent form of government than is required where men are temperamentally law-abiding. Nevertheless, so long as we remember that we are making an abstraction, it is convenient and harmless to treat the objective part of the problem of freedom in isolation. 30

We may give the name "physical freedom" to the mastery over non-human obstacles to the realization of our desires. Modern scientific technique has increased physical freedom, but has necessitated new limitations of social freedom. To take an illustration that involves no controversial issues, motor traffic has unavoidably brought about a very much stricter control over the roads by the police than was formerly necessary. Speaking generally, the technical changes that have occurred in the world during the last hundred years have increased the effects, both intended and unintended, that one man's acts are likely to have upon another man's welfare. Montesquieu's "tranquillity of mind arising from the opinion each person has of his safety" would be by no means promoted 40

by the removal of traffic regulations, and therefore no one protests against them in the name of liberty. But in other kinds of activity—of which the most important is war—although the same principle is applicable, various interests and passions prevent men from applying it, and lead them still to defend a degree of anarchy which may have promoted total freedom in a former age, but now has the opposite effect.

Many of the most vehement advocates of freedom have been led to more or less anarchic conclusions, because their conception of freedom was aristocratic rather than democratic. Byron's Corsairs and Giaours are free to practise murder and pillage and to allow their broken hearts to inspire a hatred of the human race, but their freedom is of a sort that cannot be generalized, since it is based upon terror. Tacitus can look back with nostalgia to the good old days of the Republic, when Roman aristocrats were free to plunder provinces with impunity. American plutocrats can demand, in the name of freedom, the right to obstruct organization among the men whose labour produces their wealth, while demanding the fullest freedom of organization for themselves. Educational reformers, who endeavour to introduce freedom into schools, require much vigilance to avoid unintentionally establishing a tyranny of muscle, under which all but the biggest children are trembling slaves. One of the strongest impulses of energetic individuals is the impulse to control and subject those who are unable to resist them, and if this impulse is left free the result is a great diminution of the total liberty of the community. When freedom is conceived democratically, the control of the impulse to tyranny is seen to be the essential and most difficult problem. The freedom of prominent individuals must be curtailed if any freedom is to be secured for the mass of mankind.

The promotion of physical freedom may, even in the most freedom-loving communities, in some degree override the desire for political freedom. Take, for example, the construction of roads. Even if everybody wants them, everybody would prefer the expense to be borne by someone else. The only device for distributing the burden fairly is taxation, and a man cannot be allowed to escape taxation by professing an indifference to roads. Yet his objection might be genuine: the philosopher Lâo-tse held that roads corrupt primitive innocence, and there is no reason why he should not have modern disciples. If, however, a conscience clause were introduced to meet their case, it is to be feared that the number of Lâo-tse's disciples would increase with inconvenient rapidity when the financial advantages of the anti-road creed became evident. In a democracy, just as much as in a tyranny, taxes have to be paid by those who object to the purposes for which they are collected. It is only by a mystical identification of the majority with the community that democracy can be held to involve liberty. It is a means to liberty if the

majority are lovers of liberty; if not, not.

Eighteenth-century advocates of liberty thought always of isolated individuals rather than of organizations; many of them, like Rousseau, were even actively hostile to freedom of organization. In the modern world it is organizations that raise the difficult problems. Legislators have to consider two questions: for what purposes may organizations be formed? And what may they legally do in pursuance of their purposes? These questions have been fought out in connection with trade unions, which at first were everywhere illegal, then were permitted to exist provided they did nothing to further their objects, then, very gradually, were permitted first one activity and then another. At every stage the legal mind viewed the process with grave suspicion, and was only forced to yield by the pressure of democratic opinion. In the case of trade unions, most of those who were most in favour of freedom advocated the removal of legal restrictions, in spite of the fact that these restrictions were defended in the name of freedom by employers who wished to retain their monopoly of economic power. Nevertheless, it has always been clear that the power of trade unions *might* become a genuine menace to freedom.

