

Freedom and the Necessity of Political Courage

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Abstract

Drawing a distinction between ancient and modern freedom, I advocate for a reconstituted and updated ancient conception of freedom, highlighting the important role of political courage within that conception, in order to address some of the pitfalls of strongly individualistic, modern conceptions of freedom. Outlining different theories of freedom, I focus on Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes as central to characterizing the debate between ancient and modern freedom, respectively. Examining John Lewis, Lyndon B. Johnson, and John Adams as case studies, I analyze real-world examples of political courage and their implications for freedom. In sum, I argue that political courage has the potential to allow for the further exercise of freedom in modern times, with implications ranging from increased equality to the improvement of civic activity.

Keywords: Freedom, courage, Aristotle, Hobbes, ancient and modern freedom

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Freedom and courage are words that are widely lauded but rarely understood. We place profound significance upon these words, yet their conceptions differ greatly, causing varying meaning in our political life. In this paper, I will attempt to make clear the necessity of political courage and courageous actions in being free. I will draw a distinction between ancient and modern conceptions of freedom, highlighting the problematic elements of both stances. I argue that freedom, as conceived in modernity, presents significant shortcomings to modern political issues. I attempt to reconstitute and update an ancient conception of freedom, highlighting the important role of political courage within that conception, in order to address some of the pitfalls of strongly individualistic, modern conceptions of freedom.

One of the most difficult questions surrounding the issue of freedom and courage is the common understanding of the terms themselves. Over centuries, the terms have evolved to mean different things in philosophical and political thought. In his 1819 essay, Benjamin Constant draws an important distinction between ancient and modern freedom (used here interchangeably as liberty). He states:

the aim of the ancients was the sharing of social power among the citizens of the same fatherland: this is what they called liberty. The aim of the moderns is the enjoyment of security in private pleasures; and they call liberty the guarantees accorded by institutions to these pleasures.¹

Constant points out that ancient freedom is, at its essence, a public, participatory *verb*, in which, members of a state share in power. While this was suitable to the ancient man, he states, “Because we live in modern times, I want a liberty suited for modern times.”² Modern freedom,

¹ Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns,” 6.

² Ibid. 10

he asserts, is one of a private nature—totally different than the ancient. Ancient freedom is centered on action and the ability, as a community, to deliberate and decide political matters with fellow citizens. Modern freedom is concerned with securing rights in the private sphere. It is the ability to pursue physical desires individually, unfettered, and without judgement, within the bounds of the law. It is measured in restrictions to action and desire, not the action in and of itself.

Connected to the ancient/modern distinction of Constant is the distinction between Isaiah Berlin's positive and negative freedom.³ Negative freedom, as discussed by Berlin, is generally accepted as the lack of interference. Largely following Thomas Hobbes' understanding (addressed in greater detail later), to be “negatively” free is to have no impediments in order to physically act as you please. This idea is the bedrock of much of modern thought, and underlines our modern conception of freedom. Positive freedom, in contrast, stems from “the wish of the individual to be his own master.”⁴ To be “positively” free is to engage in action in a particular way, sometimes understood in terms of autonomy. In Berlin's explanation, he describes the notion of positive liberty as the consciousness of one's self, one's thoughts, and bearing the responsibility for choices made in the context of those thoughts and rationale.⁵ This was the sole interpretation of freedom from the ancients—individuals living and acting together, having control over themselves, making decisions together for the improvement of their own community and political situation.

While positive and negative freedom are not congruous with ancient and modern freedom, examining the distinction sheds light upon the ancient/modern divide. We reside in

³ Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*.

⁴ Ibid. 131.

⁵ Ibid. 131.

modern times, where the negative concept of liberty has largely won the day, and with it has come many qualities that large portions of society would call beneficial: fundamental natural, and inalienable rights, limited government intervention, etc. I will not argue that all of the aspects of modern liberty, from a negative perspective, are deleterious. Instead, I will focus on what we may lose by focusing solely upon and privileging the negative conception, forgetting the beneficial aspects of positive freedom, exemplified by the richness of political life in the ancient world.

Encapsulated in this distinction between ancient and modern freedom is a fundamental difference in understanding of what it means to be human in varying historical contexts. Constant argues that ancients were continuously monitored and subject to popular opinion, unable to choose for themselves religion, profession, and other private activities. The collective free decisions of the public overrode, and in Constant's mind subjugated, the individual to the collective. Ancients understood their status as humans in many ways defined by the participation in and contribution to public life. Moderns, Constant argues, have learned lessons from the horrors of war and lack of privacy, and thus maintain the need for a more appropriate modern conception of freedom. The moderns, he argues, have experienced governments "harsh, repressive in their effects, absurd in their principles, wretched in action; with personal decision of the monarch as their final court of appeal; with belittling of mankind as their purpose."⁶ Constant, in the context of the time he is writing, has the memory of the French Revolution, with the impropriety of "collective" choice, the lack of individual dignity, and the lack of political autonomy, fresh upon his mind. This context leads him to the conclusion that the modern person loves individual independence and is defined by his level of autonomy in the private sphere. He

⁶ Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," 6.

argues that due to the proliferation of large states, the abolition of slavery, and the irreversible progress of commerce, people innately gravitate towards the impersonal and private and are unable to be removed from the calling of their personal business affairs.⁷ Thus, Constant argues, there has been a paradigm shift away from liberty as conceived by the ancients.

However, Constant recognizes some of the shortcomings of modern freedom that I will criticize throughout this thesis. Could it be that we have become so invested and enthralled in our own business that we forgo our collective wisdom and benefits? To be fair, Constant warns us not to forget the political power and fulfillment of an ancient version of freedom. However, we lose some richness in our lives when viewing ourselves as completely cut off and underappreciating our dependence on one another. The fear of despotism, tyranny, and loss of negative freedom leaves us lonely and cold, with none of the richness of a community and understanding of commonality between members of a society. We put ourselves in danger insofar as we end up in a place where we can no longer communicate, deliberate, and be truly free.

I argue that in the shift to the relative importance placed upon private, individualistic forms of negative freedom, while we gain many benefits, we also lose something—an interconnectedness, interdependence, and common understanding. We lose some of the capacity to deliberate, seek the heart of issues of shared concern, and even moderately disagree. While, as Constant argues, there are gains to the modern conception of freedom, it does not come without its costs.

What is a contemporary citizen to do in the face of public apathy and lack of community—a loss of the richness and understanding that ancient freedom brings? I will argue

⁷ Ibid. 4.

that an understanding of political courage and courageous acts, especially in the context of ancient, participatory freedom, offers a fruitful response to some of the shortcomings associated with a modern, private, spectatorial conception of freedom. Courage, as I will use it in a specifically political context, is best described in the ancient sense by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as noble action when one is unsure of all possible outcomes or consequences, *or* when one understands the outcome but it is injurious or unfavorable to the actor. I argue that political courage has innumerable applications to modern life, from speaking in public fora to standing up for the oppressed. I will argue that this courage is necessarily active, and the only way one may acquire and cultivate it is by practice and performance of courageous activities. These courageous political acts allow for a direct response to the shortcomings stemming from an elevation of private, individual life. Political courage calls for calculated and thoughtful risk-taking, stepping out of our individual realities into the public eye for the betterment of ourselves and our fellow citizenry in pursuit of the good.

Ultimately, I will argue that courage allows us to better deliberate about the good, make appropriate and informed choices, and act based upon virtuous behavior cultivated through continual personal and communal growth. Courage gives us the opportunity, in the face of strong modern individuality, to deliberate and act upon the good in concert with fellow citizens, and in doing so, exercise a greater degree of freedom than if we were to operate entirely within the framework of negative freedom. My intention is not to romanticize the past, but to recognize the benefits that modern freedom affords, arguing that courage is our key to the benefits enjoyed by the ancients while we remain within the paradigm of modern freedom.

The remainder of the thesis will take the form of three chapters. Using Constant's dichotomy as an organizing principal between ancient and modern freedom, I will distinguish

different elements of and conditions for each type of freedom. First, I will explain the ancient conception, drawing upon Aristotle's *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* and Pericles' funeral oration in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, with a discussion of relevant secondary literature. In the second section, I will explain the modern responses to the ancient conception, drawing from Hobbes' *Leviathan* and recent political theorists that build upon his argument. In the final section, I will elucidate, using modern case studies, the shortcomings of an impersonal, individual understanding of what it means to be free and the importance of political courage in freedom. I will argue that through an understanding of political courage, courageous individuals, and courageous actions, a superior realization of freedom can be achieved.

