

TWO VIEWS OF LIBERTY, OCCIDENTAL AND ORIENTAL (?)

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YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED that I put a question mark after the title of this paper. I must explain why.

When our friend professor Matsushita suggested this subject for our Tokyo meeting, my first impulse was to object to it. No doubt, I took it for granted that there are “Oriental” and “Occidental” people. Besides, I knew that many people shared and still share Rudyard Kipling’s idea that *East is East and West is West*. Finally, I did not ignore the fact that many Westerners feel comfortably proud of what they think to be their most peculiar trait when compared with “Oriental” people: their faith in individual (political and economic) freedom.

Still there was something which disturbed and still disturbs me in the subject or at least in the way it was suggested. To begin with, why *two* views of liberty? The history of ideas teaches us that, at first sight at least, there are many more than two views of liberty, while one cannot help feeling that two *really different* views of liberty *are already too many* for people who propose to speak of the same thing.

Moreover, if we admit that there is an “Oriental” besides, or possibly versus, an “Occidental” view of liberty, we feel forced to consider as final

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points of reference in our thinking on liberty not liberty itself but two other concepts like “East” and “West,” possibly corresponding to two different worlds, conceived of as necessarily conditioning in different ways individuals who think or are said to be *free* in each of those worlds.

True enough, liberal thinkers like Burke were right in warning us that “abstract liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found,” that “liberty inheres in some sensible object” and that “every nation has formed itself some favorite point, which by way of eminence becomes the criterion of their happiness” (*Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies*).

My fellow citizen Marco Polo, during his unprecedented travels to the East in the fourteenth century, was eventually able to find some very good examples in point. Once, for instance, he visited the province of Camul, which belonged to the empire of Mogul Khan. According to Marco (who incidentally turned out to always be an accurate reporter), the inhabitants of that remote province very much liked playing, singing, dancing and having fun. But much to Marco’s surprise, they were too “allegri” (that is too pleasure-loving) with foreign visitors, as the latter were usually left at home with the wives of the inhabitants, who (Marco says) “were beautiful and gay and very happy with that custom.” Once the emperor happened to hear about all this and indignantly ordered those distant subjects to terminate their old tradition at once. The people of Camul felt so sad at the emperor’s order that they sent him messengers with rich presents to implore him to leave the Camul people free to continue an ancient custom that (so said the messengers in a true Burkean vein) had been happily introduced by their ancestors into their country and so was blessed by their gods. Mogul Khan proved in his turn to be a true liberal, at least on that occasion: “If you want to keep that shame, then keep it,” he replied to the messengers, the result being that the people of Camul were still observing their strange custom when Marco Polo visited the country.

Nobody, however, would identify this kind of liberty—not even in the fourteenth century—with “Oriental” liberty as contrasted with an “Occidental” one, however, and the moral indignation of the emperor against the people of Camul is a good example in point.

One might say, of course, that the people of Camul had proved both “Oriental” and rather backward in their blind respect for customs. According to John Stuart Mill, it was in fact respect for custom which had prevented Oriental people from being both progressive and free. “[T]he love of liberty or of improvement”—so he wrote in his famous essay *On Liberty*—

is antagonistic to the sway of Custom, involving at least emancipation from that yoke; and the contest between the two

constitutes the chief interest of the history of mankind. The greater part of the world has, properly speaking, no history, because the despotism of Custom is complete. This is the case over the whole East. Custom is there, in all things, the final appeal; justice and right mean Conformity to custom; the argument of custom no one, unless some tyrant intoxicated with power, thinks of resisting. [On Liberty, Ch. III]

As a matter of fact, Mill maintained that disregard for custom was really what had made Europe (that is the *West*, as America was still considered in his times as an appendix of Europe) both free and different from the rest of the world. “What is it,” Mill said,

that has hitherto preserved Europe from this lot [that is, from tyranny of Custom]? What has made the European family of nations an improving, instead of a stationary portion of mankind? Not any superior excellence in them, which, when it exists, exists as the effect not as the cause; but their remarkable diversity of character and culture. Individuals, classes, nations, have been extremely unlike one another ... their attempts to thwart each other’s development have rarely had any permanent success and each has in time endured to receive the good which the others have offered.

