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Liberty: The role of an idea in two revolutions

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Abstract

This piece of work will attempt to analyse the role of ideas in implementing political change. This is done by examining the question, *what role has the philosophical idea of Liberty played in revolutions?* The dissertation will explore this question with reference to the French and American Revolutions respectively, and attempt to answer it by drawing on constructive and interpretive approaches of the French and American Revolution. This will be accomplished by first introducing and defining the different theories of causes of revolutions, and then evaluating key texts and theories addressing the role of liberty in both the American and French Revolution. Subsequently, the main philosophers' concepts of liberty will carefully be studied in order to be traced, analysed, and evaluated as a driving force in key primary documents of each revolution. This paper concludes that the idea of liberty played a crucial role in both revolutions, since it had a unifying contribution to the societies, which compliments Sewell's theoretical approach to revolutions.

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LIBERTY: THE ROLE OF AN IDEA IN TWO REVOLUTIONS

Introduction

Since forever and a day, the role of ideas in implementing political change has been assessed, evaluated, re-evaluated, and reassessed. Several political theorists and historians are constantly disputing if ideas cause political change, implements it, justifies it, or does not influence change at all, yet is rather added retrospectively to a changed political system - if at all, suggesting that the change was caused and driven by completely different motives. The causes and driving forces of the American and French Revolutions are far from excluded from this debate. Understanding the reasons for these revolutions, along with the roles of ideas in them, has the potential to enlighten an understanding for other political changes, thus, giving an insight to revolutions of our contemporary period. Both the American and French revolution are often referred to, and regarded, as the revolutions for liberty. The idea of liberty is often noted as the main cause and driving force of the rebels of these revolutions, who have been claimed to be highly inspired by enlightened thinkers. However, several historical evidences and political theories to revolutions in general, suggest a limited role for philosophical writings in creating a revolutionary context. We are therefore confronted with the question; *what role has the philosophical idea of Liberty played in revolutions?* This question will be addressed via a constructivist interpretation of the French and American Revolution, and by carefully analysing the idea of liberty, tracing it, and evaluating it as a - or *the* - driving force for each revolution respectively. At first, theories of the causes of revolutions will be compared, contrasted and evaluated. Then historians' and political scientists' previous research and interpretations of the causes of the American and French Revolutions, and the role of the idea of liberty within these causes, or as a cause will be assessed. Even with several scholars claiming that the idea of liberty

played a minor, if any, role in the revolutions, it is clear for both revolutions that the idea of liberty had a unifying attribution for the rebellions, who might have been struck by a vast variety of individual grievances. Lastly, an independent investigation will be conducted in order to try to answer what role the philosophical idea of liberty played in the French and American Revolutions. This will be done by analysing and defining key philosophers' ideas of liberty, then tracing these thoughts in key documents of the revolutions. With this, it is evident that the philosophical ideas of liberty clearly resonate in some of the most crucial documents of these revolutions, illustrating that ideas do play a significant role as a motive for political change.

Chapter 1 - Theories of Revolutions

The causes and effects of revolutions have been analysed in various ways. According to Theda Skocpol, social revolutions are 'rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below' (1979: 4). She identifies four social-scientific theories previously used to analyse revolutions; Marxist (1979: 6), aggregate-psychological approaches, system/value consensus theories, and political-conflict theories (1979: 8-9). Marx interprets revolutions as 'emerging out of class-divided modes of production, and transforming one mode of production into another through class conflict' (Skocpol, 1979: 8). In other words, revolutions occur through class action from a 'self-conscious, rising revolutionary class' (Skocpol, 1979: 8). The aggregate psychological theory is defined in simple terms by; 'political violence occurs when many people in society become angry', and that people become angry with 'relative deprivation' (1979: 8). With this, Gurr describes revolutions as 'all collective attacks within a political community against the political

regime, its actors - including competing political groups as well as incumbents - or its policies' - including guerrilla wars, coups d'état, rebellion, and riots' (1970: 3-4). His interpretation signifies that every violent action is caused by anger among the people. However, system/value consensus theories '[attempt] to explain revolutions as violent responses of ideological movements to secure disequilibrium in social systems' (Skocpol, 1979: 9). It is a value-coordinated social system model (1979: 11-12), parallel to Marx's approach in that it is macro-sociological theory of societal integration and change (1979: 11). Chalmers Johnson claims that the existing social system needs to be in a crisis - which occurs when values and environment desynchronise - for a 'value-orientated ideological movement that is prepared to use violence against authorities', to take place (Skocpol, 1979: 12). In other words, the social system needs to experience change in order for the revolution to take place. Lastly, Skocpol describes political-conflict theories as an approach to explaining revolutions. Introduced by Charles Tilly, it is a counterargument to Ted Gurr's aggregate psychological theory, which he explains as insufficient because 'no matter how discontented an aggregate of people may become, they cannot engage in political action (including violence) unless they are part of at least minimally organized groups with access to some resources' (Skocpol, 1979: 10). Revolutions have 'people acting together in pursuit of common interests' (Tilly, 1973: 436). In short, Gurr's interpretation is lacking the unifying aspect of revolutions. The violence is only a by-product of groups competing for power and conflicting goals (Skocpol, 1979: 10). Hence, the causes of revolutions are as follows; shift in resources from one group of society to another, increase in popular discontent, and lastly, the 'population find themselves confronted with strictly incompatible demands from the government and from an alternative body claiming control over the government' (Tilly, 1975: 520-521). Thus, institutions causes there to be several sovereignties within the society which causes conflict. However, according to Skocpol, none of these social scientific

theories' interpretations suffice in interpreting revolutions (Skocpol, 1979: 5).

Instead, she comes with a non-voluntarist, structuralist perspective. This interpretation focuses on class relations and group organisations, which means that it is in many ways a mixture of Marx's approach and the political conflict interpretation (Skocpol, 1979: 13). With this, Skocpol introduces three fundamental structural relations: between classes, between classes and states, and between different states in international relations (Sewell, 1985: 57). Using this approach, Skocpol explains the fall of the Old Regime as it losing power due to political crises, having administrative and military breakdowns and pressure from abroad, and 'once the old-regime states had broken apart, fundamental political and class conflicts were set in motion' (1979: 285). Sewell criticizes this approach, since she has not 'recognized the autonomous power of ideology in the revolutionary process' and that adding ideologies 'leads to a fundamentally different conceptualization of the process of revolution' (1985: 58). Sewell emphasises that the non-voluntarist, structuralist perspective is missing *structural ideology*, which he describes as; 'all social relations are at the same time ideological relations, and all explicit ideological discourses is a form of social action' (1985: 61). While he acknowledges that ideologies cannot be explained as non-voluntary, he does make a point of them being transparent (1985: 60-61). In other words, ideologies do not necessarily have to simply be one individual's view, but can be adapted to represent an institutional approach to an issue, which allows rebels to unify for a common goal.