I: Ancient Freedom

In describing an “ancient” conception of freedom, it is useful to first define what I mean by the expression “ancient.” The focus of this thesis will be the Western tradition, understanding that many other traditions have valuable and unique answers to the question of what it means to be free. In defining where modernity begins, it is useful to utilize Constant's dichotomy, relying upon historically descriptive elements to distinguish between ancient and modern freedom, temporally marking the point of distinction, broadly speaking, beginning in the Renaissance and articulated in iconic texts during this period such as Machiavelli's *The Prince*.⁸ For the ancient conception, I will focus upon ancient Greece because of the level and richness of freedom many citizens enjoyed and what these experiences can tell us about modern life.⁹ When examining ancient freedom, Aristotle's *Politics* is a natural place to begin due to its astute articulation of

⁸ Ibid. 1.

⁹ I fully understand and acknowledge the subjugation of many classes of people in ancient Greece and the problematic nature of some of Aristotle's writings read in the context of a modern, liberal society. With this being said, I focus on the beneficial aspects of the ancient Greek's freedom, relying on modern scholars later in the section to draw the extremely powerful ideas and lessons found within Aristotle without advocating for his philosophy wholesale.

freedom and its centrality in ancient political thought. Book I speaks to how the ancients understood freedom and its contribution to political life, and Books II-VIII provide context and meaning for freedom in the ancient sense. In these books, Aristotle describes the conditions one must fulfill in order to be free, and then describes freedom by focusing on action in civic and public life, wherein citizens can govern and improve one another in the pursuit of the good life.

Aristotle on Freedom

Aristotle begins his explanation of freedom by describing some basic assumptions about his argument and how the community (*koinonia*) is organized, which is necessary to understand because ancient freedom centers around interactions and decisions in communities. The first lines of the *Politics* states:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.¹⁰

This quote shows that ancient regimes dictated the ends to which subordinate relationships were directed. Unlike modern communities (which force little to no opinion of the ends of societal organization and instead focus on the protection of rights), ancient regimes articulated the end of the common good to which citizens and partnerships followed.¹¹ This interconnected and interdependent concept of a state, in which individuals, as citizens, come together to form a compound unit, is critical to understanding Aristotle's notion of what it means to be free. Because individuals gather together in the state in order to pursue what is good, the state is

¹⁰ Aristotle, *The Politics*. Book I, 1, 1252a1.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Book VII, 15, 1334a.

collectively the highest expression of such a pursuit of the community's highest good. The state represents an amalgamation of the actions and will of all those inside of it, and corporally the state works, as the people do as individuals, to pursue the good and become something greater than any single member may become on his own. Because of this common desire for deliberating and making good judgments about what is in the common good, the state becomes of critical importance in everyday life, and the process of deliberation and corporal decision making become key components of freedom.

In addition to the state, Aristotle makes the observation that individual human units cannot exist alone, prompting a freedom that, at its heart, requires the concert of multiple actors. Aristotle justifies this interconnected, natural state of freedom stating, "The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole."¹² He later explains that man is not a "man", but rather a "beast or a god", if he can survive without the fellowship and benefit provided from the community.¹³ Aristotle writes that this dependence on one another for well-being and moral, political improvement is inevitable, stating "men, even when they do not require one another's help, desire to live together; not but that they are also brought together by their common interests in proportion as they severally attain to any measure of well-being."¹⁴ According to Aristotle, men are not meant to be alone and cannot fulfill their purpose (i.e. practice of the virtues and pursuit of the good) in individual isolation.¹⁵ In that, they require the

¹² Ibid. Book I, 2, 1253a25

¹³ Ibid. Book I, 2, 1253a27.

¹⁴ Ibid. Book III, 6, 1278b20

¹⁵ On the point of purpose and our pursuit of the good life, see Strauss' discussion of Hobbes and Locke in *Natural Right and History*, Ch. V. Strauss rightly characterizes human purpose in Hobbes' and Locke's philosophy as "the fear of fear by the fear which relieves us from fear" and "the pain which relieves pain" (250). Because of these atomistic, negative, physical conceptions of purpose, Strauss suggests that humans end up in a "joyless quest for joy" (251), instead of experiencing the journey of the continual joint fulfillment of purpose that Aristotle describes in *Politics*.

communion of fellow men to exercise freedom. Aristotle envisions life as one in which people come together to form communities and states with the focus on the practice of the virtues and the pursuit of the good. These states are the highest expression of human beings in the search for the good, and collectively, can achieve what individuals cannot, and therefore are of central importance in the life of every citizen. Aristotle holds that humans are not naturally meant to be alone, and therefore some sort of relationship, whether it be that of friends or citizens, is inevitable and unnatural to suppress.

In an Aristotelian society, basic conditions and assumptions must be met before conceiving of a situation in which freedom can be exercised. Equality of parties is a key first assumption in understanding how the ancients conceptualized freedom.¹⁶ While Aristotle mentions many types of equality, the necessary equal condition for freedom is one of men *as citizens* in a government or polis. Aristotle understands that total equality is unattainable and even undesirable, stating men “ought not to attain this greatest unity even if we could, for it would be the destruction of the state. Again, a state is not made up only of so many men, but of different kinds of men; for similars do not constitute a state.”¹⁷ It is not in the ways in which men are unequal that is of central importance, but instead their equality as citizens. Because men are equal in the eyes of the *polis*, they are then able to equally participate so that they may equally contribute (or have the ability to) to debate. Because civic activity and participation are

¹⁶ It is important to note that Aristotle advocated equality in a way that is incomplete and insufficient to modernity and did not hold women, slaves, or certain types of workers to be equal, and thus able to take part in politics.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book II, 2, 1261a22; For a strong argument of the necessity of diversity and the absurdity of uniformity in societal life, see Plato, *The Republic*, Book V., in which Socrates makes the argument that all spouses and children should be held communally as to promise the unity of the city. While some unity may be desired, individuals must have some form of particularity and ownership, because without this, they are unlikely to care and effectively participate in the public sphere. In reference to freedom, deliberation necessitates, at its basest level, difference of opinions. So while some unity may be desirable among a community, plurality and difference are what actually allow individuals within it to exercise freedom. In this, freedom is privileged over unity and harmony.

crucial to Aristotelian freedom, it is necessary that men must be equal as citizens before becoming and acting free.

Aristotle also describes a basic level of property and leisure time that men must have to have to contribute to society and become free. Men must not be entirely focused upon where their next meal will come from, and they cannot be so engulfed with bodily necessities that they are unable to participate in political life.¹⁸ Additionally, Aristotle warns against unbridled, self-interested hoarding of resources as harmful to freedom, stating:

Those who do aim at a good life seek the means of obtaining bodily pleasures; and, since the enjoyment of these appears to depend on property, they are absorbed in getting wealth: and so there arises the second species of wealth-getting. For, as their enjoyment is in excess, they seek an art which produces the excess of enjoyment; and, if they are not able to supply their pleasures by the art of getting wealth, they try other arts, using in turn every faculty in a manner contrary to nature.¹⁹

In the passage, Aristotle offers that those solely interested and driven by the desire for material accumulation will be consumed by those desires and unable to participate in public life. Further, he explains, “a man may live temperately and yet miserably. A better definition would be that a man must have so much property as will enable him to live not only temperately but liberally; if the two are parted, liberality will combine with luxury; temperance will be associated with toil.”²⁰ Aristotle thus claims that to be free, citizens should have the requisite resources such that

¹⁸ Again, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Ch. II, The Public and Private Realms. Arendt, like Aristotle, sees the private realm as the realm of necessity, where physical, biological needs are met. Freedom, in contrast, necessitates the conquering and submission of these instinctual impulses, allowing for participation in public life. Because freedom is tied to speech and action in a public setting, for Arendt, it is impossible to be truly “free” in the private sphere. Because humans are naturally subject to these impulses, extreme vigilance is required to protect and guard freedom from the impulses and desires of necessity. For an excellent commentary on Arendt’s passage on necessity, see Gottsegen, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, pg. 36-40.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *The Politics*. Book I, 9, 1258a3.