Incidentally, this did not prevent Mill from being rather worried about the destiny of European people: “Europe,” he also said,

is, in my judgment, wholly indebted to this plurality of paths for its progressive and many-sided development. But it already begins to possess this benefit in a considerably less degree. It is decidedly advancing towards the Chinese ideal of making all people alike.

I am prepared to admit that there is some sense in Mill’s argument. Still, some serious objections could be raised against it.

To begin with, Mill himself concedes that custom is not so bad as it may prevent tyrants (at least the less “intoxicated” ones) from doing too much harm to their people. And indeed, old customs were often invoked both in the East and in the West to oppose and limit the power of tyrants, that is, to defend or to secure precisely a certain amount of civil or political liberty. In old China, for instance, every once in a while Confucian philosophers used to remind their ruthless rulers of the good customs introduced by legendary Sage-Kings such as Yu, or Yao or Shun, at the beginning of Chinese history. In the West, the Romans in the first century B.C. were still very proud of their old customs, which had enabled them to enjoy—as Cicero said—a free constitution. And what else other than old customs was invoked against the Tudors or the Stuarts in England, when people defended their liberties against the “prerogative” of the Crown? The

case of England is especially illuminating, and the “Conservatives” would certainly have a good point against Mill, in considering how much ancient customs and tradition proved useful for the preservation or the restoration of political and civil liberties in 16th and 17th century England. When, for instance, the Commons forced Henry VIII to modify his famous Proclamation in 1539, they had taken care to have him prohibit any attempt to change “the customary laws or the just customs of the Realm.” Similar appeals to the customary laws of the country were made by the courts against the “prerogative” of the Crown in the years of Queen Elisabeth. It was also in the name of custom that (sincerely or not) monopoly granted by the Queen was condemned in the famous *Darcy v. Allen* case, while it was again in the name of ancient custom that torture could be condemned by English judges.

Of course, the whole story (as any unprejudiced constitutional historian would admit today) did not lack several humorous aspects due to the fact that the kings of England used to refer, in their turn, to “ancient customs” and “tradition” (and rightly so) in order to justify their own absolute powers. Still, it was just in the name of custom that the Commoners openly defied their kings at last and paved the way to revolution: when Wentworth proclaimed that “customary laws were traditional” and that English people would vindicate their freedoms against the King according “to tradition,” or when Edward Coke put it bluntly that “the king cannot change by his acts or in other ways any part of the customary laws ... or of the customs of the Realm.”

And what else but custom and tradition was invoked, once again, against the new doctrine of “arbitrary powers” of the parliament in the second half of the eighteenth century, in order to prove that the “colonists” of America, just as any other English subject, could not be treated as slaves?

Machiavelli himself had made it clear—more than two centuries earlier in Italy—that a tyrant should *change everything* in his state if he was to preserve his tyranny: a “technical” rule which implied the notion that old customs and tradition are not compatible with the absolute powers of a ruler.

A further objection may be raised, however, against Mill’s argument. He maintains that disregard of custom accounts for novelty, novelty for *diversity of character and culture*, and the latter for freedom and progress.

There is certainly some truth in this. Still, no more remarkable diversity of character and culture could possibly have existed at the time when so many Oriental and Occidental people were put together under the rule of the Roman emperors, for instance. At that time, however, the old Roman tradition of political liberties was practically lost and even the interference of

the sovereign with that *private* law of the citizens, which had been so jealously preserved by the latter in Republican times, was to become more and more insistent and disastrous.

Certainly the “Orient” was not—and is not—that monotonous world of dull and homogeneous people that Mill presumed in his times. To the contrary, it may even be said that Europe cannot show in any period of its history a variety of races, languages, cultures, philosophies and religions even slightly comparable to those of, say, India or China.

All in all, I think that we Westerners should be much more cautious in accepting comfortable commonplaces about “East” and “West” of the type we have just seen in Mill’s essay.