Bukovansky supports the notion of the importance of ideologies, however, from a different approach. He claims that 'political legitimacy [...] is important to international as well as to domestic politics' (2002: 2), and that this legitimacy was transformed in the mid-eighteenth century from being legitimate in the monarch, to being legitimate in popular sovereignty, by the enlightenment thinking

(2002: 3). Bukovansky contradicts the Marxists approach by stating that material power does not necessarily lead to legitimacy, although it is a crucial aspect of power (2002: 8). In short, the enlightenment introduced alterations to monarchical legitimacy of power, which thereby delegitimised the kings and allowed revolutions to take place. It is evident that most approaches to revolutions that do not include the power of ideologies are lacking crucial interpretations of political change.

Chapter 2 - The role of the idea of Liberty

The American Revolution

Historians and political scientists have for generations debated the role of the philosophical idea of Liberty, along with philosophical thought in general, on the American Revolution. Several philosophers, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Beccaria, Montesquieu, and especially Locke, have been cited in colonies' historical documents (Bailyn, 1971: 27), and been used to justify their opposition (Ferguson, 1974: 165). Primary sources also indicate that in Great Britain, it was reported that in the colonies, people 'were being driven crazy [...] by certain books about the rights of man' (Fisher, 1902: 46). This indicates that contemporary to the events, the ideas of philosophers were considered the cause of the uprising. Furthermore, according to Bailyn, the American's 'political awareness had been formed by the literature of English politics' (1971: 126-127).

However, the influence, and outreach, of the philosophies may be more limited than many people have attributed it. According to Fisher, none of the patriot's pamphlets included any of Rousseau's philosophies (1902: 150-151), and Montesquieu was mainly read after the revolution (1902: 138). Furthermore, it was mainly the educated upper class that knew of the Enlightenment writings (Ferguson, 1974: 62-63),

suggesting that either the upper class demanded change and led the revolution, or the uprising was not inspired by the philosophical writings. The limited attribution of the philosophes to the revolution is further supported by the fact that several historical figures, who did not support American independence, such as Peter Van Schaack (Bailyn, 1971: 29), and Peter Oliver (Adair and Schutz, 1961: xix. – In; Oliver, 1781), based their loyalist views on the same philosophical writings - mainly on Locke. Bailyn also notes that both in America and in Britain, the ‘skeletons of their political thought was Lockean’ (Reid, 1988: 126). This clearly suggests a limited role to Locke and other philosophers in the cause the American Revolution.

Thomas Paine’s pamphlet, *Common Sense* has been attributed a lot of responsibility for converting Americans to the idea of independence (Adams, 1939: 112). Within the first three months, over 120.000 copies were sold (Kelly, 1983: 61), and it is considered ‘one of the most effective pamphlets of all time’ (Ferguson, 1974: 100). Even though *Common Sense* was very successful, it was critiqued not only by loyalists, but also from patriots who feared his constitutional ideas (Bailyn, 1971: 286-287). This suggests a limited influence of Paine’s work. Many historians also agree that by the time of publication, the American separation was already inevitable, and the pamphlet simply hastened the process (Kelly, 1983: 61). Nevertheless, *Common Sense*, and other successful pamphlets of the period, illustrates the stage which the American conscience had reached in the time of their publications (Adams, 1939: 112). To simplify, instead of influencing the people, it redistributed already established ideas. Therefore, although Paine did not influence new ideas to the patriots, the ideas he put forward had already had a great significance to the American Revolution.

The attribution of the idea of liberty is also a hot debate when considering the American Revolution. Several historians support the Beard thesis, which is that the motive on both sides were ‘economic

advantages' and the guiding purpose of the leaders in the revolution, and not the 'vague thing known as "advancement of general welfare" or some abstraction known as "justice"' (Beard, 1952: 17-18). This would also justify the issue that slavery existed in America after their fight for independence, since it suggests an economic interest, rather than ideological one. Furthermore, liberty was not only boasted in America, but also on the other side of the Atlantic (Reid, 1988: 19), Loyalists claimed to fight for liberty (Countryman, 1993: 126), and opponents of the revolution who lived in Great Britain believed that their 'constitution spread the blessing of liberty through the colonies, as much as in the mother country' (Reid, 1988: 84). Also, liberty directed the Whigs along 'contradictory paths by first guiding them to union with their mother country and then pointing them toward rebellion' (Reid, 1988: 84). All of this would suggest that the idea of liberty was interpreted in many different ways, and, as previously stated, often by using the same sources, which would suggest that the interpretations changed according to private interests. Furthermore, according to the Tory, Peter Oliver, 'they [the Whigs] disguised their Private Views by mouthing it for Liberty' (1781: 65). This suggests that liberty was used in order to add substance to legal matters, rather than being the primary issue.

However, what the rebels meant by liberty was most likely what we know today as negative liberty, while the royalists were fighting for a positive liberty - opposite to the royalists and rebels of the French revolution. In short, negative liberty is allowing a *lassiez faire* approach to society (2007: 169), while positive liberty is having influence from above in order to enforce liberty (Berlin, 2007: 178-179). Therefore, a negative liberty entails freedom of external barriers, thereby protection of society from the government, while positive liberty is the freedom of internal barriers and is therefore the protection from society. The opponents of the rebels determine the type of liberty used; in the American case, they were fighting external regulations and constraints on their society, while the French rebels were fighting

against an unjust distribution of power and wealth within the society. This also explains why the American society remained intact post the revolution, whereas the French Revolution ended up in the great terror. Even though negative and positive liberty is not necessarily mutually exclusive, it suggests that although the rebels in America and France were both fighting for *liberty*, their comparison of causes is limited. Importantly, the notion of negative vs positive liberty gives an insight to how the opposing side of either revolution could both claim to fight for liberty, illustrating that liberty is technically too broad a concept to describe the motives.

Contrary to the argument that liberty was simply added to provide substance to the grievances, Bailyn proposes that the legal matters were added as grievances for the patriots to fight for their actual cause - liberty (1971: 155). Reid supports this by advocating that 'liberty grievance' was not simply 'lending color to legal substance,' but was 'part of the legal substance itself' (1988: 88), and that it was both 'the cause of the American Revolution and a purpose for drafting the United States Constitution' (1988: 1). According to Hutchinson, the events leading up to the revolution were of little relevance, and 'if no taxes or duties had been laid upon the colonies, other pretenses would have been found for exception to the authority of Parliament' (Bailyn, 1971: 138). The concept of liberty was not only the central ideological symbol of the revolutionaries (Countryman, 1993: 125), but also the 'directing force of public affairs' (Reid, 1988: 19). Even Peter Oliver, a Loyalist, admitted that, 'the Fascination in the Word Liberty threw the people into the harpy Claws of their Destroyers' (1781: 65). Therefore, it is commonly accepted that the concept of liberty was central in the cause of the American Revolution.