²⁰ *Ibid.* Book II, 6, 1265a32.

they do not have to constantly be subject to the impulse of gathering physical necessities.

Furthermore, Aristotle goes a step further, claiming that to be free, citizens should not become obsessed with accumulation of material things, due to the obsessions' ability to wholly prevent taking part in public life.

Moreover, the concept of rule and adherence to a constitution is necessary in understanding how ancient freedom prevents tyranny of the majority and rash public opinion. To Aristotle, freedom is not the absence or lack of rule, but to “rule and (be) ruled according to nature.”²¹ In this, Aristotle focuses on the fulfillment of a citizen's role and function, emphasizing that these are always actively changing and contextual. In talking about the ruling responsibilities of a citizen, Aristotle states, “the citizen whom we are seeking to define is a citizen in the strictest sense, against whom no such exception can be taken, and his special characteristic is that he shares in the administration of justice,”²² and that “the good citizen ought to be capable of both; he should know how to govern like a freeman, and how to obey like a freeman—these are the virtues of a citizen.”²³ Citizens should have the capacity to rule over themselves and others with the understanding that this rule must be reciprocal and not plagued by drastic inequalities if it is to be considered free.

Aristotelian rule and action is based upon a constitutional framework which guides individual and collective action in the polis. Ossified customs, cultures, laws, communities and institutions, enduring over many years, form the constitution.²⁴ It orders the polis, provides a framework by which everyday society operates, and is the essence of the existence of the polis. So, while a marker and prerequisite of freedom is the ability to rule and be ruled, it is not an

²¹ Ibid. Book I, 13, 1260a8.

²² Ibid. Book III, 1, 1275a19.

²³ Ibid. Book III, 1277b13

²⁴ Ibid. Book II, 1, 1260b Book III, 4, 1276b, Book VII, 13, 1331b.

unbridled, rash rule.²⁵ Instead, it is rule that operates within the boundaries of the constitution, simultaneously restrained and active.

Within the framework and boundaries of the constitution, citizens are allowed to engage in action. This idea is critical, as Aristotle states succinctly, “life is action,” and ancient freedom is based around acting in ways which a free person would act.²⁶ Aristotle offers a couple of key concepts that drastically differ from a modern individualistic, negative conception of freedom. First, equality as citizens is necessary because it allows for all to begin on a relatively equal playing field for the deliberation and pursuit of the good. Second, men must have physical means to have the time to participate in determining the public good, not tangled up in the constant worry and fight for life’s basic necessities. Third, men must have the ability in the state to rule and be ruled within the framework of a constitution, consistently fulfilling each political role as to not upset balances of power. This allows deliberation among citizens, partaking in activity in the public life, and ruling in turn, which Aristotle sees as constituting the exercise of freedom. This is not an inactive right which one puts in their back pocket, but rather an active state of being. This deliberation brings about a practical, political wisdom that is necessary for good political judgment and the functioning of the democracy.

Aristotle’s work in the *Politics* summarizes the essence of ancient freedom: it is a relational, communal activity whereby citizens come together to deliberate, ruling and being ruled in turn. In the state (considered a deduction of the highest good), humans are considered “a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of deliberate purpose, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them

²⁵ Ibid. Book II, 8, 1267b.

²⁶ Ibid. Book I, 4, 1254a7.

an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved.”²⁷ These sociable relationships lead to the development of partnerships, eventually culminating in the self-sufficient polis. For Aristotle, the cooperation between private and public life is natural, inescapable, and good: the state, which is composed of communities and ordered groups which are centered around “a view to some good”, is the highest manifestation of such good. This, as I will show in the next chapter, is in contrast with the modern state, which attempts to divorce the relationship between man and the public community, neglecting man’s natural sociability, and thus, a significant part of their nature as human beings, necessarily resulting in less happiness and freedom. Aristotle shows that ancient freedom is centered on certain conditions that ultimately let citizens “rule and be ruled” and contribute to public life.²⁸ Citizens constantly make decisions for themselves and participate in public life, experiencing the compounded collective effects and knowledge of the pursuit of the public good. In public action and deliberation, citizens are making decisions for themselves collectively and pursuing the good. In this action, the citizens are free.

Aristotle’s Contemporary Applications

Aristotle theorizes within the confines of the ancient world, unable to foresee modern issues, idiosyncrasies, and philosophies, frequently being written off by modern political philosophers as inapplicable to modern society.²⁹ However, his philosophy and fundamental ideas can be applied to a modern context. Jill Frank’s *Democracy of Distinction* offers a method by which to take the fundamental ideas found within *Politics* and apply them to a modern context, with profound implications for what it means to be free. Frank’s work centers upon

²⁷ Ibid. Book I, 1, 1252a30.

²⁸ Ibid. Book I, 12, 1259b5.

²⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Ch. 15; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Ch. XI.

freedom and Aristotelian ideas, such as the identity of humans, role of property, administration of justice, and rule of law. Drawing upon Frank's modernization of key Aristotelian concepts, I look to political courage as a specific virtue to add color to our understanding of politics and freedom.

Frank offers a nuanced understanding of human nature crucial to understanding the merits of ancient freedom in a modern context. Instead of drawing separation between the private realm of nature and the public realm of society and civil relationships, Frank offers a view of Aristotelian nature that is "a measure of a polity and as itself a question of politics."³⁰ In this, instead of isolating actions surrounding decision-making in the "political" realm, they are now held at the center of individuals' lives. Public and private barriers are rare in the firm, modern, liberal sense, not because of a disbelief in privacy, but because it is acknowledged that what goes on in private ultimately affects the public, and vice-versa. The political aspects of human nature therefore become entangled in our understanding of being—in general, we are not to understand ourselves politically as escaping nature, but living in the thick of it, responsible for all parts of what makes us human. Frank argues that this view of nature is absolutely central to understanding the *Politics*, as Aristotle places great importance on it because it informs his true purpose: to draw the distinction between the free and unfree human being.³¹

As mentioned above, possessing and expressing equality as citizens is central to experiencing freedom in an ancient sense. However, a closer look at Aristotle's understanding of what constitutes a citizen, following Frank, is central to recuperating Aristotle's ancient thoughts for modern contexts. In understanding the importance placed upon Aristotelian action (*energeia*), one can reveal Aristotle's full conception of what being a citizen entails. Aristotle, in focusing on

³⁰ Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*. 19.

³¹ *Ibid.* 18.

what makes one a citizen, offers that it is acting like one, or “a citizen is a citizen in (being understood in terms as) *acting* as a citizen.”³² Citizenship is not based on location, birth, ancestry or blood. Rather, a citizen is one who partakes in the political process by ruling, judging, deliberating, and being ruled in turn. As opposed to some common modern conceptions of citizenship, citizens are not those with or without wealth, they are not those that are of a certain ethnicity or nationality, etc. For Aristotle, being a citizen is not about static, absolute qualities, instead, the status of citizen is dynamic and activity-based. A citizen is simply a citizen because they choose to act as a citizen would act. Frank places our focus upon the active and cyclical nature of Aristotelian citizenship, opening the door for a definition based on the action of a citizen, which instills in them particular habits conducive for exercising freedom, not simply a binary or absolute distinction.

It is not enough, Frank argues, for citizens simply to engage in action to be free. Instead, using their unique qualities as human beings, including *logos*, reasoning, capacity for speech and reason-based judgment, and intellectual and moral virtue, citizens must engage in particular types of activity to qualify as free: namely engaging in what she defines as *prohairesis activity*.³³ Prohairesis activity, from the Greek *prohairesis*, meaning “according to thoughtful or deliberate choice,” is a method of action that combines physical action and cultivating one’s character, disposition, and habits through contemplative deliberation, using our unique emotional and reasoning skills as humans.³⁴ Instead of acting rashly without thought or virtue, prohairesis activity entails a human making a deliberative choice to act, in Frank’s words, in something that can be “useful and harmful, just and unjust, and good and bad.”³⁵ Because of the activity’s focus

³² Ibid. 22.

³³ Ibid. 33.

³⁴ Ibid. 33.