The rise of fascism brought about, in its early stages, an exactly opposite situation. Here it was the reactionaries who favoured freedom of organization and the progressives who opposed it. The first step in a fascist movement is the combination under an energetic leader of a number of men who possess more than the average share of leisure, brutality, and stupidity. The next step is to fascinate fools and muzzle the intelligent, by emotional excitement on the one hand and terrorism on the other. This technique is as old as the hills; it was practised in almost every Greek city, and the moderns have only enlarged its scale. But what I am concerned with is the reaction of modern liberal sentiment to this new attack on liberty. Does the principle of free speech require us to put no obstacle in the way of those who advocate its suppression? Does the principle of toleration require us to tolerate those who advocate intolerance? Public opinion, among those who dislike fascism, is divided on these questions, and has not arrived at any clear theory from which consistent answers could be derived.

There is of course one obvious limitation upon the principle of free speech: if an act is illegal, it is logical to make it illegal to advocate it. This principle justifies the authorities in prohibiting incitement to assassination or violent revolution. But in practice this principle does not by any means cover the ground. If there is to be any personal liberty, men must be free to urge a change in the laws. Suppose a man makes a speech in favour of communism, with the implication that it is to be brought about by the ordinary processes of democracy, and suppose that,

after his speech, a questioner asks whether he really believes that such changes can be secured without violent revolution. Unless he gives an affirmative answer with far more emphasis than the facts warrant, he will have, in effect, promoted revolutionary sentiment. Or suppose a fascist makes an anti-Semitic speech, urging that Jews should be subject to legal disabilities; his arguments must be such as to stimulate hatred of the Jews, and the more successful they are the more likely they are to cause violence. Imagine Mark Antony indicted for his speech in *Julius Caesar*: although it is obviously intended to cause violence, it would hardly be possible to obtain legal proof of this intention. To prohibit the advocacy of illegalities is therefore not enough; some further limitation upon the principle of free speech is necessary if incitement to violence is to be effectively prevented.

The solution of this problem has two sides: on the one hand, the ordinary citizen, if he is on the whole content with his form of government, has a right to prohibit any organized attempt to overthrow it by force and any propaganda obviously likely to promote such an attempt. But on the other hand the government must avoid such flagrant injustice or oppression as is likely to lead to violence in spite of prohibition. The Irish secured their liberties by assassination; women in England won the vote by a long series of inconvenient crimes. Such tactics ought not to have been necessary, since in each case the professed democratic principles of the government justified the aims of the rebels, and therefore seemed to excuse their methods. But when, as in the case of the fascists, the aims of the rebels are fundamentally opposed to a governmental theory accepted by the majority, and when, further, it is obvious that violence is intended to be used at a suitable moment, there is every justification for preventing the growth of organized power in the hands of a rebellious minority. For if this is not done, internal peace is jeopardized, and the kind of community that most men desire can no longer be preserved. Liberal principles will not survive of themselves; like all other principles, they require vigorous assertion when they are challenged.

Freedom of opinion is closely connected with free speech, but has a wider scope. The Inquisition made a point of investigating, by means of torture, the secret opinions that men endeavoured to keep to themselves. When men confessed to unorthodox opinions, they were punished even if it could not be proved that they had ever before given utterance to them. This practice has been revived in the dictatorial countries, Germany, Italy, and Russia. The reason, in each case, is that the government feels itself unstable. One of the most important conditions of freedom, in the matter of opinion as in other matters, is governmental security. In England, during the sixty or seventy years preceding the Great War, freedom of speech and opinion, in political matters, was almost com-

plete, because everyone knew that no subversive opinion had a chance of success. Gilbert and Sullivan made fun of the navy and army, but the only penalty was the Queen's refusal to bestow a knighthood on Gilbert. Nowadays, they would be shot in Russia, beheaded in Germany, sent to a penal settlement in Italy, accused of violating the Official Secrets Act in England, and investigated by a Senatorial Committee in the United States on suspicion of being in receipt of Moscow gold. The change is due to increased insecurity, which is caused by war, the fear of war, and the impoverishment due to war. And modern war is mainly due to nationalism. Until this state of affairs is changed, it is hardly to be hoped 10 that there will be as much freedom of opinion as existed in Western countries fifty years ago.