Rather than the revolutionaries fighting to gain liberty, Bailyn interprets the cause of the American revolution as the colonists fear of losing their liberty, which he believes is rooted in a long history of conspiracy theories (1971: 157). He believes that there was a general

fear that England was conspiring to enslave America (1971: 119), and that this suspicion was present before any of the political events of the struggle with England took place (1971: 95), which justifies his argument, that ‘interest in the topic of liberty did not have to be triggered by specific events’ (1971: 3). Bailyn also asserts that the pamphlets and newspapers of the time cannot simply be interpreted as propaganda, but that they were real fears and ideas of corruption and threats to liberty (1971: ix). The Whigs interpreted the loss of liberty to be slavery (Reid, 1988: 91), and power was considered the natural enemy of liberty (Bailyn, 1971: 57). In other words, power would lead to American slavery. Therefore, any form of illustration of English power over their colonies would increase the already existing fear of the loss of liberty. With this, the events of ‘unconstitutional taxing, the invasion of placement, the weakening of the judiciary, plural officeholding, Wilkers, [and] Standing armies’ were considered ‘deliberate assault of power upon liberty’ (Bailyn, 1971: 117). Bailyn therefore concludes that it was the alleged evidence that the Americans were faced with ‘conspirators against liberty, [...] above all else that in the end propelled them into Revolution’ (1971: 95). Therefore, the fear of the loss of liberty played an essential role in the cause of the American Revolution.

However, when arguing that liberty was the cause for America’s fight for independence, the fact that slavery still existed in America during and after the revolution is an issue. Clearly slavery is not compatible with the idea of liberty, and with the values of the American Revolution in general (C. Campbell, 2016: 29). Although - according to Campbell - most of the prominent members of the Revolutionary generation acknowledged that slavery was unfit for Independent America (2016: 29), too much money was invested in it, and the South’s economy was too dependent on it for them to abolish it (Ferguson, 1974: 45). A common justification for slavery was that it was an ‘inheritance from the past which had to be lived with,’ and that people of colour did not fit into the American society (1974: 45).

However, even contemporary to the revolution, these justifications for slavery were not generally accepted; according to Samuel F. Scott, several French soldiers who were fighting in the American Revolution were wondering how Americans could claim to fight for liberty and equality if they still had slavery in their country (1998: 122). This further supports Beard's thesis, that the American Revolution was caused by financial self-interest, and that the ideological idea of liberty played a minor role, if any. However, according to Jonathan Israel, Locke is 'notably disinclined to oppose slavery' (2006: 529). This suggests that even if slavery existed in independent America, it did not mean that the rebels were not inspired by Locke's definition to the philosophical idea of liberty. Furthermore, it would be too simplistic to devalue the idea of liberty because of the presence of slavery. In other words, an idea can have tremendous power, even if its execution is hypocritical.

Nevertheless, even if Bailyn's constructivist approach to the revolution is not accepted by every historian and political scientist, on the grounds of slavery in post-revolution America and because of Beard's thesis of financial self-interest as the main driver of the revolution, it must be accepted that liberty and philosophical thoughts on rights, justice, and liberty gave certain people justifications for their grievances. Although the English king's actions were not going against any laws of that time in history, the philosophies allowed the patriots to interpret and categorise them as unlawful, rather than simply proclaiming them as going against certain individuals' self-interest. Thus, liberty became a legal and constitutional concept, rather than exclusively a political idea (Reid, 1988: 4). This was not only useful as a justifier of their rebellion, but would have had a unifying contribution to the certain American people and allowed them to fight for one unified cause - liberty.

The French Revolution

Just like the American Revolution, the French Revolution has several times been analysed within a Marxist framework, and with that the role of the philosophical ideas of liberty, and ideas in general, have been limited. W. Scott states that ‘even in the Revolution, its ideals - such as the rights of man - were seen as disguising bourgeois interest,’ and “‘Liberty” included the economic right freely to hire and fire’ (2006: 116). In other words, even when liberty was used it was put forward to achieving individual financial interests.

To support this interpretation, and to weigh the power of the notion of liberty, one must analyse to what extent the French people knew about the writings of some of the main enlightened philosophers. With the French Revolution, this is done by assessing the impact of the printing culture, salon society, and public opinion in general. In many ways, the printing culture influenced the origin of the revolution by spreading the ideas of the enlightenment. Shortly before the revolution, there was a clear increase in literacy and in the number of books owned by the French people (Chartier, 1991: 69). Voltaire’s work had a large circulation, the Encyclopédie was well known to the reading public and sold well, and many pamphlets were full of ideas from Rousseau’s Social contract (Doyle, 1980: 85). This illustrates that the enlightened ideas were widespread and potentially had an influence on the people. However, other sources state that although there was an increase in literacy, approximately 63% of the French population were still illiterate, and most of the ones that could read were not educated (1980: 78). The lack of education makes it difficult to assess how many understood the philosophical writings (1980: 78). Therefore, although the printing culture did have some influence in spreading philosophers’ different ideas, it was mostly not exhaustive.

An analysis of the general public opinion of the French people prior to the French Revolution allows one to evaluate how much people were influenced by the enlightened ideas. Although limited, the best way to

analyse public opinion, and the influence of the Enlightenment on people, is the *cahiers de doléances*. The Cahiers were written grievances to the king from the Third Estate, where they were allowed to freely express their complaints at the local national general assemblies (Tocqueville, 1856b: 63-64). George V. Taylor has done an analysis of how revolutionary the cahiers were by using 741 cahiers and categorising them into different stages of revolutionary thoughts (1972: 488). Most of the cahiers proved to have no revolutionary demands at all (1972: 489), and only 19 out of the 741 were categorized as grade 4 cahiers - the most revolutionary category, and only six of these were from outside Paris (1972: 493). This illustrates that briefly before the revolution, people were not enlightened enough to start a revolution on the ground of philosophical ideas. However, it is important to note that; 'juristic modes of presentation and legal vocabulary in the cahiers served for the formulation of concrete grievance, leaving little room for demand more directly inspired by philosophical literature' (Chartier, 1991: 176). Doyle also states that, 'it does (...) seem increasingly certain that the public was far from won over by the most sustained assault which it had been subjected over the century, that of the Enlightenment' (1980: 83). Therefore, the cahiers illustrate the notion that the philosophers' ideas did not play a massive role in the origins of the French Revolution.

This would support the notion that philosophical culture and philosophical ideas arise as a consequence of revolutions, which is supported by Chartier statement; 'books came from a rupture, rather than caused a rupture' (1991: 89). In other words, the revolution came without the philosophical ideas and the ideologies came as a consequence of the revolution.