The idea that Oriental people had no freedom at all certainly is an old one in the West. Still, it is doubtful, for example, whether the Persians who invaded Greece in the first half of the fifth century before Christ were really that host of slaves that Greek leaders and writers complacently imagined, or at least pretended, in their successful war propaganda against the “barbarians.”

Permit me to tell you some of my personal experiences with the East. When I happened last year to visit the ancient capital of the Persian kings, Persepolis, I was strongly impressed by the classic beauty of the buildings still partly standing, testifying to the greatness of Darius and Xerxes. I realized that everything—the walls, columns, statues, bas-reliefs—had been built there several years *before* the most famous monuments of Athens. But what impressed me even more was a boasting statement left by Xerxes himself (the king who was to be defeated a few years later in Europe by the Greeks) relating to the tremendous monetary costs of his buildings, a cost that he would have had no reason to meet if his architectural works had been based only, or even mainly, on a centralized economy belonging to the ruler, or on the cheap labor of slaves.

I got a similar impression visiting the marvelous temples of Angkor in Cambodia. The peculiar idea of their builders, between the 9th and the 12th century of our era, had been obviously that no single stone in that imposing town should be left without at least a gracefully smiling human figure carved in it. If one compares Angkor Vat or Angkor Thom with, say, the Egyptian pyramids, the difference is immediately apparent. The latter, being artificial mountains of plain stones, could well be built, as they actually were, by masses of slaves. In the other case, a host of *free* artists had to be hired by the men who managed to actuate their superb architectural dream in Angkor.

As a matter of fact, in the East as well as in the West, there is certainly one thing that coercion cannot easily obtain or obtain at all: making people do something (the kind of coercion that the famous German lawyer Rudolf von Jhering would have called “propellant”), while it is comparatively much easier to employ coercion to *prevent people from doing something* (the kind of coercion that Jhering would have called “impedient”). You can coerce slaves to endure the weight of big stones, but you cannot really *coerce* anybody to become a sculptor or an architect.

I said already that we Westerners should be much more cautious in accepting commonplaces about East and West. This applies, of course, to the history of moral, religious and political ideas in the East, just as well as to the political and civil history of Oriental countries.

Unfortunately (or fortunately) I have here neither information nor time to draw an outline of that history. May I be allowed to proceed in the rhapsodic way I have more or less deliberately adopted in this paper, by which I intend more to raise questions and discussions among both our Oriental and Occidental members than to present to them a definite conclusion.

I suggest that the two most prominent and influential thinkers and leaders of doctrines bound to last thousands of years in the East—Buddha and Confucius—were both concerned mainly, if not only, with individual freedom.

Of course it is very difficult for us, the Westerners, to understand Buddha’s doctrines without having a Buddhist background, and as far as I am personally concerned, I have been always slightly suspicious of those Westerners who pretend to be Buddhist in our times. Still, I think it is difficult to deny that Buddha was concerned at least with a very peculiar kind of individual freedom—which was not included later among the famous four Roosevelt’s “freedoms”—and which I would suggest calling “freedom from rebirth.” I wonder how much of this freedom is historically connected, however, with that “autarchy” or that “atarassy” of the Sage which, when it was preached later by Western philosophers in the Hellenistic and Roman era, was to exert for centuries a more or less direct influence on the political thought of the West.¹

¹No doubt there is an important connection between “inner freedom” or self-discipline of the type preached in the Orient by the Buddha (or in the West by the Cynics, the Stoics, the Epicureans, and later on by the Christians) and “outer freedom,” or freedom from other people’s coercion, as theorized by the representatives of the liberal doctrine in the West.

But while, as a political scientist, I feel a little uncomfortable with Buddhism, Confucianism is a completely different story. Here is a man, Confucius, who really looks like one of us, regardless of whether we were born in the East or in the West.

I would even go far as to suggest that Confucius could be fully eligible as a member of the Mont Pèlerin Society if he lived in our days and, of course, had escaped from continental China to participate as a distinguished guest in our meeting.