Freedom of opinion is important for many reasons, especially because it is a necessary condition of all progress, intellectual, moral, political, and social. Where it does not exist, the *status quo* becomes stereotyped, and all originality, even the most necessary, is discouraged. Since freedom of opinion can only exist when the government thinks itself secure, it is important that the government should have the approval of the great majority of the population and should deal with discontented minorities, wherever possible, in a manner calculated to allay their discontent. A 20 government must possess force, but cannot be a satisfactory government unless force is seldom necessary. All the kinds of freedom advocated by liberals disappear when security disappears, and security depends upon a wide diffusion of contentment. This in turn is impossible when the general level of prosperity is falling. Liberalism flourished in the nineteenth century because of economic progress; it is in eclipse now because of economic retrogression.

There can be no widespread liberty except under the reign of law, for when men are lawless only the strongest are free, and they only until they are overcome by someone still stronger. The tyrant in a lawless community is like the King of the Wood, "who slays the slayer and must himself 30 be slain". Whoever, in the name of liberty, impairs respect for the law, incurs a grave responsibility; yet, since the law is often oppressive and incapable of being amended legally, revolution must be allowed to be sometimes necessary. The solution of this problem is not possible in abstract terms. It was solved practically in the American Revolution; but most revolutions have so weakened the respect for law that they have led to dictatorships. Perhaps a revolution can be completely successful only when those who make it are persuaded that they are defending legality 40 against some illegal usurpation. But this requires a rare combination of fortunate circumstances, and is not possible in the case of revolutions that attempt any far-reaching change in the social structure.

The most fallacious of all the applications of the principle of liberty has

been in international affairs. While it has been generally realized that liberty for the individual depends upon law, it has been thought that liberty for nations depended upon the absence of law. This is partly a historical accident, connected with the years that followed the Congress of Vienna. At that time a number of reactionary states, most of which were purely dynastic, established what was in effect an international government of Europe, and devoted their united strength to the suppression of every form of liberalism in every part of the Continent. The opposition to despotic monarchs was bound up, at that time, with the
10 principle of nationality; democracy went hand in hand with the desire to make the boundaries of states coincide with national sentiment instead of being determined by the accidents of royal marriages or diplomatic bargains among the victors over Napoleon. It was thought that, when once national boundaries and parliamentary institutions had been established everywhere, the democracies would co-operate freely, and the causes of war would have been eliminated. In this mood of optimism, liberals completely overlooked the need for any international authority to regulate the relations between states.

But nationalism triumphant has proved, is proving, and will prove, in-
20 compatible not only with liberty, but with everything else that intelligent men have considered desirable since the Renaissance. To consider, for a moment, goods other than freedom, especially the eighteenth-century ideals of culture, education, and humanitarian enlightenment: in these matters South-eastern Europe and Latin America have lost much of what they owed to the Hapsburgs; Ireland, from nationalist sentiment, has cut itself off from European culture by Catholic education and censorship; India, from similar motives, is preparing to repudiate everything
30 that their country had acquired since 1492. The conception of the unity of civilization, born in the Roman Empire, nurtured by the medieval Church, brought to maturity by the Renaissance and modern science, survives now only, and that precariously, in the Western democracies, where, it is to be feared, it will perish during this war. Elsewhere, in the name of some national hero, living or dead, the State devotes its powers to the inculcation of some national theology as crass and stupid as the superstitions of South Sea Islanders or the cannibalistic rites of the Aztecs.