³⁵ Ibid. 33.

on both logic and emotion, it allows for both premeditated discrimination of what action is virtuous or noble, the appropriate choice of action in the moment, and the possession of the proper emotional responses to those choices. Prohairetic activity reveals character, virtuosity, and the ability of reason insomuch as a person acts in a manner that is becoming of a human. Because humans, and no other animals, have the ability to thoughtfully choose between what they take to be better or worse for them, and are not mere slaves to instinctual behavior as are other social animals (e.g. bees³⁶), prohairetic activity sets us apart and allows us to come together and participate in just rule. We are able to enjoy just rule because prohairetic activity entails reason ruling the soul, cultivating virtues accordingly, leading individuals to the capacity to rule themselves while still living together in interdependent communities.³⁷ Prohairetic activity aids in understanding Aristotle's conception of freedom by illuminating the importance of a combination of judgment and thoughtful action based upon continual practice, especially as it concerns reasoned action and cultivating particular civic habits in concert with others.

In the context of Aristotle's *Politics*, it is helpful to imagine how one, by Frank's argument, might *not* be free. By consistently failing to engage in prohairetic activity, one can no longer live a "life based on choice," but instead has decisions made for them by someone who has the capacity to make a choice based upon logos and thoughtful deliberation.³⁸ While this is not at first apparent, the lack of the ability to choose is nonetheless true, not only in the context of another *person* making the decision for the unfree, but also in the context of a potential *desire*, such as the that of the desire for wealth, instead making the decision for the unfree. Instead of a modern sense, in which those that are not afforded physical freedom of movement are slaves, a

³⁶ See *Politics*, Book I, Part 2, 1253a.

³⁷ Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, 159.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 37.

person that is coerced or captured against their will and is not necessarily a slave (they could still, possibly, have the capacity for virtuous behavior and prohairesis activity). Similarly, those that might be coerced, captured, or controlled by that which is not physical, such as money, food, power, etc., may not necessarily be free, although they are allowed to pursue those desires unfettered. This is because the desires, instead of the individual's thought and reasoning based upon virtuous character, are making the decision (i.e. ruling). In this distinction, Frank takes a nuanced view of Aristotle's text: when something keeps one from engaging in prohairesis, thoughtful action, whether that be spiritual, mental, physical, or psychological, that person is not free. On the other hand, when one does engage in knowledgeable action *despite* that which might discourage or hinder them, such as the physical, mental, and emotional obstacles and vices we encounter each day, they are free. Frank's idea of prohairesis activity is a powerful example of the nuanced interplay of action, deliberation, and virtue that are necessary for ancient freedom.

Frank explains how virtue friendships are often overlooked as examples of a relationships in which one engages in prohairesis activity and exercises freedom; therefore, I will use such friendships to illuminate my stance throughout the thesis.³⁹ True friends, she states, are not those that are alike in all things—they have many different, plural qualities and interests. They are not those that are selfish by taking too much from the relationship or each other, because this would constitute becoming enslaved by one's baser tendencies, such as greed, food, pleasure, etc. Alternatively, true friends do not neglect their own personal desires and always act solely in their friend's best interest, becoming subjugated to his friend.⁴⁰ Instead, it is the ability of interaction between the two, knowing that each can come together and be their own person, yet also share

³⁹ For an excellent overview of the profound implications friendship can have for politics, see P.E. Digeser's *Friendship Reconsidered: What It Means and How It Matters to Politics*.

⁴⁰ Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*. 159.

and simultaneously improve one another, whether that be physically, in the case of material support, intellectually, in the case of ideas, or emotionally, in the case of feelings, without one becoming enslaved to the other.⁴¹ Among true friends, freedom is exemplified. Each person is an individual yet neither person is subjugated to the other. They both share physical and intellectual gifts within the relationship, constantly sharpening one another, making each other more virtuous, and aiding on their path to their conception of the good life. Given their virtuous nature, they come together and create something greater, a friendship, that transcends atomized individual interests and isolation. This relationship in many ways is comparable to individuals and the state: individuals share what is “theirs” with one another in the state—especially their talent and propensity to participate in politics and rule—without being enslaved or unfree, or unable to express their plural interests or desires. In this union of the state, the individuals are something greater than that which is achieved alone, and are more equipped to pursue the good life and enjoy freedom.

The key to this relationship, and central to Frank and Aristotle’s theory, is thoughtful activity that is backed by knowledge, practice, and experience, further guided by virtuous motives.⁴² It is not enough just to be thoughtful and philosophize about what is virtuous, nor is it enough to act rashly or instinctively as animals on impulse or prompt. It is necessary to couple the two: thoughtfulness in cultivating character by sharing and challenging one another, with mindful effort in attempting to live properly. In this, individuals are able, as we described in the

⁴¹ Ibid. 159.

⁴² See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, for a discussion of the “virtuous” in the context of Aristotle’s argument. MacIntyre looks to Aristotle and classical thought for answers to many of the problems of the modern world, arguing for a renewed version of virtue theory and understanding of telos. MacIntyre characterizes virtuous behavior as follows: “The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* (the good life) and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos*” (148).

previous section, to “rule and be ruled”, share but not be joined as one, engage in public life and the pursuit of the good, and be free.

Role of Courage for Freedom

I will build on Frank’s reading of Aristotle by claiming that the application beneficial aspects of Aristotelian freedom to the paradigm of modern, liberal society involves the centrality of political courage and courageous actions in civic and political life. Courage, as described by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is a “mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence.”⁴³ However, it is clear that Aristotle is not insinuating simply a “middle ground” or average of fear and confidence, resulting in an inadequate mix of the two, nor fear or confidence in the context of any and all situations. Instead, courage is a unique and independent virtue, resulting from specific action in specific scenarios. Courage is recognizing and harnessing fear for what it is, but then acting as one should (with the correct motive) in the face of this fear. Aristotle lays out four situations that do *not* constitute courage:⁴⁴

- Acting with confidence in the face of danger due to legal obligations or from fear of a greater punishment
- Acting confident due to prior experience or results, which is not necessarily indicative of rapidly changing situations
- Confidence as a result of ignorance of the nature of situation one is facing.
- Passion disguised as confidence, or as another harmful emotion such as lust, anger or greed, which causes one to act rashly without understanding

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. 3.6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 3.6-3.9.

In describing what is not courage, Aristotle calls into question what popular opinion may find courageous. Under the guise of courage, is a politician taking a stand on a contentious issue, whose true motive is press coverage and personal political gain, acting courageously? I would suggest not in Aristotle's eyes. While this situation involves action in the face of risk, it suffers from a lack of proper motive or sufficient understanding of the context/dangers of the situation. In a modern context, courage can be properly interpreted as noble action, with a virtuous motive, in situations that satisfy two conditions: (1) when one is unsure of the possible outcomes or consequences, *or* (2) when one understands the outcome but it is injurious or unfavorable to the actor.

Political courage and courageous actions allows one to exhibit freedom in an ancient sense. One may risk great things in public and civic participation: rejection, reputation, economic security, social standing, and in some countries, even death. Facing these risks with *fear* is normal and expected, but when fully understood and acted upon while considering the risks, one exhibits courage. In this exhibition of courage, the individual participates in public life, acts, and truly adds something that would likely not be revealed were it not for their courageous action.⁴⁵ Courage is crucial to realizing many of the benefits of ancient freedom in a modern world.

For example, in *Courage and the Democratic Polis*, Ryan Balot provides a thorough and novel account of the role that courage plays in being free in ancient Athens. Balot argues that courage was linked with the ancient Athenian ideal of democratic freedom, innovation, equality,

⁴⁵ See Arendt's discussion of natality and miracles in *The Human Condition*. Specifically, Ch. V, section 34 claims that without an understanding of natality and action (which, courageous political action, I claim, is especially effective) humans can be caught in a "ever-recurring cycle of becoming, then without the faculty to undo what we have done and to control at least partially the processes we have let loose," leading to "carry everything human to ruin and destruction." However, Arendt claims that through an understanding of natality and action, humans may escape this cycle, experiencing the "miracle" of new human creation, stating that: "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the tact of natality." Therefore, in an act of political courage, one, in Arendtian terms, presents the possibility to escape the inescapable cycle of human nature, by bringing something new (i.e. an idea, institution, philosophy, etc.) into existence.

and rational deliberation, defining courage as “an intrinsically worthwhile excellence of character, on the basis of which ethical agents knowingly strive to overcome difficult, dangerous, painful or frightening obstacles or uncertainty, with a view of achieving noble ends.”⁴⁶ Much like my own definition, Balot’s interpretation of courage revolves around rational and temperate knowledge and understanding in the face of difficult, yet worthwhile situations.⁴⁷

Perhaps the best exhibition of this freedom and courage as understood by Aristotle, Frank, and Balot is Pericles’ funeral oration in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Not only is the sheer act of Pericles’ speech an accurate example of ancient freedom, his focus on Athens and her worth also highlights the interdependent nature of the collective and individual in ancient freedom, and the importance of courageous action in becoming free and maintaining freedom. Pericles first addresses the gathering, making an argument that Athens is a unique community that fosters greatness and happiness among its people: it is democratic, just, meritocratic, cosmopolitan, lawful, and fruitful.⁴⁸ Pericles views the society and richness of life that Athens produces to be so valuable, and so dependent on the public, interconnected nature of the city, that one should voluntarily give up certain aspects of his/her private life and individualism in order reap the benefits of a shared society.⁴⁹ In this voluntary sacrifice of some forms of individual privacy and negative freedoms, the true means by which one may become free—including courage, self-mastery, and the ability to judge and discern—are uncovered.⁵⁰ Athenians are not called to actions such as war or commerce because they are coerced against

⁴⁶ Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis*. 3.