Maybe I am personally biased in favor of Confucius by my own love for Chinese antique bronzes and vases or possibly by my love for Chinese cuisine—which is, of course, both a minor art and a testimony of a great old civilization. All this could explain only partly, however, my pleasure when I happened to read for the first time the *Analects*, or my interest in some sympathetic, contemporary reconstruction of the Confucian political thought such as that, say, of a distinguished American scholar, professor H.G. Creel of the University of Chicago. Of course there is, as Creel put it, Confucius as a man, and Confucius as a myth, and, besides it is not always easy to distinguish between the man and the myth after two thousand five hundred years of history of Confucian thought. Still, I think that surely there are some recognizable traits of the Confucian doctrine which are congenial to any liberally minded person of our time, and especially to that kind of liberalism which one would call this-worldly as it does not need to be anchored to any definite religion.

In a world of people who believed in the spirits, Confucius suggested not speaking of them, and being fully conscious of the tremendous difficulties which confront whomever wants to understand our life,

Already Plato had remarked that a tyrannical government is somehow the result of the moral vices of its very victims, and it is hardly to be considered as a mere historical coincidence the fact that the most active and successful struggles for political freedom in the West have been conducted by individuals and groups of high moral standards. Even if we do not accept the definition of freedom, suggested by Lord Acton, as freedom to perform one's own duties, it is obvious that a strong consciousness of one's own moral duties, and namely of the duty to respect other individuals, is a necessary ingredient of any really free political and economic system.

It may be added that the requirement of a high moral standard for the establishment of a free society has been possibly not stressed enough by the champions of the liberal idea, who usually have played more the role of the claimant than that of the preacher.

Still I think it is not possible—without risking confusion—to speak of “inner freedom” tout court as of a pretended “Oriental” version of individual freedom, and even less as of a pretended “Oriental” version of political and economic freedom, as we know (or at least as we have known) it in the West.

Confucius was rather outspoken in discouraging reflection about death. He did not condemn sacrifices either, but, as Creel would say, he accepted them in the same spirit in which one is courteous to “one’s friend,” without waiting for blessing or for help. Confucius was certainly little concerned with religion or another world and preferred to concentrate on the problems of human life, and namely of social life, without attempting to anchor his research to any definite metaphysical or religious tenet.

I suggest this is certainly a good point of departure for a modern liberal. Of course I am ready to accept the results of contemporary history of ideas in the West and to admit accordingly that, were it not for the religious struggles and wars among the various sects and churches and states since the Reformation in Europe, Westerners, and namely the English (not to mention their cousins the Americans) would not have conquered those civil and political liberties of which they are justly proud. I also agree with my fellow citizen, the late professor Guido De Ruggiero, when, in his famous *History of European Liberalism*, he maintains that without the struggles and rivalries between Church and State after the Counterreformation in Catholic countries, the latter would have remained much less free than they actually are at present. Finally, I am convinced that much of that civil and political freedom which was enjoyed by the Italians in the city-states of Northern and Central Italy between the eleventh and fourteenth century of our era was certainly due at least in part to the bitter struggle for supremacy between the popes and the emperors of the Holy Roman Empire in the early Middle Ages.

Still, it seems to me that all this was more of a happy and possibly unthought-of result of such things as war, worldly ambition and theological fury, than a direct consequence of any religious creed to be applied in the political field. It is not proved at all that moral feelings are necessarily rooted in any particular religious creed, while it seems to be only too obvious that moral feelings are, more than any other thing, accountable for that *respect for the individuals* (individuals *qua ends* and not only *qua means*, as Immanuel Kant would put it) which is at the basis of any successful liberal system, both in politics and in economics.

What Confucius did in the East is this: he started from moral feelings and duties (which he called “li”) in order to discover what was indispensable for all living beings in any political society, and although this point of departure is in some way accountable for a certain vagueness in Confucian political theory, it is still possible, I guess, not only to reconstruct its main lines, but also to recognize its obvious liberal tendency in the true modern (and occidental) sense of this word.

The point of departure of Confucius in his theory of society was certainly and decidedly individualistic. But what is no less important from a modern liberal point of view, he clearly formulated for the first time in recorded history that principle of “reciprocity,” between the behaviors of individuals which can secure their own freedom in an efficient way, and which could be called (as I called it myself with reference to Confucius in my American book on *Freedom and the Law*, 1961), the “golden rule” for any liberal society.