However, Doyle still believes that the Enlightenment ideas had an influence (1980: 85). Perhaps political ideas played a limited role, nonetheless, it most certainly set the mood of the Revolution, and arguably contributed to it being as controversial as it was. Philosophical ideas are also evident in the trial of the king; in Saint

Just's speech, there are clear references to Rousseau's Social Contract between citizens, to justify Louis XVI's execution (1792). Gruder states that even though those deliberating in the local assemblies had 'no citation of the argument of any philosophe, no reverence expressed for any one of them, no title of any work were indicated' that 'ideas clearly may have more than one source, so the roots of discourses in 1787-1788 were likely to have been multiple', since the local assemblies put forwards basic and simple ideas drawn from the Enlightenment (2007: 363). To sum up, even with high levels of illiteracy, enlightened ideas would have had other means of spreading to the people. This illustrates, even though the Enlightenment may not have caused the Revolution, it did contribute to its outcome and its character.

Furthermore, several historians, and political scientists, still attribute tremendous amount of responsibility of the revolution to the philosophes. Hampson has described Montesquieu's writings as winning over his readers by his arguments, and Rousseau 'swept them off their feet by the power of exhortation and excitement of his prose,' and claims that Rousseau 'did not persuade people so much as convert them' (1983: 55). Gruder also notes that in many pamphlets, 'arguments from history and citations of historical precedents were coupled with invocations of theoretical principles: reason, justice, equality, natural law, and imprescriptible, inalienable or universal rights to liberty founded in nature' (2007: 362). This illustrates that even if their scope of influence was limited by illiteracy, writers of 18th century France were preoccupied with the notion of liberty. Writers of politics and finance who concerned themselves with France's global role often explained that their failure was due to the 'notions of commerce and liberty, both of which they saw as stifled in France' (P. Campbell, 2006: 19). Thus, it is clear that writers of the period were concerned with the notion of liberty.

Gruder also believes that the discourses - liberty, justice, will, interest - were not only present in the writings of the era, but 'inextricably linked in the lives and thought of the French people' (2007: 362). Yet, he also states that 'none of these ideas were explored in depth; they were accepted principles and beliefs employed as political instruments to promote a cause' (2007: 362). This is also supported by Tocqueville, who believed that the revolution was led to violence because people lacked 'training in liberty' (Herr, 1962: 62). Furthermore, the notion of liberty was used to oppose the 'royal ministers and their policies, to excessive and arbitrary royal authority, or to magistrate and nobles seeking to establish political hegemony' (Gruder, 2007: 362). Not only does all of this suggest a limited role of the philosophes' ideas of liberty, since their ideas were not fully interpreted by the people, it also illustrates that liberty was such a vague term that it could be, and was, used for either side of the revolution, suggesting that private interests probably outweighed the notion of liberty, and liberty was interpreted in a fashion to accompany other causes to revolt. Nevertheless, the notion of liberty had enough power to be used to support and justify any cause.

Corresponding to the time of the events of the revolution, several documents illustrate that people's general interpretations of the happenings were caused by the demand for liberty. The Correspondance Secrète noted on the 28th of March 1788 that; 'The nation is in effect so penetrated by principles of liberty... that the parlements are no longer but a mirror where their sentiments and wishes are reflected and then turned upon the throne' (Gruder, 2007: 158). Diary entries from General Charles-Gabriel de la Croix, marquis de Castries notes in 1787 that; 'the nation makes great strides towards liberty... this safeguards the people from giving the sweat of its labour to an implacable and oppressive master' (Hardman, 2006: 68). This illustrates that liberty was attributed a major role for the reason for revolt, contemporary to the events of the revolution.

Tocqueville ascribes much responsibility to the notion of liberty in the French Revolution. He believes that liberty prepared the French people to overthrow their king (1856a: 111). He states; ‘we had become a country of absolute government in our political and administrative institutions, but we remained a free people in our judicial institutions’ (1856a: 108). He blames the government and nobles little concern for the liberty of the citizens as the main cause for people to revolt (1856a: 104). He believes that ‘any number of the privileges, prejudices, and false ideas that did the most to impede the establishment of lawful and beneficial liberty maintained a spirit of independence in many subjects and led them to resist abuse of authority’ (1856a: 103). To simplify, he believes that the French people were free people by nature, and the institutions trying to limit people’s freedom caused them to revolt.

With this interpretation, it would suggest that the philosophical idea of liberty played a major role in the French Revolution. Linton also supports the idea that the revolution was ‘founded on the principles of liberty and equality’ (2006: 140). W. Scott states that ‘liberty was a demand before it became a rallying cry of 1789’ (2006: 112), which would suggest that liberty was a major theme, even before the outset of the revolution. According to Tocqueville, the nation kept people separated, and ensured that they had no common interests so that they did not come together as a common resistance, thus, the government would never have to deal with more than a few individuals at a time (1856a: 100). It was the first when Louis XVI tried to unify his people that they found a common interest in liberty (Tocqueville, 1856a: 101). It was liberty that ‘forced all classes to maintain contact with one another so that when necessary they could find common ground’ (1856a: 93). In other words, the notion of liberty was the unifying power, which allowed the French people of different classes to find common ground to revolt. Therefore, even if there might have been other grounds for revolting, such as financial and other individual interests, it was the theme of liberty which allowed these different

reasons to revolt be unified and have the French people fight for one common goal.

Chapter 3 - Philosophers on Liberty

In this chapter, the different arguments of the idea of liberty in key philosophical texts, for the French and American Revolutions respectively, will be assessed and interpreted. For the American Revolution, Locke and Paine will be interpreted, and for the French Revolution, Montesquieu and Rousseau, since these philosophers are arguably the most influential for each revolution. To support the aforementioned arguments of Berlin's concepts of liberty, it has to be noted that French Revolution's philosophers seem to implement positive liberty, while the American implement a negative liberty. However, since these concepts are very detailed approaches to political liberty and are first fully described and differentiated in the 20th century, they should not be too heavily investigated as a cause of either revolutions. By establishing a definition of liberty and what liberty entails for each philosopher respectively, the influence of their ideas can be assessed and evaluated in crucial primary documents in Chapter 4.

The American Revolution

John Locke

As seen in the previous chapter, Locke's philosophies have been attributed to tremendous amount of responsibility for the outcome, the causes, and the directions of the American Revolution, by several historians and political theorists. Hence, Locke's idea of freedom needs to be analysed in order to trace the idea in documents

concerning the American Revolution, to see if they reflect his view on liberty.