If stupidity were the only defect of the modern national religions, the philosopher might shrug his shoulders and remark that the bulk of man-
40 kind have always been fools. Unfortunately, while the superstitions of savages are harmful only to themselves, those of nations equipped with scientific technique are dangerous to the whole world and, in particular, involve a grave loss of liberty, not only among the devout, but also

among those who wish to remain rational. Vast expenditure on armaments, compulsory military service, and occasional wars are part of the price that has to be paid by those nations that will not accept foreign domination. The inevitable outcome of the doctrine that each nation should have unrestricted sovereignty is to compel the citizens of each nation to engage in irksome activities and to incur sacrifices, often of life itself, in order to thwart the designs of other nations. Hitler, in a sense, had already subjugated England and France, since a large part of the thoughts and actions of Englishmen and Frenchmen were determined by reference to him; and Hitler himself is a product of the previous subjugation of Germany by England and France. In a world of international anarchy individual freedom is as impossible as in a country where private violence is not restrained by the law and the police.

A complete international government, with legislative, executive, and judiciary, and a monopoly of armed force, is the most essential condition of individual liberty in a technically scientific world. Not, of course, that it will secure *complete* liberty; that, I repeat, is only possible for omnipotence, and there cannot be two omnipotent individuals in the world. The man whose desire for liberty is wholly self-centred is therefore driven, if he feels strong enough, to seek world dictatorship; but the man whose desire for liberty is social, or who feels too weak to secure more than his fair share, will seek to maximize liberty by means of law and government, and will oppose anarchic power in all its various forms.

Every man desires freedom for his own impulses, but men's impulses conflict, and therefore not all can be satisfied. There are two kinds of conflict between men's desires. In the first place, we desire more than our fair share of possessions; this can be met, in theory, by decreeing equality of distribution, as has been done by the institution of monogamy. But there is a more essential and deep-rooted conflict owing to the love of power: most human beings, though in very varying degrees, desire to control not only their own lives but also the lives of others. Most forms of control over the lives of others diminish the freedom of those who are controlled, but some increase it. The man who endows a university has power over the lives of those who profit by his benefaction, but his power is such as to liberate their own impulses. Inventors have great power, and the general tendency of inventions is to increase physical liberty. It is therefore possible for power impulses to find an outlet not incompatible with social freedom. To insure that they shall do so is a problem partly of individual psychology, partly of education, and partly of opportunity. A homicidal maniac cannot be allowed any freedom for his power impulses, but their undesirable character may be the result of bad education and lack of opportunity. Cromwell spent the first half of his career in agitation connected with draining the Fens, and the second

in making himself a military dictator; in other circumstances, his power impulses might have found only the earlier beneficent outlet. If freedom is to be secure, it is essential both that useful careers shall be open to energetic men, and that harmful careers shall be closed to them. It is important also that education should develop useful forms of technical skill, and that the circumstances of childhood and youth should not be such as to generate ferocity. All these conditions are absent in totalitarian countries, where the principal means to success are sycophancy, treachery, and brutality, and where education is designed to produce a combination of submissiveness and truculence.

If freedom were the sole political desideratum, there would still, as we have seen, be need of law and government, which, in the international sphere, remain to be created. But individual freedom, however desirable, is only one among the ends of statesmanship. Among innocuous activities we admire some more than others: we praise a great poet, composer, or man of science more than we praise men who are innocent but undistinguished. Education, both general and technical, is generally conceded to be desirable, even at the cost of the liberties of both parents and children. And if we knew a way to produce a community of Shakespeares, Beethovens, and Newtons, we should probably think it worth while to do so. Freedom is too negative a conception to determine the ends of human life, or even of politics. Nevertheless, it is only in so far as the majority of men agree that other ends can be pursued in political action without arousing resistances and violences that are likely to prove disastrous. An unpopular Utopia, in so far as a benevolent dictator could realize it, would prove to be quite different from his dreams. Liberty, therefore, must always remain a *sine qua non* of other political goods.

The transition from individual to social ethics is theoretically far from simple. Most philosophers who have written on ethics have been mainly concerned with the individual. When they have been concerned also with society, they have failed to build a bridge from the individual to the community that will bear logical scrutiny. Take, for instance, the two foundations of Bentham's social philosophy: (1) every man pursues his own happiness; (2) every man ought to pursue the general happiness. Perhaps if we could submit Bentham to a *viva voce* examination, he would expand his second proposition as follows: The general happiness will be increased if every man acts in a manner likely to increase it; therefore, if I am in a governmental position, or in any way owe my own happiness to the fact that I represent the general interest, I shall endeavour to cause others to act in a way that will promote the happiness of mankind, which I can only do by means of institutions that cause the interests of the individual and those of the community to be identical.