Confucius did not go so far as to say that one must love his neighbors as one loves himself (a difficult task indeed for people who are not saints) but he maintained (in that typically Confucian, i.e. rationalistic and utilitarian way which was to be rightly pointed out by Max Weber in our times) that the very fundamental principle for a happy society is “Not doing to others what one does not wish them do to one’s self” (*Analects*, XV, 23). This idea Confucius developed in an even clearer way by saying: “The truly virtuous man, desiring to be established himself seeks to establish others; desiring success for himself, he strives to help others succeed. To find in the wishes of one’s heart the principle for his conduct towards others is the method of true virtue” (*Analects*, VI, 28).

Of course this requires a long term view on the part of the individuals concerned, as contrasted with the inclination to “cut corners,” that is with that short term view of human relationships which is always adopted by thieves, robbers, tyrants and ... social planners. Confucius would call this long term view “tao,” i.e. the “way,” conceived of as a practical way of conduct, without any of the mystical overtones which his rivals, the Taoists, used to put on that concept.

To be sure, Confucius realized quite well that his principle was not an easy one to be adopted in any historical society. Still, he shared in this respect (and this is also a trait he has in common with the greatest masters of liberal thought in the West) an almost unlimited confidence in *education*.

Everybody could be educated in principle, regardless of his condition, while nobody, according to Confucius, could be coerced to accept right rules if he did not believe in their value. Indeed, coercion was for Confucius a very limited means of establishing a good society, and he put that point very explicitly when he wrote: “If one tries to guide the people by means of rules, and keep order by means of punishments, the people will merely seek to avoid the penalties without having any sense or moral obligation. But if one leads them by virtue and depends upon “li” to maintain order, the people will then feel their moral obligation to correct themselves” (*Analects*, II, 3).

Many centuries later, another great master of liberal thought, Herbert Spencer, in his *Individual versus the State*, was to make a very similar remark, when he condemned the reliance that so many governments put on coercion in his time, while other ways of persuading and enlightening people could be much more successfully applied.

And not much earlier, in his *Representative Government* (chapter III), John Stuart Mill had written in a true “Confucian” vein: “One of the benefits of freedom is that under it the ruler cannot pass by the people’s minds, and amend their affairs for them without emending them. If it were possible for the people to be well governed in spite of themselves, their good government would last no longer than the freedom of a people usually lasts who have been liberated by foreign arms without their own cooperation.”

Of course I have no intention of letting anybody believe that the social and political theories of Confucius in sixth century B.C. China were the same as those of, say, the *Old Whigs* in England, or of the *guarantistes* in the European continent after the French revolution. Still, Confucius had both a clear and liberal idea of the unsurpassable limits of government in any desirable society, and an equally clear idea of the point of reference for any valuation of the action of government in it. He made quite clear that the *government existed for the people and not the people for the government*, that no hereditary power whatsoever, but *the happiness of the people* provided a justification for the rulers. Happiness in its turn was a matter of *individual judgment* on the part of the people concerned, since it was a matter of their own judgment (as we have seen) “what one does not wish others to do to oneself.” Finally, he maintained that government was not a matter of caprice, but of wisdom, and even more specifically, a kind of technical knowledge which very rarely, if ever, could be found in hereditary rulers in the real world.

The way Confucius tried to reconcile his political principles with reality is typically compromising and discreet. His formula was that the kings by inheritance had to refrain from governing their own people directly, giving instead to a learned and wise prime minister the corresponding responsibilities. Only specially selected people were to govern in the place of the king. What Confucius had in mind five hundred years before Christ in the East is that “separation between the crown and the government” which was to be theorized in the West by Benjamin Constant in the first half of last century, and which the French historian and statesman Thiers was to condense in the famous formula “the king reigns, but does not govern.”