Locke states that humans are in nature equal, share the same common nature, faculties and powers, and therefore have a natural freedom (*Two Treatises of Government*, 1689: Book 1, §67), which is ‘to be free from any superior power on earth, and to be under the will or legislative authority of man (*Treat.*, 1689: B2, §22). In short, Locke’s view on liberty is that it falls into human’s God-given and inalienable natural rights of freedom of dominion on a person’s *life, liberty, and estate* (*Treat.*, 1689: B2, §135). Locke justifies his view of freedom by stating that;

Man has a natural freedom [...] since all that share in the same common nature, faculties, and powers, are in nature equal, and ought to partake in the same common rights and privileges, till the manifest appointment of God, who “Lord over all, blessed forever,” can be produced to show any particular person’s supremacy; or a man’s own consent subjects him to a superior (*Treat.*, 1689: B1, §67)

Since Locke is religious, he claims that his support for natural freedom is not denying Adam’s creation, which is a direct contradiction of Robert Filmer’s view (*Treat.*, 1689: B1, §15). His notion of freedom is strongly linked to his idea of people’s right of property, and their liberty to use creatures for their own benefit (*Treat.*, 1689: B1, §39). Furthermore, his state of nature is one where people have ‘perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature; without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man’ (*Treat.*, 1689: B2, §4). This is also one of his justifications for his view on slavery, which is; ‘slavery is so vile and miserable an estate of man’ (*Treat.*, 1689: B1, §1) - this statement is contradictory to Israel's aforementioned interpretation of Locke’s view on slavery.

Nevertheless, Locke believes that the freedom of men must be common for everyone in that society (*Treat.*, 1689: B2, §24), yet he does have some limits when it comes to religion. In his *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke states that people of different religions should be tolerated as long as they do not establish domination over others, or ‘civil impunity to the church in which they are taught’ (*A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1689: 36). However, he believes that atheists should not be tolerated, since they deny God, and cannot be trusted (*Tol.*, 1689: 36). While this is concerning people’s toleration of others and people’s religions, Locke’s view does set a limit to people’s choice of religion, and thereby limits their freedom. Nonetheless, contemporary to Locke’s time, this was radically tolerant, and a modern interpretation of his text would suggest that he advocates for religious freedom.

To summarise, Locke’s definition of liberty is based on a laissez faire approach to society, meaning that liberty is the protection of the society from the government, making it a negative liberty that consists of the freedom from violence and dominion of others, and to only be constrained by laws by the commonwealth justifiable by the laws of nature.

Thomas Paine

Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* was widely spread during the American Revolution. Therefore, Paine’s conception of liberty needs to be interpreted, to see if it attributed to the philosophical notion of freedom which was adapted for the revolution.

Contrary to Locke, Paine wrote his pamphlet contemporary to the happenings of the American Revolution, and therefore it is a direct response and justification for the American fight for independence. Because of this, Paine’s main notion of freedom is very much linked to the independence of a nation, and is more concerned with the

collective freedom of a country, rather than the individual's liberty, as Locke advocates for. Paine states that freedom is for America not to be under British rule. He advocates that a country should have the freedom to not be ruled by a smaller country, should be able to make its own laws, and he believes that having their own government is their 'natural right' (1776). Therefore, Paine's notion of freedom is independence for a country.

Nevertheless, his collective notion of freedom still has some attributions to individual liberties, such as one's freedom to vote - or to have a say in one's government, freedom of oppression, and by stating that distinguishing people - such as kings and his subjects - is not natural (1776), he advocates that people are born equal. Furthermore, Paine states that he believes in the freedom of religion, and freedom/right of property (1776).

Thus, Paine's philosophical idea of liberty can be summarised as a nation having their own government, their independence, and that individuals play a role in political outcome of their government, freedom of oppression, and freedom of religion and property, and is thereby a negative liberty.

The French Revolution

Baron de Montesquieu

Montesquieu splits his definition of political liberty into two different categories: the constitutional, and the citizen's liberty (1748: 149). Montesquieu's interpretation of liberty is heavily based on laws. He states that constitutional liberty is 'a right of doing whatever the law permits,' and should not be confused with an 'unlimited freedom,' which he justifies as; 'liberty is a right of doing whatever the law permit, and if a citizen could do what they forbid he would be no longer possessed of liberty, because all his fellow-citizens would have the same power' (1748: 150). In other words, the law might limit a

person's freedom in certain aspects, but it is to protect the liberty of all the citizens. This is also his justification for taxes, which he interprets as the price people pay for their liberty (1748: 214). He states that political liberty can only be reached in moderate governments and only when there is no abuse of power (1748: 150). Therefore, Montesquieu's political liberty is confined to freedom to do as one wills as long as it follows the rules of the constitution, and is therefore a positive liberty.

On the other hand, according to Montesquieu, civil liberty consists on a person's security, or the opinion people have on their security (1748: 183). Once again, this form of liberty is heavily based on laws, suggesting it to be a positive liberty. Montesquieu states that; 'it is [...] on the goodness of criminal laws that the liberty of the subject principally depends' which he defends by stating that if the subject has no means of securing his innocence, he has no liberty (1748: 184). He thereby advocates that a person living under just laws has liberty - which he further explains by illustrating that if a man is condemned to be hanged by a state with the best laws, he has more liberty than 'a pasha enjoys in Turkey' (1748: 184). With this analogy, Montesquieu makes a clear distinction between having privileges and having liberty.

Montesquieu envisions perfect liberty 'when criminal laws derive each punishment from the particular nature of the crime' (1748: 185). Hence, his understanding of civil liberty is that people are free as long as they are punished according to the crime they have committed. With this, he lists four crimes; prejudice to religion, prejudice to morals, to public tranquillity, and security of the subject (1748: 185). With this, one can conclude that Montesquieu advocates for freedom of religion, toleration, freedom of peace, and security as forms of liberty - as long as they fit into the government and society of the subject. He states that laws and governments should adjust to the circumstances of the nation, and that this is rooted in nature (1748: 185). Therefore, Montesquieu's laws to enforce liberty are the laws of nature.

These laws change with different circumstances. For example, according to Montesquieu, equality of sexes is more natural in colder climates than in hotter climates (1748: 251). He supports this by stating that women mature at an earlier stage where the climate is hotter, and therefore, a man is prone to have more wives in his lifetime, than in the colder climate where females mature slower (1748: 251). This illustrates that as the climate and other circumstances change, so should the liberties of subjects.

Montesquieu states slavery to be 'in its own nature bad' and against the civil law and the law of nature, since none of these laws can prevent a slave from running away (1748: 235-236). His justification is that every citizen constitutes to the republic liberty and is part of the sovereignty in a democratic state (1748: 236). Thus, a person cannot sell his liberty, as he would rob his civil society of himself. Furthermore, slavery goes against the constitution in democracies and aristocracies, by giving citizens power which they should not have (1748: 235.) Therefore, it can be interpreted that Montesquieu's liberty consists of freedom from slavery. He also advocates for freedom of thoughts, freedom of speech, and freedom of writing, since words are 'subject to interpretation', 'do not constitute an overt act', and can hence not be considered a crime of high treason (1748: 193-194).