⁴⁷ While Balot more broadly focuses upon the importance of courage in all aspects of life, I will focus on the importance of specifically political courage in being free. Therefore, in my context, examples of these situations may include political goals or projects.

⁴⁸ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 2.30-3.15

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 3.30

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 3.15-3.30.

their will.⁵¹ Instead, they choose to act for the good of one another and the pride of their city and way of life. In this choice to act based upon deliberation around common goals combined with the action fulfilling that reasoned choice, they are free.

The simple action of Pericles' speech is a strong exhibition ancient freedom. By speaking, Pericles, a leader of men, becomes free in interacting with and engaging in political rhetoric with his fellow men. He first elucidates that he is not speaking to honor the law, even the one that establishes the speech and gathering each year, as many have done in years past. He honors the actions of the fallen by doing something—making a political speech about the excellence of Athens and Athenians—and completing an action. Pericles freely argues for Athens in his speech, and yet while a powerful leader, he does not command the people. In his love for Athens, he does not legislate or coerce his fellow citizens' individual wills. He understands that this freedom is what makes humans excellent, and this excellence is what fosters a higher level of freedom and civic-mindedness.

Balot also views Pericles' speech as central in understanding courage's role in freedom. He points directly to the speech as evidence, quoting:

We do not think that words (*tous logos*) are harmful to deeds (*tois ergois*); instead it is harmful not to be instructed in advance by argument (*logoi*) before going in deed (*ergoi*) to what is necessary. For we differ in this: that we ourselves, the same men, both dare the most and calculate about what we undertake; whereas for others ignorance brings boldness and calculation hesitation. Those would rightly be judged most courageous who both know most clearly pains and pleasures and nevertheless (*dia tauta*) do not turn away from danger.⁵²

⁵¹ Ibid. 3.30.

⁵² Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis*, 30, (Thucydides 2.40.2-3).

In Balot's translation of the passage, Pericles refers to a courage which is informed by knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, not rash action. In connecting courage and freedom, Balot again cites the speech's text, quoting:

You yourselves now emulate them [the war dead] and judge that well-being (to eudaimon) is freedom (to eleutheron) and freedom (to eleutheron) is courage (to eupsuchon); do not stand on the sidelines and watch the risks of war.⁵³

Balot wisely points out that because of Pericles' and the Athenians' understanding that freedom and the democratic way of life was superior to others and had the particular quality of producing "excellent, admirable human beings", courage was necessary as "the defender of freedom."⁵⁴ In this, Pericles links the city's well-being, promoted through *collective* success, defense and freedom, to *individual* interests.⁵⁵ Because the city guarantees the safety and the ability of each of its citizens to pursue some individual interests, and thus exercise freedom, it is necessary to defend it, both militarily, and more importantly to my argument, civically.⁵⁶ Because the city gives the ability to act freely and democratically, it is worthy of the courageous actions that are required for its continual existence.

Balot again presses the importance of understanding and knowledge as central in the conception of courage, especially in relation to freedom. Because the Athenians understand the value that the polis brings them, they are rational to both love their polis and to courageously defend it. Pericles takes this to its logical extreme, insinuating that if the Athenians truly understood the true value that the polis provided, they would consider their possessions

⁵³ Ibid. 31, (Thucydides 2.43.4).

⁵⁴ Ibid. 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 32.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 32.

worthless compared to that of the freedom of their polis.⁵⁷ In this argument, Pericles claims courage is defender of freedom and introduces freedom squarely in the equation of “human flourishing,” appropriating freedom as a fundamental human good, taking precedence over individual possessions by linking courage, freedom, and the good life.⁵⁸

Balot’s commentary on Pericles’ funeral oration highlights the centrality of courage for freedom in ancient Athens, and shows how some aspects of courage could be modernized and applied in our contemporary political context. Combining character and intellect, a daring and courageous individual such as Pericles, or a contemporary leader, may be put into action in the right place, at the right time, with the right motive to effectively lead or contribute to a state’s freedom, and therefore, its success, allowing individuals and the state to flourish.⁵⁹ While Balot relies solely on courage as a panacea for many of the ills in the quest for a good life, calling for the resurrection of many ancient ideas, my argument for courage is much more narrow: in *political* courage, we can experience some of the richness lost from the freedom of ancients while we reside in the modern world.

Here it is essential to highlight the important relationship between freedom and action, or freedom as a type of activity involving both courage and rule. For example, Mary Nichols defends Pericles as a shining example of a leader in a system of democratic freedom, highlighting the importance of action and rule in his leadership.⁶⁰ Nichols mainly does this by explaining that Pericles defends and promotes Athens not by its ideals, but instead by continually undertaking actions that are appropriate to freedom.⁶¹ Pericles’ argument for freedom begins

⁵⁷ Ibid. 39.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 39.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 45.

⁶⁰ Nichols, *Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom*.

⁶¹ Ibid. 26.

with the fact that Pericles is *acting* as a high form of freedom by using rhetoric in the public forum by standing and giving a speech, immersing himself in the collective decision-making and ruling of his community with his fellow citizens. Pericles then speaks of Athens and freedom in terms of action, highlighting the unique human quality to be a “cause of action” and not merely a reactive and responsive being.⁶² With this, he states that all citizens possess this capacity for freedom, yet it must be exercised and actively practiced to be realized. Nichols argues that this active freedom manifests as rule, stating, “Freedom requires rule, of oneself, and therefore of the circumstances with which one is presented, and to some extent, other human beings. To rule (archein) in one of its forms in Greek (archesthai) also means to begin or initiate.”⁶³ This point becomes even more clear when examining Thucydides confusing statement, “Pericles controlled the people with freedom.”⁶⁴ Nichols reconciles this seemingly antithetical statement by focusing on the centrality of rule to freedom. Namely, Pericles rules through rhetoric and appeals to the Athenians minds, not through force or other subversive means.⁶⁵ In this, Pericles is skilled in rhetoric and relaying his ideas, and thus contributes in ruling a free people by freely persuading them.

Nichols, like Balot, also highlights Pericles courage in making the speech.⁶⁶ Pericles was recently blamed for starting the war, and the Athenian people are skeptical of his leadership. Pericles begins the speech by criticizing what his predecessors have revered and spoken on previously: the law. By standing up and speaking, Pericles takes a risk and delivers a speech that is unlike his predecessors’, but regarded as one of the best in history, highlighting Athens’

⁶² Ibid. 26.

⁶³ Ibid. 26.

⁶⁴ Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.65.9.

⁶⁵ Nichols, *Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom*, 34-35.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 26.

uniqueness and preeminence due to its citizens' freedom and free actions. Pericles and his funeral oration are prime examples of ancient freedom and courage and their central characteristics: public, active, bold, and politically influential, highlighting the necessity of politically courageous action, usually involving risk, in exercising freedom.