This explanation might pass muster in an ideal democracy, where no politician or official could continue to enjoy his salary unless he served the public faithfully. But it does not give any reason why, where an ideal democracy does not exist, any public man should aim at the public good. I dare say Caligula and Nero got more fun out of life than Marcus Aurelius did. One wonders what arguments Bentham would have used to them, and how long he would have been allowed to go on using them. The only argument compatible with his psychology would have been that they would come to a bad end, but they might have replied that they preferred a cheerful beginning and a bad end to drabness throughout. Bentham imagines the legislator to be in some unexplained way an incarnation of the public interest. But this is only because, in fantasy, he is the legislator, and he is in fact a benevolent man. Psycho-analysts show most people that they have unconscious vices, but in Bentham's case it was the virtues that were unconscious. In obedience to theory, he conceived of himself as wholly selfish and remained unaware of his spontaneous desire for the general happiness. Public spirit, he says (in the Table of the Springs of Action), is an absurd motive, which never actuated anyone; in fact, it is a synonym for spite. Nevertheless, he hopes to find a legislator who will seek the public good. He was young in the era of benevolent despots, which perhaps accounts for his failure of logic. However that may be, his individual psychology and his social ethics remain disparate and fundamentally inconsistent. 10 20

Of the great religions, Christianity and Buddhism, in their primitive and most vital forms, are concerned only with personal virtue, and show no interest in social and political questions. On the other hand, Confucianism is fundamentally political, and considers all virtues in relation to the welfare of the State. The result is a certain dullness and aridity, which caused it to be supplemented by Buddhism and Taoism among the more spiritually minded Chinese. Confucianism is a religion for the civil service, and gave rise to the most remarkable civil service the world has ever known. But it had nothing to offer to prophets or poets or mystics: St. Francis or Dante or Pascal would have found it wholly irrelevant to their needs. 30

Karl Marx, as a religious leader, is analogous to both Confucius and Bentham. His ethical doctrine, in a nutshell, is this: that every man pursues the economic interest of his class, and therefore, if there is only one class, every man will pursue the general interest. This doctrine has failed to work out in practice as its adherents expected, both because men do not in fact pursue the interest of their class, and because no civilized community is possible in which there is only one class, since government and executive officials are unavoidable. 40

There is one method of making the public good fundamental in ethics

which has been favoured by many philosophers and some politicians, namely to endow the community with a mystical oneness and to regard the separate citizens as unreal abstractions. This view may be supported by the analogy of the human body. No man is troubled by the possibility of conflict between the different parts of his body, say the great toe and the little finger. The body has to be considered as a whole, and the interests concerned are those of the whole, not of the several members. A healthy body is a completely integrated corporative State, governed despotically by the brain. There are, no doubt, possibilities of rebellion, such as paralysis and St. Vitus's dance, but these are diseases which are exceptional. Could not the body politic be similarly integrated and similarly devoted, instinctively and harmoniously, to the welfare of the whole? The answer is merely an appeal to the facts. An individual body contains only one mind, whereas the body politic contains many, and there is no psychological mechanism by which many minds can coöperate in the same manner in which muscles controlled by a single mind coöperate. Coöperation among many minds has to be a matter of agreement, even when it is agreement to be dominated by a dictator. A further, but less fundamental, argument against those who regard a human society as an organism is that they almost invariably take a nation, rather than mankind, as the organism concerned, thus merely substituting the strife of nations for that of individuals, instead of arriving at a genuine public interest which is to be served by the whole human race.