Therefore, Montesquieu's idea of liberty can be summarised as a person is free as long as he lives in a society that has laws which follow the rule of nature, and the fundamental civil laws of freedom of speech and security of the citizen. His approach to liberty is very much based on the government securing subject's liberties from the society, thereby making it a positive liberty.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Rousseau describes two different forms of freedom; the natural liberty, which can be found in his version of the state of nature (1762:

50), and has only the individual's forces as a boundary (1762: 54), and the civic liberty, which is present in the social contract (1762: 50), and bound by the general will (1762: 54). The particular will is the will of the individual and it would be implemented in the state of nature, while the general will is the will of the 'political body' (1762: 52), which can be described as the greater good of the society.

Rousseau declares the family as the only natural society (1762: 42). He compares children to the people, and the father as their chief. He states that the children are born free and equal, but will alienate their freedom until adulthood for their ultimate benefit (1762: 42). Hence, one should only separate from their natural freedom if it is of utility for them and the political body. However, he also states that a person cannot enslave himself, and that to renounce one's freedom is to 'renounce one's quality as man, the rights of humanity, and even his duties', and since slavery represents the owners' (a private individual) will, it is not for the good of the public or the body politics, and it should be illegitimate (1762: 45). Similarly, the will of all is also a private will, and is therefore not the will of that benefits society the most (1762: 60). Thereby, no individual, majority, or other form of private will can constrain the conventional freedom of people.

Furthermore, Rousseau states that there cannot be a general will if there is a 'master' (1762: 57). This suggests that the limits to one's freedom would not be for the greater good if it were run by an authoritarian state. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that Rousseau's work has been interpreted and used on several occasions to justify totalitarianism. Nisbet analyses Rousseau's interpretation of freedom as; 'no more than the freedom to do that which the state in its omniscience determines' (1943: 102). He believes that the introduction of the 'General Will' to society implements totalitarianism, since it 'demands the unqualified obedience of every individual in the community, and infers the obligation of each citizen to render to the state all that the state sees fit to demand' (1943: 101-102), and

therefore assesses that the ideology of modern authoritarianism originates with Rousseau (1943: 97). While this is true in many aspects, and might have inspired, and been used, as justification for despotic rulership, it is an inconsistent approach to Rousseau's work, since it ignores specific arguments of Rousseau - such as the previously mentioned *no master* approach to the general will - and it fails to understand the uniqueness of the general will, which is that no individual, majority or other form of private interest should implement it, and it is only what is best for the society as a whole. Nevertheless, it illustrates that philosophes' arguments can be interpreted in various ways, and can thereby both inspire and justify several causes.

Rousseau states that within the social contract, each citizen has equal limitations to their freedom and goods, and subjects lose their natural independence when they enter the social contract, but gain civil freedom instead (1762: 63). Thus, Rousseau's view of freedom within a society is to equalise the degree of freedom of citizens by taking away their individual forces, thereby making it impossible for individuals to limit other's liberty. In other words, the natural freedom can be interpreted as an individual pursuing their own needs - their independence - which, because of difference of strength and intelligence, would not be true freedom in a social community, while the civil freedom is pursuing the needs of the whole, and is the purest form of liberty within a social community, according to Rousseau. To simplify, with the general will, people will be 'forced to be free' (1762: 53).

The general will should be implemented as laws, and 'people subject to the laws ought to be their author' (1762: 67). This would indicate that Rousseau advocates that within the civil state, every citizen should have an influence on their laws, and thereby, play a political role in their government. In short, Rousseau's interpretation of freedom is ultimately a positive freedom, and is only limited by the laws that ensure the general good of the people.

This chapter will focus on tracing the notion, the scope, and understanding of liberty in several key documents of the French and American revolutions, while linking them to the key philosophers of the previous chapter. This is done to establish an understanding of the influence of their ideas on the crucial documents of the revolutions, its outcomes and the revolutions in general.

The American Revolution

The Declaration of Independence

The philosophical ideas of freedom and liberty are very clear in the American Declaration of Independence. The American people are described as ‘a free people,’ while the king’s crimes are described as ‘oppressions’ (*The Declaration of Independence*, 1776: 3). This by itself sets the tone that freedom is the main theme of the declaration.

Furthermore, since the declaration is concerning the rights of American independence, it is mainly the ideas of Thomas Paine which resonates in the document. In it, the founding fathers accuse the king of England of forcing Americans to a jurisdiction which is foreign to their constitution and to their laws (*Dec.*, 1776: 2). These are considered crimes if you follow the philosophies of Paine, which states that every nation has the right to create their own laws and legislature (*Dec.*, 1776). Furthermore, it states that their forms of governments have been altered – and even taken away from them, their laws abolished, and charters taken away (*Dec.*, 1776: 3). Once again, these can only be considered crimes if one adapts Paine’s philosophies that nations have the liberty to create their own government and to be independent.

Locke’s attribution to liberty is also very much present in the Declaration. The whole document is based on Locke’s philosophical

idea that a people have the right to oppose and change a government that is oppressing them, and not protecting their natural rights. They also adapt many key ideas from Locke, such as; all men being created equal (*Dec.*, 1776: 1), and that people have the rights of ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ and that these rights are inalienable (1776: 1), which is an adaptation with a slight alteration of Locke’s philosophy that every man has the god given, inalienable right to *life, liberty, and estate* (*Treat.*, 1689: B2, §135). With this, it is very evident that Locke’s ideas and arguments had a clear influence on the American revolution and its outcome.

In the opening paragraph, they even combine Locke’s law of nature (*Treat.*, 1776: B2, §4), with Paine’s idea of freedom of foreign states’ power (1776), to implement that it is by the law of nature that America has the rights of separation (*Dec.* 1776: 1). The idea of Liberty is a crucial theme in the declaration, and reason for the American independence; ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ (*Dec.*, 1776: 1).

The Constitution of the United States 1787, and the Bill of Rights 1791

Since the primary focus, and purpose, of the constitution was to establish the institutional structure and principles of governance, the idea and definition of freedom is not clearly defined nor developed in it. Nevertheless, it is clear that the constitution is implemented in order to ensure the liberty of the American people, and since creating a constitution of their own was one of the main outcomes of the American Revolution, it needs to be interpreted to assess the role of the idea of freedom. Liberty was the ‘principles of the constitution’ (Reid, 1988: 89). This is noticeable by several factors, most clearly by the opening that the constitution is established to ‘secure the Blessing of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity’ (*Constitution*, 1787: 186).