Freedom as envisioned by the ancients consists of equal citizens actively participating in civic and political life, making “free” decisions for themselves and their polis, constantly improving one another and furthering their desire for the good life. In the modern sense, with a focus on individuality, heightened materialism, the pursuit of physical resources, and a general skepticism about human ability to interact virtuously as the basis of living freely, being free in the ancient sense is a task and burden. Political and civic participation is low, and seldom a cause for popular concern.⁶⁷ When participation and deliberation does happen, it is routinely criticized, mocked, and stifled, sometimes at great personal cost, as evidenced by the tenor of intellectual and political conversations in the United States today. True listening and understanding is at a precious premium. Political courage and courageous actions offer a path to realizing positive aspects of ancient freedom amid severe criticism and great political, social, and economic prices. By taking actions that exhibit courage, one bears the immediate risk of the potential costs of their actions, actively contributing to civic and political life in positive ways, such as promoting understanding among different groups of citizens or demanding equality for those treated unfairly. In these courageous actions, the individual may be able to become free and exhibit freedom in an ancient sense.

⁶⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; Han, “A Review of the Promoting Electoral Reform and Democratic Participation Initiative.” Both selected works highlight the reality of dissolving social bonds seen in our democracy. This phenomenon is ultimately concerning due to freedom’s reliance upon action in the public, interpersonal sphere.

Why is this ancient conception of freedom important to modern day society? Modern conceptions of freedom and society revolve around the importance of the individual and the prevention of interference in the pursuit of individual desires. In a strongly individualistic world, it can be difficult to imagine freedom as active, participatory verb courageously expressed in everyday life, and instead conceptualize it as a treasured noun, necessitating protection of one's person predicated on rights and greater isolation from one's fellow citizens. The Greek concept of κοινωμία, or *koinonia*, is exceedingly helpful in modernizing the ancient conception of freedom.

Koinonia

Koinonia, or a sense of shared interest through having something in common, is what I see as central in connecting ancient freedom to courage and modernizing these ancient ideas in positive ways in contemporary political life.⁶⁸ In the most formal and obvious sense, *koinonia* is evidenced by individuals' shared interest in a state or political body. Citizens have *koinonia* in that they share in their place in the polis—they have in common their ability to speak in the public sphere, to vote, to enjoy the status of a citizen, and maintain some common goods and interests. With this relationship comes both a mutual understanding of what citizens have in common, and a shared interest in the success or progress of the state or that which is common between them. One can envision *koinonia* connecting those at the highest levels of rule to those at the lower levels, creating a civic body through common characteristics, such as citizenship, in many ways aligning and tempering individualistic interests to that of the polis.

In fact, *koinonia* pervades everyday life and human relationships, extending from a civic interest, such as a local commission, to a personal interest, such as a friendship. Relationships

⁶⁸ Morwood and Taylor, *Κοινωνία*; *The Pocket Oxford Classical Greek Dictionary*. 188.

through common interest are not isolated, nor merely important in the upper echelons of formal government. Instead, they permeate our everyday life and create a web of interconnectivity and interdependence. Tying in the concept of courage, people in these relationships take risks and sacrifice by allowing one's self to become vulnerable to others and, in many ways, understanding individual desires in the context of a shared interest that supersedes immediate self-interest. In terms of ancient freedom, koinonia lays the foundation for liberty based on interconnectivity and activity, emphasizing the importance of relationships between members of a community and interests or goods that they share. While this relationship of koinonia may be that of citizens in a polis described earlier, it may also be that of parents whose children participate on a little league baseball team, members of a local Lions' Club or VFW, or at the basest level, two friends that and have the shared capacity to improve one another morally and politically.

This, again, is not to say that because two individuals share in koinonia that they have *all* or even *most* things in common. Instead, they simply have *something or a singular thing* in common that binds their interests and fate together. While this interpretation of koinonia leaves room for inequality, plurality and difference, it also forces one to recognize shared characteristics and common ground. A poignant example of this paradox can be seen in Lexington's backyard with the competing Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade and Lee-Jackson Day parade. While both groups generally hold that they have little to nothing in common, and thus have no room for cooperation, understanding, moderation, and education, the opposite could be true. Both groups are strongly and freely exhibiting their first amendment rights as citizens, gathering with other like-minded individuals in an active display of civic life. While I am not here to argue the merits of each individual parade, I do hold that a recognition of koinonia and courage to discuss the

principles of their respective goals with one another will necessarily lead to further understanding, less hate, and a healthier civic body.

Another prime example of *koinonia* at a more personal level is the relationship between friends. Jill Frank's interpretation of Aristotelian friendship—a relationship in which two come together to enjoy and create something greater than that which they can alone *without* losing individual qualities—highlights *koinonia* in our everyday lives. Friends are different, and they do not share in all things. However, they must have something in common that they share. Because of this commonality, they come together, creating something that could not be achieved alone. One friend is not entirely subverting their identity for the other friend, nor do they agree on all matters. Instead, they can come together around something, whether that be love for a sports team, the love of conversation, or even the love of debate and disagreement. Friendship highlights that *koinonia* pervades our everyday life, creating a thick, interwoven mat of connectivity and interdependence that provides the basis for the broader ability and willingness to exercise political freedom.

Bernard Yack does a masterful job of interpreting the concept of *koinonia* in Aristotelian terms for modern political systems. He argues that the key to bringing these ancient concepts into the modern realm relies upon one's ability to contextualize the concepts and understand the more fundamental meaning of ancient passages, stating:

Aristotle's understanding of community captures [...] the insistence on the way in which all social interactions help shape character and identity. But it also leaves open the questions of the nature and value of any particular form of communal life that one might advocate.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 50.

Community, according to Yack, is an understanding of four things: individuals who are different in some way, that share in something, engage in interaction through what they share, and have some sense of friendship and justice or equality.⁷⁰ To emphasize community in such a way is not to suggest a simplistic dichotomy and choice between absolutist individualism or subjugation to a community. Instead, Aristotle recognizes the complexity of life, and argues that heterogeneity and difference are critical to our understanding of community. It is because of these differences, coupled with a desire to be with our fellow man, that communal life is valuable to the good life.

This form of similarity-yet-difference, or shared ideas and values despite difference, is key in understanding my critique of modern life and what I believe the ancients have to offer. To characterize my argument as collectivist would be improper, and I do not suggest that individual subjugation is necessary or valuable to achieve freedom. Instead, drawing on Aristotle, I recognize there are differences and plurality among us in our everyday and political lives, and that many of these differences are crucial as grounds for freedom and the exercise of courage as it relates to freedom. However, I claim that our sense of *koinonia*, or something shared, is the glue that holds us together, and a fuller understanding of what this entails would better allow us to flourish—both as individuals and a state. This usually comes at a cost, and I believe that courage is a key to unlocking the freedom of public life and interpersonal interaction as the ancients experienced it. This position, as I will lay out in the next section, stands in stark contrast to many modern thinkers that strongly influence our modern conception of freedom, and, as Hobbes has famously claimed, leads to a natural state of war of all against all, in a life that is “nasty, brutish, and short.”⁷¹ For Hobbes, our uniquely human quality is instrumental reasoning, which is a scout for our individual, idiosyncratic desires. This reasoning leads us to recognize the

⁷⁰ Ibid. 29

⁷¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Ch. XIII.

right of nature—the right to employ any and all means for self-preservation. As individuals seeking such self-preservation, the state is merely a tool of and for individual preservation and security, not anything like an Aristotelian *koinonia*. Before and after creating the commonwealth, we remain self-seeking *individuals* (e.g. see the artwork of the Leviathan’s frontispiece by Bosse). As I will argue in the next section, accepting or assuming some of these Hobbesian ideas regarding human nature has led to many problematic and impoverished conceptions of freedom in modern life.

Ch. II Modern Freedom and Courage

Hobbes on Freedom

In this section, I will claim that there are major, descriptive differences between ancient and modern freedom. I will argue that the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes lays the groundwork for the modern conception of freedom, holding humans as individualistic, materialistic, and being overly skeptical of the potential for cooperation between one another. I will argue this modern conception of freedom, stemming from Hobbes and modern iterations of his philosophy, is largely responsible for the loss of richness in political life from the ancients to the moderns, specifically focusing on freedom.