One typical trait of this Confucian conception is that birth or fortune or personal position are irrelevant for the choice of the prime minister to be

appointed by the king. Everybody could then become a premier in principle, provided that he had the necessary learning and ability for this task. Of course a weak point in the whole Confucian system was that it was to the king himself (a man who according to the Confucian conception of politics had no special qualities to govern) that ultimately the selection of the able man who should govern the kingdom was entrusted. How much this system (and notwithstanding that principle of the "happiness of the people" which was the final touchstone in Confucian politics) can be reconciled with a democratic and constitutional system of the modern occidental type, is disputable. Still, the Confucian prime minister had many traits in common with a Prussian *Chancellor* of Bismarck's time, and we know that the Prussian kings of the last century had a point in maintaining that their system could be praised and defended as *liberal* enough, at least insofar as it put the "Chancellor" above the capricious moods of "irresponsible" representatives of the people.

As a matter of fact, choosing talented and learned ministers became soon a kind of noble fashion among Chinese kings (and later on the part of Chinese emperors) under the influence of Confucian doctrines, and according to that system of *public service competitive examinations* which, for good and for evil, was to remain a great invention of Chinese political thought, and possibly the best substitute for the market wherever the market is not utilizable to select the most efficient people.

True enough, Confucius did not think of *elections* to appoint governments, nor of a direct, or indirect participation of "the People" *as a political body*, in the government. Still, the final point of reference in his system were just "the people," that is, *the individuals*, each one of which was perfectly able to judge what is good and what is bad for himself and for the others according to the principle of "reciprocity."

And we find evidence in the Analects of another important "liberal" principle in Confucian doctrine. While the prime minister did have to be responsible to his king, he did not have to be "loyal" to him in a feudal way. He had to speak frankly to the king and resist, if necessary, his own arbitrary will if this was contrary to the happiness of the people, just as well as Confucius himself once had spoken frankly to the prince Chi K'ang Tzu in the realm of Lu when the prince had asked Confucius how he might get rid of the thieves in his state: "If you, sir, did not covet things that don't belong to you, they wouldn't steal if you paid them to!" (*Analects*, XXXVI, 18)

To use professor Creel's words: "Democracy values freedom and the individual, and denies unlimited authority to the State: so does Confucianism. The entire humanistic and liberal background out of which Western

democracy grew has much in common with the best traditions of Chinese thought.”

It is well known, of course, that many of the teachings of Confucius were later distorted both by rulers, who tried to disguise despotism under the cover of Confucianism, and by political philosophers who pretended to be “Confucians” while pleasing despots at the same time. And when we consider the history of China, we know how heavy the hand of the emperors down through the centuries could be and how correspondingly limited political freedom could become. Still it would be silly, I think, simply to say (as an Italian reporter wrote recently after a visit to Red China) that “Chinese people are all but individualistic people.”

For instance, how in the world could Chinese people be such successful businessmen as they have proved to be in Hong Kong, in Taiwan, in South East Asia and even in US, if they were not full of initiative, if they did not rely on their own judgment and accept their own responsibilities—in a word, if they were not individualists in the “Western” sense of the word?

If Confucius is the most prominent representative of this individualistic spirit, one can well understand why Mao Zedong could state, according to one of his biographers (Robert Payne): “I hated Confucius from the age of eight!” As a matter of fact, and notwithstanding many hindrances of all kinds, “old China”—as Creel remarks—“was a *laissez-faire* state,” and here it seems to me that Hayek’s distinction between totalitarianism and autocracy comes well in point. China was certainly an autocratic country for so many centuries, but this does not mean in the least that it had to be totalitarian as it is today.

I can imagine what some people might say at this point: forget China for a while and consider Japan. Japan is in the East as well.

It got most of its culture and civilization from China and from India. It is now one of the leading nations not only in the Orient but in the world. Can we really interpret the history of Japan in terms of individual freedom? Discipline and unconditional obedience to the authorities of the land seemed to be by far more important than individual freedom for all those Japanese who in the recent past have gallantly waged a tremendous war at the cost of innumerable individual sacrifices. Is not that, if anything, a completely different and typically “Oriental” view of liberty?

I am not so presumptuous as to pretend to speak at length of Japanese affairs before Japanese people in the capital of Japan. Still I guess I would have two replies for the above-mentioned critics. First, the individual sense of discipline, the feeling that one’s belonging to a nation as a whole is as

important as being “free” is neither peculiar to this Oriental nation nor necessarily in contrast with liberalism in the Western sense.