Considered practically, not philosophically, the question is: Can the public interest ever be a force in public affairs, or must politics be always and essentially nothing but a tug-of-war between the passions of powerful individuals or groups? There are two ways in which the public interest can become practically operative: first, through the impulse of benevolence, as in Bentham; second, through the consciousness of the common man that he is too weak to stand alone, and that he can only secure that part of his political desires which he shares with other common men. An uncommon man can hope to become a dictator, but a common man can hope, at best, only to become a voter in a democracy. Common men are helpless without a leader, and as a rule follow a leader who deceives them; but there have been occasions when they have accepted the leadership of men inspired by benevolence. When this has happened, the public good has become an effective force in public affairs. To secure that it shall happen as often as possible is the practical problem for the man whose theorizing on politics is guided by a desire for the welfare of mankind.

The practical solution of this problem is difficult in the extreme, but the theoretical solution is obvious. Common men throughout the world should be made aware of the identity of their interests, wherever it exists;

conflicts of interest which are apparent but not real must be shown to be illusory; real conflicts of interest, where they exist, must be removed by a change of institutions, of which the most harmful are national sovereignty and private ownership of land and raw materials; education and economic circumstances must be made such as not to generate hatred and ferocity and a desire for revenge upon the world. When all this has been achieved, co-operation will become possible with a minimum of coercion, and individual freedom will be increased as well as all other political desiderata.

To sum up: Government is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the greatest realizable degree of individual liberty; indeed, there is need of more government than at present, not less, since an international authority is as much required as the present national states. But if government is not to be tyrannical, it must be democratic, and the democracy must feel that the common interests of mankind are more important than the conflicting interests of separate groups. To realize this state of affairs completely would be scarcely possible, but since the problem is quantitative a gradual approach may be hoped for. At present the world is moving away from all that is valued by lovers of freedom, but this movement will not last for ever. The world has oscillated many times between freedom and slavery, and the dark times in which we live are probably no more permanent than the progressive epoch that rejoiced our grandfathers.

58 Freedom and Government

- 438: 3 **Kropotkin** Pyotr (Peter) Alekseyevich Kropotkin (1842–1921) was a Russian revolutionary who was forced to flee Russia in 1876 after a sensational escape from prison. During his exile he devoted most of his time to expounding anarchistic communism. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, he returned to the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but soon fell out with the Bolsheviks, whose dictatorship he denounced. He retired to a village outside Moscow and spent the rest of his life writing.
- 438: 9 **the kingdom of Poland** Poland in the mid-seventeenth century was a republic, with a monarch elected by members of the aristocracy. The aristocracy met in regional diets, which in principle answered to a central assembly, but each member had free veto power, thus the dissolution of a given diet could be brought about by any one aristocrat. Such a constitution, combined with the expanse of the Republic and the general suspicion among aristocrats of centralized governmental power, made coherent leadership and political organization impossible. From about 1650 to 1750, no national policies existed to guide or enforce taxation or social and business conduct, and no national armed forces existed. The Republic collapsed into a discordant collection of regions worked by serfs and held by independent aristocratic landlords.
- 438: 9 **and the League of Nations** The League of Nations consisted of the victorious allied powers of World War I and was the precursor to the contemporary United Nations. It proved ineffective in maintaining peace and order during the inter-war years because it lacked effective authority over non-member states such as Germany, Italy and Japan, and the Senate refused to ratify the membership of the United States.
- 438: 25–6 **The degree of liberty demanded by such men as Locke** In his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) John Locke (1632–1704) wrote: “The *Natural Liberty* of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of Nature for his Rule. The *Liberty of Man, in Society*, is to be under no Legislative Power, but that established, by consent, in the Commonwealth, nor under the Dominion of any Will, or Restraint of any Law, but what the Legislative shall enact, according to the Trust put in it.... This *Freedom* from Absolute, Arbitrary Power, is so necessary to, and closely joyned with a Man’s Preservation, that he cannot part with it, but by what forfeits his Preservation and Life together” (Chap. iv).
- 438: 26 **and Montesquieu** Charles-Louis de Secondat, afterwards Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689–1755) was a French lawyer and political philosopher who advocated the separation of the legislative, the executive and the judicial powers as a means of preserving liberty. The American doctrine of the “separation of powers” is often supposed to give formal expression to Montesquieu’s theory.