Modern freedom and courage are terms that are nearly irreconcilable with their ancient counterparts. Departing from freedom as conceived as action and involvement in a public community, modern freedom is grounded in the understanding of humans as self-interested individuals acting to maximize their consumption of physical desires. Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* provides the philosophical reasoning and justification for this conception of freedom that continues to permeate modern life. Philip Petit writes, (citing prominent modern theorists such as himself, Skinner, and Viroli):

No one has written with greater influence on the topic of liberty or freedom than Hobbes. Although he was an absolutist in politics, his way of thinking about liberty left a deep impact on the liberal and libertarian traditions that emerged a century or more after his death. It helped overturn the dominance of the rival way of conceptualizing freedom that had been associated with his neo-Roman, republican opponents.⁷²

Pettit argues that Hobbes' "versions" of freedom—non-commitment and non-obstruction—were fundamental for later thinkers, such as William Paley and Jeremy Bentham, who modified freedom and greatly informed modern liberal politics.⁷³

Three portions of Hobbes' argument that are particularly relevant in examining problematic undercurrents in modern political life concerning freedom are an overriding sense of the critical importance of individuality and materialism, and an extreme skepticism of humans' ability to cooperate with one another. Hobbes' substantial assumptions about human nature and the nature of freedom are largely responsible for the loss of richness and connectivity in modern life.

Hobbesian, much like Aristotelian, philosophy is based upon the understanding of human nature. Hobbes basically understands humans as individual units fulfilling individual desires. His analysis of "life is but a motion of limbs" highlights the animalistic, individualistic conception of humanity and its relationship with nature.⁷⁴ Hobbes explains:

The Right of Nature [...] is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature [...], and consequently of doing anything,

⁷² Pettit, "Liberty and Leviathan," 131.

⁷³ Ibid. 149.

⁷⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction.

which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the attest means thereunto.⁷⁵

Hobbes' understanding of human nature is one of explicit individualism and concern for one's singular, physical person in pursuit of individual felicity, (happiness) understood as the successful attainment of never-ending desires, one after another, until death. Humans, especially in the state of nature, are individual units seeking their individual desires. Peoples' aims are not for mutual understanding, empathy, or actions that might be adverse to one's self-interest. Individuals only come to cooperate and associate with others when it is beneficial to them and fulfills their individual desires or protects individual security.

Hobbes' understanding of human nature also entails explicit materialism as the primary driving incentive in behavior. Again, Hobbes' statement "life is but a motion of limbs" reveals a totally physical, material understanding of life in the first lines of the *Leviathan*.⁷⁶ Hobbes' understanding of humans as a sort of mechanical, innately physical animal underlines the importance placed on materialism and the accumulation of material desires in his philosophy. This materialism underpins his conception of freedom, as he states:

Liberty is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external impediments, which impediments may oft take away man's power to do what he would, but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgement and reason shall dictate to him.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid. Part I, Ch. XIV.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Introduction.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Part I, Ch. XIV.

Freedom is understood in an inherently negative fashion, as a lack of impediments to motion and one fulfilling his/her individual desires.⁷⁸ In general, Hobbes makes no mention of virtue or good except in situations that virtue and good are instrumentally useful to minimize external obstacles in the accumulation and realization of personal desires.

Hobbes' description of the state of nature highlights his profound skepticism of human beings' ability to interact and cooperate with one another insofar as it provides individual security and means for self-preservation. Hobbes explains that without a powerful ruler (i.e. Leviathan), humans are unlikely to cooperate and necessarily resort to destruction and chaos. Hobbes states:

Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.⁷⁹

Furthermore, in explaining a society in which there is no all-powerful ruler, Hobbes claims, "The condition of man is a condition of war of everyone against everyone, [...] and it followeth that in such a condition every man has a right to everything, even to one another's body."⁸⁰ Hobbes' normative analysis of this reality is that the "life of man [in this condition] is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."⁸¹ In this analysis, Hobbes himself seems to recognize that in his philosophy, the reality of the human nature makes it impossible for us to get along and reside with one another without fear and coercion.

⁷⁸ Again, See Berlin's *The Two Conception of Freedom* for a thorough and consequential discussion of the definitions and merits of negative and positive freedom.

⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Ch. XIII.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Part I, Ch. XIV.

⁸¹ Ibid. Part I, Ch. XIV.

However, Hobbes does explain conditions under which individuals might cooperate with one another, leaving the door open for peace and veiled understanding between two parties.

Hobbes famously foreshadows the argument of the “fool”, who claims that, in Hobbes’ philosophy, a person always acting in one’s self-interest may lead to the neglect of justice, trust, and moderation, stating:

The fool hath said in his heart there is no such thing as justice, and sometimes also with his tongue, seriously alleging that every man’s conservation and contentment, being committed to his own care, there could be no reason why every man might not to do what he thought conduced thereunto; and therefore also to make or not make, keep or not keep, covenants was not against reason when it conduced to one’s benefit.⁸²

Hobbes, in accordance with his understanding of human nature, lays out a reasonable objection to his argument—what is to stop people from total self-indulgence, violence, and mutual destruction? To respond, Hobbes offers a sort of state of nature contract, in which, in the lack of a sovereign to keep all in awe, people are bound to one another by the knowledge that their physical safety and security depends upon their subversion of mutual desires instrumentally, for self-preservation.⁸³ Individuals decide to cooperate based upon what is in their individual best interest, and in the case of a state of nature, this is mutual self-preservation.

Students of economics will be very familiar with this line of reasoning—why would someone act against what appears to be self-interest? Hobbes foreshadowed these thinkers’ later arguments—at closer inspection, these actions are in individuals’ self-interest because they enable the individual to maintain a credible commitment and reputation which later allows for the further fulfillment of desires. As economists have shown, this role can be filled by many

⁸² Ibid. Part I, Ch. XV.

⁸³ Ibid. Part I, Ch. XV.

means, including a powerful sovereign or government, through adequate incentives such as wages, or through mutual networks of association.⁸⁴ The main mechanism upon which Hobbes' argument relies is reputation and perception. If one acts contrary to mutual benefit and breaks his "covenants" or has a reputation of doing so, in turn that person:

Cannot be received into any society that unite themselves for peace and defence but by the error of them that receive him; nor when he is received, be retained in it without seeing the danger of their error; which errors a man cannot reasonably reckon upon as the means of his security; and therefore, if he be left or cast out of society, he perisheth [...].⁸⁵

Therefore, Hobbes' notion of cooperation, and, in turn, society, is based upon a collection of individuals, attempting to dodge their own destruction and maximize the attainment of desire, who choose to subdue those desires solely because it *is in their own true self-interest*. Hobbes clearly explains that those who do not ascribe to this calculus are not welcome in relationships with one another because of their irrationally reasoned attainment of security.

Hobbes' assumptions and arguments about human nature are implicit in many of our modern-day understandings of what it means to be human, leading to problematic and impoverished conceptions of freedom. In Hobbes' argument one is necessarily a self-seeking individual, whose end goal is to maximize the fulfillment of desires. When one acts in concert and cooperation with others, according to Hobbes' understanding, it is thinly veiled self-interest which drives the relationship. Interaction between individuals is transactional—trading and

⁸⁴ See Greif, "Contract Enforceability and Economic Institutions in Early Trade," for an ingenious defense of early societal credible commitment and reputational mechanisms at play with case studies such as the Magrhibi traders. Grief and others in the field of institutional economics claim that groups may use trust and/or belief based institutions instead of strict contracts to solve problems arising from trade.

⁸⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Ch. XIV.

subduing desires for each other's benefits—not, as Aristotle and the ancients claimed, based on commonality or shared qualities.

While this is a persuasive philosophical argument, some immediate examples pose difficulties in the context of Hobbes' paradigm. Namely, as I have already suggested, is the phenomenon of friendship. While some relationships, such as between business partners, are based upon mutual physical and financial self-interest, I claim that all friendships are not based upon some simple desire maximization, and that this same idea will extend to politics. Does one choose their friends based upon what those people can do for helping them attain what is in one's self-interest? Does one stop having a true friend when the friend's "value" to the other has become exhausted? Are relationships based upon some transactional level of self-interest? As alluded to in Chapter I, many relationships, exemplified by *koinonia*, do not fit cleanly into Hobbes' argument because of their reliance on commonality and community, not self-interest and isolation. And if they do, I truly think that they are lacking a deeper meaning and understanding of what it means to be human.