The people of the democratic Greek city-states (like Athens) no less than the Romans in Republican times obviously joined their sense of personal freedom (as independence from unnecessary coercion on the part of their political authorities) with their attachment to their own mother country, for which they thought it right to fight and if necessary to die. I guess that the pretended difference between what the ancient Westerners called “freedom” (conceived of as participation in the government of their cities) and what the modern ones called in their turn “freedom” (conceived of as independence in private rights and life) has been possibly exaggerated since the times of Benjamin Constant and Lord Acton, down to those of Fustel de Coulanges and other scholars.

Whoever has read the famous speech which Tucidides put in the mouth of Pericles for the commemoration of the Athenians dead in the Peloponnesian War, knows how much *privacy* and *private rights* and *habits* were praised and defended by the free Athenians against the authorities no less than against the strictures of their own fellow-citizens and neighbors. On the other hand, the people who have gained most reputation for their individual freedom in the modern West, the English, are also probably the people most loyal to their own nation, as is well revealed by their own saying: *my country, right or wrong*.

Thus, there are wide limits within which the history of European liberalism is also, without contradiction, the history of European nationalism. I wonder whether the same could not be applied to the history of Japan.

Certainly, both in the East and in the West, “nationalism” has proved, beyond a point, incompatible with liberalism in many senses. To put it better, what in a certain kind of “nationalism” is really incompatible with freedom is an attitude which does not necessarily apply to nations more than to individuals. This attitude could be well defined, in Mill’s words, as “the passion for governing others.” This passion, as Mill says, can be “so much stronger than the desire of personal independence, that for the mere shadow of the one” some “are found ready to sacrifice the whole of the other. Each one of their number is willing, like the private soldier in an army, to abdicate his personal freedom of action into the hands of his general, provided the army is triumphant and victorious, and he is able to flatter himself that he is one of a conquering host, though the notion that he has himself any share in the domination exercised over the conquered is an illusion” (*Representative Government*, Ch. IV).

This time what Mill had in mind was not, however, any Oriental country but the French, of whom he was inclined to think that “an average individual among them prefers the chance, however distant and improbable, of wielding some share of power over his fellow-citizens, above the certainty, to himself or others, of having no unnecessary powers exercised over them.” This reminds me indeed of an advertisement which I saw some years ago on the walls of a police post in Southern France. French boys were invited by the government to join the police forces: “you then will share,” so said the advertisement, “a part of the public power [une partie de la puissance publique].” And of course I am reminded also of a striking Sicilian (or perhaps Neapolitan) saying, not very decent to be quoted literally before nice ladies, which goes more or less, “Commanding is even better than fornicating.”

I do not know whether this kind of lust for power is accountable for nationalism in Oriental countries like Japan. It is certainly accountable, alas, for the corruption of true liberalism in some of the Western countries.

But let me revert to Japan and suggest my second reply to my hypothetical critics.

The great Renaissance of Japan after Meiji’s restoration in the second half of last century, besides the unprejudiced acceptance of Occidental science and technique promoted by that wise emperor, was based just on *private initiative*, as the former American Ambassador to Japan, Mr. Edwin Reschauer, has recently reminded the readers of *US News and World Report*.

Moreover, the extraordinary development of this nation in our times is to be explained to a great extent, I guess, by the basic fact that today—unless I am wrong—private initiative is *still strong* in this country, and possibly *much stronger than in most countries of the West*.

All in all, I suspect that this great question of “freedom” is confronted today with the same kind of difficulties with which the concepts of “law” or of “economics” or of “politics” were, and still are, partly confronted. A host of intellectuals is only too pleased to point out that there is no such a thing as “law,” but that there are several “legal orders,” that there is no such a thing as “economy,” but that there are several “economies,” and finally that there is no such a thing as “freedom” but that there are several “freedoms” according to the various peoples, times and places. Nobody would contest that there are several legal orders, several economies and several political systems, that is, in the end, several “freedoms.” But to pretend that *therefore*, there would be no such thing as “freedom” (or law, or the economy, or political society) is simply a *non sequitur*, implying that people are *too different* from each other to have really anything in common. This I do not believe. Let me explain why.