- 438: 27–30 **“Liberty is the right of doing ... possessed of the same power.”** Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Bk. II, Ch. 3.
- 438: 32–3 **the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes** The Edict of Nantes was issued by Henry IV of France in 1598 at the end of the Wars of Religion. It defined the rights of the French Protestants (Huguenots), granting them liberty of conscience and the right to private worship wherever it had formerly been granted. As a guarantee of these rights, it also gave them the right to fortify and garrison about 200 cities in France where the majority were Huguenots, thus creating a state within a state, which led to armed conflict. Louis XIV found this situation intolerable, so he revoked the Edict in 1685. His promise to respect private worship was not kept, with the consequence that thousands of Huguenots fled the country, defying a ban to do so, leaving whole provinces in France almost devoid of population.
- 438: 42–3 **“due process of law”** Provision for due process is found in Amendment v of the Bill of Rights: “No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.” It was reaffirmed in the first clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, one of the reconstruction amendments, ratified in 1868: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”
- 439: 7–10 **“the political liberty of the subject ... afraid of another”** Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Bk. II, Ch. 6.
- 440: 9–10 **Byron’s Corsairs and Giaours are free to practise murder** Russell refers here to two long poems, *The Corsair* and *The Giaour*, by the English romantic poet George Gordon, 6th Baron Byron (1788–1824).
- 440: 12–14 **Tacitus can look back ... to plunder provinces with impunity** For the evidence for Russell’s point see Tacitus’s *Annals*, 1: 1–3, but note that Russell editorializes when he attributes nostalgia to Tacitus.
- 440: 34–5 **the philosopher Láo-tse ... primitive innocence** According to legend, Lao-tse is the founder of Taoism. The idea to which Russell refers is expressed by Chuang Tzū, one of the most important interpreters of Taoism (the text attributed to him, the *Chuang-tzū*, is generally considered to be more comprehensive than the earlier *Tao-te-Ching*, a collection of statements attri-

buted to Lâu-tse). In H. A. Giles's 1889 translation of the *Chuang-tzũ*, in Chapter 7 ("Horse's Hoofs"), Chuang-tzũ writes: "And so in the days when natural instincts prevailed, men moved quietly and gazed steadily. At that time there were no roads over mountains, nor boats, nor bridges over water. All things were produced, each for its own proper sphere.... For then man dwelt with birds and beasts, and all creation was one" (Chuang Tzu 1889, 107).

- 441: 3–4 **like Rousseau, were ... hostile to freedom of organization** Russell discusses this point at some length in his 1945, 699 (1946, 725–6). Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) gives the reasons for his opposition to freedom of organization in Book II, Chapter III, "Whether the General Will Can Err", of *On the Social Contract* (1983).
- 442: 8 **Mark Antony indicted for his speech in Julius Caesar** Russell is referring to Antony's famous speech at the funeral of Julius Caesar, beginning "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" (III. ii. 78–112).
- 442: 42 **the Great War** Russell means, of course, World War I.
- 443: 2–3 **Gilbert and Sullivan made fun ... a knighthood on Gilbert** Sir William Schwenck Gilbert (1836–1911), librettist, and Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842–1900), composer, joined forces in 1871 and in the next twenty-five years wrote their famous comic operas. The military is often satirized in these operas. Sullivan was knighted on 22 May 1883; but Gilbert had to wait until 15 July 1909, eight years after Queen Victoria's death.
- 443: 31–2 **the King of the Wood, "who slays the slayer ... be slain"** Russell is probably quoting from Stanza x of Thomas Babington Macaulay's "The Battle of the Lake Regillus", which is the second of his *Lays of Ancient Rome*: "From every warlike city | That boasts the Latian name, | Foredoomed to dogs and vultures, | That gallant army came; | From Setia's purple vineyards, | From Norba's ancient wall, | From the white streets of Tusculum, | The proudest town of all; | From where the Witch's Fortress | O'erhangs the dark-blue seas; | From the still glassy lake that sleeps | Beneath Aricia's trees— | Those trees in whose dim shadow | The ghastly priest doth reign, | The priest who slew the slayer, | And shall himself be slain." Sir James George Frazer also discusses this myth. In the first chapter, "King of the Wood", of *The Golden Bough, a Study of Magic and Religion* (1890) he describes a sanctuary in Italy to the Goddess Diana Nemorensis, "or Diana of the Wood": "In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier" (1900, I: 2).

