

LIBERTY AND EQUALITY

Note to the Reader

The text which one is about to read is that of the last lecture of Raymond Aron at the Collège de France, delivered on April 4, 1978. The recording having been lost, it has been edited from a very faulty handwritten transcript by Giulio De Ligio and Pierre Manent, who have had to make choices "according to the spirit." Such as it is, it gives a faithful idea of the political perspective of Raymond Aron at the twilight of his university career.

I would like to consecrate this last lecture, as I had informed you, to liberty, or more precisely *to liberties*. I don't like employing the word liberty in the singular. Just as one sometimes says that peace is indivisible—which is not true—, one sometimes says that liberty is indivisible, which is equally false. Even in the most despotic societies, individuals enjoy certain liberties. In order to understand this, it suffices to employ liberty in the most prosaic sense, and one sees that the individual who has the possibility of choosing between this and that, of doing or not doing, of going to the church or of

not going there, is at liberty with respect to this particular activity, and that in this sense, there are *liberties*. We all enjoy certain liberties, and we never enjoy all of the liberties. In practice, in order that we may enjoy certain liberties, it is necessary to prohibit other fellow citizens from preventing us (one must stop them from stopping us) exercising our liberties. When we want to organize a public demonstration, in order for it to take place it is necessary to exclude others, or prevent them from preventing our demonstration. This means: there is no liberty for something or for someone which does not, most of the time, reciprocally bear a restriction or prohibition for something else or for someone else.

Of course, if we reason in the manner of the philosophers of the 17th or of the 18th century, if we refer ourselves to the state of nature, the problem poses itself differently.

One may say that, in the state of nature when there has not been a state of society, liberty is confounded with the capacity or with the power of the individual. Certain philosophers have analyzed the state of nature as that in which the liberty of each is confounded with his power. The individual has to battle with nature, he is free to do whatever his force gives him the capacity to do, but there are also the others, and since he has not yet tied social bonds with the others he may find himself with them in a situation of peace, or he may find himself in a situation of war.

As you know, certain philosophers have characterized the state of nature as the war of all against all. The striking example is that of Hobbes, who had elsewhere compared the state of nature which he describes with the relation of States to one another. The States, according to him, in effect, are

in the state of nature, that is to say in a permanent state of war, be it real or simply potential. Others on the contrary, like Montesquieu, have not described the state of nature as a state of war where each wants to get the upper hand over the other, but as a state in which humans would be fearful, frightened, and as a result would never have the idea of domination or the instinct of violence. I am not sure that one can settle the debate between these different interpretations of the state of nature because these interpretations reflect different theories of human nature. And even better, it seems to me, not to refer to the situation of humans in the Paleolithic age, which we know poorly, but rather to refer at the same time to what we know in the small Neolithic societies and in our societies.

All that one may affirm as certain or almost certain is that beyond society insecu-

rity reigns amongst humans. I think that almost all the philosophers who utilized this notion of the state of nature recognized that, without a power superior to all the individuals, without a power capable of imposing peace, there is, at the very least, a situation of insecurity. It is thus quite significant that Montesquieu, in *The Spirit of the Laws*, defines political liberty in the following terms: "Political liberty consists in surety, or at least in the opinion one has of one's surety" (Book XII, chapter 2). And surety comes in third place in the enumeration of fundamental rights in article 2 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* of 1789. One may furthermore join to the term surety that of property, which the same article places in the second rank of the enumeration, right after liberty. There is not surety for a human individual if he is not protected in what he has, in what is proper