Even though the type of liberty is not clear in the Constitution, there are several laws and jurisdictions that resonate philosopher's idea of freedom. For example, Article VI states that Senators, Representatives, the Members of the several State legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers should never be required to fulfil any religious test to qualify for office of public trust (1787: 192). This law would mean that no person would be able to be held out of office for religious reasons, and is clearly established to ensure freedom of religion. However, it does not ensure that a person has faith, as Locke advocates. Nevertheless, prospect of freedom of religion, even for atheists, can be seen as a contemporary of the period interpretation and a modern adaptation of Locke's toleration of religion.

Nonetheless, arguably the mere establishment of a common constitution for all the states goes against Paine's notion of liberty, even if Paine advocated for a constitution (1776), since it limits the individual state's sovereignty. Several anti-federalist writings claimed that with a constitution, the government could act as a national government (Gerry et al., 1787-1788: 254), which would infringe individual rights and liberties according to Paine. Madison addresses and counters this issue in the *federalist papers*, where he states that the constitution is not fully federal, nor fully national, but a composition of both (Duer et al., *Selected*, 1787-1788: 184), since 'each State in ratifying the Constitution, is considered as a sovereign body independent of all others, and only to be bound by its own voluntary act' (*Selected*, 1787-1788: 184). Although more relevant to the French case, a common constitution of such a large country goes against Montesquieu's view that liberty and rights change according to the natural circumstances. Furthermore, according to Kammen, the constitution 'essentially protected slavery where it existed, and remained mute about the legality of slavery in territories that might one day become states' (1986: xviii), and since Locke sees slavery as the denial of full freedom (Kammen, 1986: xvii), it can either be argued that Locke's philosophy of liberty was not being considered, or that

liberty in general was less relevant. Furthermore, some of the anti-federalist writings note that the constitution would enforce the continuation of slavery and keep the slave trade legal at least until 1808 (Gerry et al., 1787-1788: 320-321). However, as previously stated, even with hypocrisy, an idea can play a crucial role; the constitution withholds and was written to engrave several laws binding people to their liberties and rights, even if it did not initially prevent slavery. Additionally, slavery is not mentioned in the Constitution of 1787. Since most of the founding father condemned slavery [Campbell, 2016: 29], and at the period implementing a common constitution was the top priority for the federalists, it is clear that slavery was deliberately not mentioned in the constitution to get the Southern States to agree to it, while not declaring the right of slaveholder, so that the issue could be tackled at a later stage in history (Spalding, 2002). Therefore, even if it can be argued to be limited, the philosophical idea of liberty is one of, if not the, most crucial theme of the constitution of 1787. Nevertheless, it differentiates from Paine's and Locke's forms of liberties, since it is in many ways implementing a positive liberty.

The Bill of Rights, were added to the constitution in 1791 as the first ten amendments. While also concerning laws to limit the powers of the government, they are more concerned with the protection of the individual's rights and liberties, and are largely based on principles of negative liberty. The first amendment states; 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof' (*Constitution*, 1787: 193). This enforces several philosophers' idea that liberty consists of freedom of religion. Freedom of speech and the press is also in the first amendment. Furthermore, it states that there should be no law to prevent people's right to 'peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievance' (*Constitution*, 1787: 193). Not only is this implemented to avoid oppression by the government, but also supports Paine's philosophy that freedom consists in having a voice in a person's government (Paine 1776). The second amendment is confirming the

American people's right to bear arms (*Constitution*, 1787: 193). This is an obvious interpretation of Locke's notion on the right to self-protection, and right to oppose oppression; 'Self-defence is a part of the law of nature; nor can it be denied the community, even against the king himself' (*Treat.*, 1689: B2, §233). This right to bear arms, was clearly implemented to ensure individuals liberty of safety from violence. Amendment five further supports this by declaring that no one should be deprived of 'life, liberty, or property, without due process of law' (*Constitution*, 1787: 194). Hence, it is clear that liberty is a key theme in the American constitution and the Bill of Rights. Since the constitution was one of the main outcomes of the revolution, it illustrates that the idea of liberty played a tremendous role in the American fight for independence.

The Federalist Papers, 1787-1788

The Federalist Papers are a set of articles written between 1787 and 1788 by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, and William Duer as part of public debate and in order to build support for a unified government and a common constitution (Kammen, 1986: 125). According to Kammen, they have been 'regarded as the most thorough and penetrating commentary on the U.S. Constitution' (1986: 125).

While most of the papers mainly revolve around other issues of the constitution, such as danger from foreign forces, military powers, reasons for declaring war, domestic faction and insurrection and many other themes (Hamilton et al., *Federalist*, 1787-1788: 3-5), they almost all come back to the notion of securing the nation's and individual's liberty. For example, in *The Federalist No. 1*, Hamilton approaches a debate on having a strong government by emphasising that the strength of the government, and a constitution, is crucial to securing liberty (Duer et al., 1787-1788: 128-129). In *The Federalist No. 9*, Hamilton also declares that having a unified American government would be a

tool to prevent domestic faction and insurrection, which would - again - ensure the preservation of liberty (Duer et al., 1787-1788: 140-141). In fact, according to *The Federalist Concordance*, the word Liberties has 34 occurrences and Liberty has 142 (Engeman, 1980: 302), illustrating how big a role the idea of liberty played in the 85 articles.

However, the type of liberty is never explicitly stated and the papers do not go into depth in describing which philosophical attribution they give liberty. According to Kammen, 'they meant civil liberty rather than natural liberty', which he characterises as natural liberty being unrestrained liberty, and civil liberty being freedom as long as it does not infringe on other's freedom and is beneficial to the common weal, and that when they spoke of political liberty they meant the 'freedom to be a participant, to vote, and to hold public office' (1986: ix). The distinction of natural and civil liberty fits Rousseau's approach to liberty, and illustrates the philosophical approach to liberty's role in the outcome of the American revolution.

However, the anti-federalists also advocated for the protection of personal liberties (Kammen, 1986: xvi). With this, one could argue that the idea of liberty did not contribute to the outcome of the revolution, but was simply added as a justification for other goals. Conversely, it can be argued, that the federalists advocated for a positive liberty, since they supported the implementation of the constitution, and the anti-federalists advocated for negative liberty, since they supported a more individualistic and smaller society based form of liberty. Furthermore, by reading a scope of the federalist papers, and the anti-federalist writings, it is clear that the preservation of liberty was truly the driving force for both sides. Thus, the disagreement ensued because of the discussion of the best means of ensuring liberty, rather than a disagreement about liberty, or the type of liberty. Therefore, even if what is meant by liberty is not clearly stated or developed, it is still clear that the philosophical idea of liberty was

one, if not the main, motive to unify the American government and to creating the constitution.

The French Revolution

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen 1789

When analysing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen from the 26th of August 1789, it is clear that it is inspired and founded on the basis of philosopher's ideas. The right and implementation of an individual's freedom/liberty is a crucial theme of the declaration. It is evident that Rousseau and Montesquieu's proclamation of freedom and its limits have guided the text's support of liberty.