- 444: 4–5 **the Congress of Vienna** This Congress, which was convened by the alliance that defeated Napoleon, met from September 1814 to June 1815, to settle the territorial claims left over by his defeat. In his 1934 Russell devotes Chapter II to this Congress.
- 444: 25 **the Hapsburgs** The ruling house of Austria from 1282 to 1918. The Hapsburgs were closely connected through marriage with the Spanish throne for the two centuries preceding the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), which they lost to the House of Bourbon.
- 445: 42–3 **Cromwell spent the first half of his career ... draining the Fens** In the 1630s Cromwell acted as the spokesman for the fen dwellers, whose lives were to be profoundly affected by the draining of the fens. Not much is known about his actual activities on their behalf, but it was sufficient to earn him the title “Lord of the Fens”. See Picton 1883, 79–82, for the story.
- 446: 34–5 **Bentham’s ... (1) every man pursues his own happiness** Chapter I of his 1789 begins in this way: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while.”
- 446: 35 **(2) every man ought to pursue the general happiness** The passage quoted above is followed by a discussion of “the principle of utility”, which, in a note added in July 1822, is explained in this way: “To this denomination has of late been added, or substituted, the *greatest happiness* or *greatest felicity* principle: this for shortness, instead of saying at length *that principle* which states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, as being the right and proper, and only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action: of human action in every situation, and in particular in that of a functionary or set of functionaries exercising the powers of Government.”
- 447: 5–6 **Caligula and Nero got more fun out of life than Marcus Aurelius** These three were all Roman emperors: Caligula (12–41) and Nero (37–68) were cruel and bloodthirsty tyrants; Marcus Aurelius (121–180) was a Stoic philosopher who tried to live his life according to his philosophical principles.
- 447: 17–19 **Public ... (in the Table of the Springs of Action) ... spite** Bentham published this work in 1817; in it he makes several references to “public spirit” in the sense Russell uses here. However, none of the passages seem to correspond exactly with Russell’s paraphrase. The closest Bentham comes to saying what Russell attributes to him is near the end of the work, where he describes “‘Love of country’—a man’s own country, i.e. sympathy for the feelings of its inhabitants, present or future or both—taken in the aggregate” and “‘Love of mankind’, ‘philanthropy’, i.e. sympathy for the human race taken in

the aggregate”, to be “impossible motive[s]” (1983, 114). However, in the Marginals, part III (“Observations”) at §115, he writes: “Public spirit is the rare production of a high degree of mental culture”; and at §125: “Public spirit operates not with sensible effect except in a few highly cultivated minds belonging to the best educated classes” (1983, 16).

- 447: 26–7 **Confucianism is fundamentally political** Confucianism is the code of morals and conduct which was developed out of the teachings of Confucius (c.551–479 B.C.). Its central idea is the maintenance of *jen* (usually translated as sympathy) between people by establishing and keeping right relationships; its golden rule is that a person should treat his subordinates as he would have his superiors treat him. In government this led to civil servants stressing the middle way and avoiding extremes.
- 447: 33 **St. Francis** Giovanni Francesco Bernardone (1182–1226), St. Francis of Assisi, founded the Franciscan order about 1209.
- 447: 33 **Pascal** Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), a French scientist and philosopher, is famous for his posthumously published *Pensées*, in which he argues that, since the basic principles of human knowledge are known through intuition, they are uncertain. Submission to God and acceptance of His revelation is, according to Pascal, the only way of overcoming this uncertainty.

58 Freedom and Government

No textual notes.