The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce was elected, a few years before his death (he passed away after the end of World War Two) the President of the reborn Italian Liberal Party. But his attitude towards political and economic problems of Italian life seemed to me, as well as to many other people at that time, rather disappointing for a militant liberal economist and politician.

Croce showed a certain Olympian indifference towards political programs and economic theories, and used to insist that *freedom is something you can never separate from the very concept of man and human action*. I felt uncomfortable with that doctrine, which seemed to me rather sterile and even destructive both from the economic and the political angle. If freedom is actually inseparable from human action, the Crocean implication seemed to be that it was rather irrelevant, after all, to bother about specific economic or political freedoms.

The same sense of discomfort had been felt by my old teacher of economics at the University of Turin, and our past distinguished member, the late professor Luigi Einaudi, who was to become later one of the leaders of the Italian Liberal Party and the President of the Republic of Italy.

A polemic between Croce and Einaudi relating to the possibility of men being free even without being allowed to be free traders has remained famous in my country. Croce inclined to think (although he may have changed his mind later) that people even without enjoying a *free* market can still be *free*. Einaudi strongly opposed that view, which in many respects seemed to him (and rightly so) incompatible with a true understanding both of liberalism and of economics.

After a deeper perusal of the Crocean doctrine of liberty I am now inclined to think that while Einaudi was right, he possibly did not see all the implications of the Crocean principle (*that man is always free in some sense*) both in politics and in economics.

Men are always free by their own nature, in the East as well in the West, today as well as thousands of years ago, at least in the “trivial” sense that if they are allowed to act at all, *they must enjoy a certain, even if a minimum, amount of free choice among given alternatives for their own action*. It was in this sense that Roman, lawyers who were very matter-of-fact people, used to say that freedom (contrary to slavery) was a *natural condition*, not only of human beings, but also of animals like birds, who (so those lawyers said) are naturally *free* to fly from one place to another, at least until somebody catches or kills them. In other words, *before being a principle, freedom is a general fact, and namely the necessary condition of all human actions*, regardless of what human beings have to do. The recognition of this basic fact is indeed *at the core of all sound theories of*

human action no matter what the field be in which human beings are to act, in the market or in political, or legal, or generally social relationships.

A very important corollary of this is that *the more complicated an action is the more freedom is needed by the individuals who have to act, and the more one needs the action and collaboration of other individuals, the more freedom is necessary for all of them to act and collaborate as requested.*

Beyond a certain limit, slavery never pays an owner of slaves as it would pay him to have the collaboration of free people. The Romans had learned this lesson, when they gave more and more freedom to their slaves, allowing them not only to act, in private life and business, on behalf of their masters, but also for themselves. And Mises has justly remarked that what made slavery disappear in modern times was not only or mainly a more human feeling on the part of the masters, but the need of a free and voluntary collaboration in the complicated and highly technical economies of our time.

On the other hand, the insurmountable difficulties of contemporary “planners” to run in any really efficient way the economies of their countries are, I think, the most striking example of what could be called *the paradox of tyranny*. Both in the East and in the West, contemporary “planocrats” wish and pretend they could do without a fundamental freedom of choice on the part of their “planned” subjects (both *qua* producers and *qua* consumers) in the very moment they desperately need the *active*, that is the *free* collaboration of all of them for the achievement of grandiose and complicated projects.

The so called problem of “economic calculation” which no “socialist” economy can solve (as so many prominent economists, from Gossen to Pareto and Mises, have definitely proved) is nothing else in the end, *than the problem arising from that contradiction of tyrannies, which would like to suppress individual freedom and still cannot do without it.*

As Confucius warned us two thousand five hundred years ago, coercion—that typical tool of all tyrants—*has limits*, and “propellant” coercion has even more limits than the “impedient” one.

There is always a point at which coercion would not do at all, and free collaboration would do well instead.

Of course, this point may be located differently, not only in the East or in the West, but in each place and time respectively in the East and in the West.

What really matters, however, in this question, unless I am wrong, is neither East nor West, or any other geographical or historical limitation. It is human nature itself.