In the opening paragraph, it is stated that; 'every political institution should be directed by the constitution and the 'happiness of all'' (*Declaration*, 1789: 26) The happiness of all, can clearly be associated with Rousseau's general will. In other words, the declaration uses Rousseau's thought that political institution should impose the general will. It suggests a positive freedom, since it is not the freedom from something, but rather enforced by something. This would also indicate that the declaration supports Rousseau's conventional freedom. Rousseau's ideas are also implemented in Article 1, where it is stated that 'men are born and remain free and equal in rights' and that, 'social distinction may be based only on considerations of the common good' (1789: 26). In other words; in order to implement Rousseau's general will. This is further supported by Article 6, which states that. 'the Law is an expression of the general will,' and that, 'all citizens have the right to take part, personally or through their representatives, in its making' (1789: 27). Article 6 is not only the implementation of the general will, but enforces Rousseau's ideology that every citizen should be the author of the law. Furthermore, Article 5 states that the Law can only forbid actions which damage the society, and no freedom that is not forbidden by the

law should be hindered (1789: 27). Since Rousseau states that the general will is the only law, and that the general will is what is best for society, it is clear that the declaration implements that there should only be laws that enforce the general will.

It is also clear that Montesquieu's philosophies played an important role in inspiring the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. All the rights and liberties of citizens stated in the declarations are expressed to be bound by law, which is a clear illustration of Montesquieu's influence. This is clear in Article 5, which states; 'no one may be compelled to do what the Law does not ordain' (1789: 27). Furthermore, Article 9 states that a person is innocent until proven guilty (1789: 27), which clearly supports Montesquieu's view that a person can only enjoy liberty if he lives in a state where he can defend his innocence. Furthermore, the declarations advocating for freedom of religion and opinion in Article 10, and freedom of speech in Article 11 (1789: 27), is also illustrative of Montesquieu's interpretation of liberty.

The Tennis Court Oath

The Tennis Court Oath, was the oath taken by the National Assembly in 1789, where they swore to remain assembled until the constitution of the realm was fixed (Baker, 1990: 252).

This oath has clear links to Rousseau and Montesquieu's respective views on freedom, - such as the representatives must fight for the public good (*Oath*, 1789), which could be analysed as the institutions working for the general wills in Rousseau's work, and that the National Assembly will have to establish a constitution, which is something Montesquieu advocates, and can be interpreted as a set of laws to ensure and set people's liberty. However, it also states that [they] will fight for the 'true principles of monarchy' (*Oath*, 1789). Advocating to have a king would be the same as to have a 'master' in a society, which Rousseau states that if this is the case, the general will cannot be

represented (1762: 57). Thereby, if the general will is set to implement the conventional liberty, if there is a master, or a monarchy, the conventional liberty cannot exist. However, this suggest one of the previously mentioned different interpretations and an inconsistent approach to Rousseau's philosophies, rather than implementing that they were not inspired by Rousseau. This issue, which limits the scope of the usage of Rousseau's aspect to liberty, is also present in the French Constitution of 1791.

The French Constitution of 1791

The general idea of Liberty is clearly supported by the French Constitution of 1791. This is clear by several statements, such as it will abolish 'irrevocably the institutions which were injurious to liberty and equality of rights' (The French *Constitution of 1791*, 1791: 1). Just as the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, and the Tennis Court Oath, the Constitution of 1791 in many ways enforces the idea of freedom of both Rousseau and Montesquieu.

The implementation of Montesquieu's liberty is clear by several statements, which fit Montesquieu's definition of freedom. For example; everyone should be taxed equally, the punishment should be fitting to the crime, and freedom of speech (*Constitution*, 1791: 1). Furthermore, it states that legislative power may not make laws that infringe natural and civil rights (*Constitution*, 1791: 2). This is clearly inspired by Montesquieu's assessment that laws should only enforce natural laws (1748: 185). It also supports Montesquieu's liberty by stating; 'Liberty consists of being able to do only whatever is not injurious to the rights of others or public security' (*Constitution*, 1791: 2). These, and many other examples, illustrates that the French constitution of 1791 was heavily influenced by Montesquieu, and would suggest that the philosophical idea of liberty played a role in creating the circumstances of the revolution.

One of its clear links to Rousseau's interpretation of freedom, is that it states that the Sovereign should concern with the good of the nation - the political body, and should not be exercised by any individual, nor section of the nation (*Constitution*, 1791: 3). This prevents individuals to pursue their personal will, and secures the freedom of the political body. However, the issue of implementing Rousseau's notion of freedom is that the constitution implements the king to the government and to the law. The king is stated to be the 'supreme head of the general administration of the kingdom; the task of supervising the maintenance of public order and tranquillity is entrusted to him' (*Constitution*, 1791: 24). While his powers might be limited, it would still suggest that the state has a master, and this would make Rousseau's general will, and thereby civil liberty, impossible (Rousseau, 1762: 57).

Having citizens proclaim the civic oath, where they 'swear to be faithful to [...] the king' (*Constitution*, 1791: 3), goes against Montesquieu's notion that the law should be the only boundary to a person's liberty (Montesquieu, 1748: 150). If a person is faithful to the king, he could arguably be conflicted between following the law, or following the king. To sum up, it is clear that several philosophes' ideas and arguments are reflected in these documents; however, they are put in practice in a theoretically inconsistent fashion.

Conclusion

The precise role of the idea of liberty is complex and challenging to assess in both the French and American Revolution. As this study illustrates, approaches to the issue varies greatly; having some highlight liberty as an important, even the core factor, while others diminishing it to a state of non-importance to the cause. The investigated documents at times suggest an inconsistent and conflicting

adaption of the philosophies. Nevertheless, they attribute tremendous attention to the notion of liberty, having it as a key theme in all the documents, and it is clear that its notion of liberty is influenced by philosophers' ideas; even if its adaption may be inconsistent or even hypocritical. Therefore, since it is clear that the philosophical idea of liberty played a crucial role in the key documents, and that these documents were in fact the most crucial legacies of the revolutions, it can, and should, be argued that the idea of liberty was inspired by philosophers' writings and a major contributor to both revolutions. The general literature on the causes of the French and American revolution, and on revolutions in general, is split on its emphasis on the role of ideas. While interpretations of other causes and driving forces for revolutions are not necessarily inconsequential, the unifying power that the philosophical idea of liberty introduced to both revolutions, gave the people a common cause. Thus, Sewell's previously mentioned consensus, that social relations are fundamentally ideological relations, is clearly demonstrated with the American and French case. Ideologies and ideas allowed people to come together to fight for a greater cause, rather than having a society split with several individual grievances. Hence, the idea of liberty, played a crucial role in both the American and French Revolution, suggesting that ideas are significant for political change.

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