Hobbes' individualistic, materialistic, and skeptical view of human nature (and its subsequent effect on freedom) is ironically obvious in Hobbes' interpretation of courage. Hobbes' discussion of courage comes in a broader conversation about the nature of "simple passions."⁸⁶ Hobbes argues that courage, beginning from *appetite*, is "the hope of avoiding that hurt by resistance."⁸⁷ Courage, in Hobbes' mind, has no eye toward nobility or even goodness. Instead, it is the product of the desire for something (i.e. glory, money, fame, etc.), while attempting to bypass and avoid difficulties in order that one might forgo the painful or risky costs associated with attaining such desires. Therefore, a courageous Hobbesian action, instead of

⁸⁶ Ibid. Part I, Ch. VI.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

being grounded in a noble end, is solely grounded in the avoidance of difficulty or pain in the attainment of physical well-being. In a Hobbesian sense, all rational actions synthesize into individual, materialistic desires, and thus, courage, as the ancients defined it, cannot be entertained in a Hobbesian world. A focus on individuality and materialism in a concept such as courage highlights problems with Hobbes' philosophy that informs modern life.

Thus, in the Hobbesian mindset, conceptions of the self and what it means to be human come in necessarily negative terms, leading to extreme individualism, materialism, and skepticism, which are prevalent in modern life.

Hobbes' Contemporary Applications

S.A. Lloyd (2009) provides a persuasive reinterpretation and modern defense of Hobbes' political philosophy with profound implications for Hobbes' understanding of freedom. Lloyd takes a nuanced reading of Hobbes' texts, which, at first glance, seems to moderate negative consequences. Ultimately, she still argues for the individualistic, materialistic aspects of Hobbes' philosophy that underpin modern moral philosophy and outline normative moral philosophy applicable to current life. Lloyd's work is along the lines of this thesis: providing a novel interpretation of classic ideas and providing applications to modern life. However, her work ultimately highlights the problematic nature of modern life and strengthens modern criticism.

She states:

Having pursued this question I have concluded that the traditional understanding of Hobbes's Laws of Nature is fundamentally flawed, and that this crucial misunderstanding reverberates throughout Hobbes' interpretation, causing interpreters to attribute to

Hobbes an overly simplistic psychology that cannot accommodate transcendent interests, and a correspondingly impoverished moral theory.⁸⁸

Lloyd bases this reconstruction of Hobbes' ideas around what she calls the *reciprocity theorem* in Hobbes' work. Lloyd describes this theorem as:

If one judges another's doing of an action to be without right, and yet does that action oneself, one acts contrary to reason...The reciprocity theorem articulates the primary constraint in Hobbes's moral and civil philosophy on the justifiability in reason of actions.⁸⁹

Lloyd's theorem formally articulates that "the primary constraint in Hobbes' moral and civil philosophy is the justifiability of actions."⁹⁰ This is based upon Hobbes' bedrock "Golden Rule", understood as "do not do that to others, you would not have done to yourself."⁹¹ Lloyd interprets reciprocity into this rule, much akin to the old adage, "If you scratch my back I'll scratch yours."⁹² Lloyd's reciprocity theorem admittedly makes great improvements to modern readings of Hobbes' work. According to her work, there is allowance made for actions not in *direct, immediate* fulfillment of desires. Humans are not relegated to the land of animals, where external impulses govern their behavior. Instead, individuals understand their relationships with one another (and the state, as she eventually argues), in a reciprocal fashion, leading a reasonable individual (in her mind) to not act in a way which they would not like to be acted upon because of the communal consequences eventually arising from such actions.

⁸⁸ Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*, (Preface, xiv).

⁸⁹ Ibid. 220.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 220.

⁹¹ Martinich, "Reason and Reciprocity in Hobbes's Political Philosophy," 166.

⁹² Ibid. 160.

However, for its merits, Lloyd's argument, like Hobbes', is ultimately lacking. While Lloyd may be able to modernize Hobbes in a way to understand why humans interact and cooperate with one another, I still argue that Hobbes and Lloyd's reliance upon their negative conception of human nature highlights the incomplete conception of freedom in the modern sense. While Lloyd's work does extend Hobbes' philosophy to attempt to explain relationships and societies not wholly based upon power and coercion, it still falls short in its ability to explain the exponential benefits of such arrangements to freedom, holding individuals as ultimately atomistic and self-concerned. Lloyd takes an admittedly nuanced reading of Hobbes' primary text, and as Hobbes makes his arguments through careful definitions and analytical deduction, it can be seen as problematic that Lloyd makes an argument that Hobbes, more or less, does not actually mean what he says about human nature.⁹³

Furthermore, Lloyd's work cannot escape the ultimate reliance on self-interest, security, and desire rampant in Hobbes and modern life. *Reciprocity* is understood to be the driving force of cooperation and relationships, indicating a more nuanced version of mutual self-benefit. In Lloyd's work, reliance is not upon the immediate transaction of mutual desires described before, but ultimately, upon the fact that one does good because of the recognition that one will eventually be paid back, in kind, at some point in time. The emphasis is even placed upon the negative tense, in that, under the reciprocity theorem, one will simply not treat others as how one would not like to be treated.⁹⁴

Again, this understanding of relationships may present an impoverished and descriptively inaccurate view of human life, freedom, and ultimately politics. I argue here, and explain later in the case studies, that human life, interaction, and politics is much more than this tit-for-tat social

⁹³ Lloyd, *Morality in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes*. 242-243.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 220.

relationship in which we always act, in some way, albeit directly or convolutedly, to gain a fulfillment of a physical “desire.” An immediate counterexample can be seen in love. For example, marriage seems as if it is not solely based upon this reciprocity principal. I do not cheat on my spouse because I would not like to be cheated upon. Instead, I do not cheat on my spouse because I love her and do not want to see *her* in pain (not simply because that might then give me pain, but because of something less individualistic and more shared). One might argue (and might be true of some couples) that the fear/incentive of my wife cheating on me would be enough for me not to cheat on her, but this is overly simplistic, binary, and inadequate view of the relationship, neglecting the acknowledgement of something shared and greater created because of the relationship of the two individuals. This example highlights the difficulty and lack of context in Lloyd and Hobbes’ argument—behavior is not solely grounded in utility/felicity maximization, and instead, it is a piece of a complex puzzle that is inadequately explained by incentive or reciprocity alone.

Many modern understandings of human nature, and therefore freedom, are strongly influenced by Hobbes’ and others’ philosophy which hold humans as exclusively individualistic and materialistic. These characteristics lead to a philosophy which is damningly skeptical of human ability to cooperate and act in ways contrary to their immediate self-interest. These ideas lead to an impoverished and descriptively inaccurate view of the complex reality of human life and freedom, which have intense and profound implications for our politics. The following case studies will illuminate the virtue of courage as an avenue that allows an opportunity to, while still in a system that is based upon the foundational understanding of Hobbes’ human nature and modern freedom, regain some of the richness of life and the conception of freedom as considered by the ancients.

Ch. III. Case Studies in Political Courage

The following chapter offers four case studies in which exhibitions of political courage led to the increased exercise of freedom in an ancient sense. First, a short case from the recent 2016 United States Presidential race and literary character Atticus Finch introduce the chapter. Then, starting from the grassroots level with John Lewis, going to the Presidential level with Lyndon B. Johnson, culminating in the highest political level in the face of revolution and regime change with John Adams, I explain how political courage allows for the exercise of more freedom.

After eight years in office, President Barack Obama, facing a philosophical repudiation of his administration and successes in the election of President-Elect Donald Trump, gave a Farewell Address on January 10, 2017. Instead of conveniently calling for division, he called for solidarity behind the newly-elected regime. When encountered with the boos of the masses upon mentioning the peaceful transfer of power, he immediately quieted them, reaffirming, as a leader, the commitment to American democracy, Constitution, and “the decency of our people.”⁹⁵ Instead of hatred and misunderstanding, he called for empathy and understanding. In a moment of rhetorical skill, President Obama quoted one of the most lauded literary characters in the canon of American literature, familiar to most with more than a fifth-grade education, Atticus Finch:⁹⁶

“Who said ‘You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.’”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Obama, “Full Text of President Obama’s Farewell Speech.”

⁹⁶ I include Finch due to his political relevancy in the Obama speech and his displays of courage throughout *To Kill A Mockingbird*, acknowledging and understanding the controversy surrounding his characterization after the publication of Lee’s second book *Go Set a Watchman*.

⁹⁷ Obama, “Full Text of President Obama’s Farewell Speech.”

A fictional lawyer from Maycomb, Alabama, Finch is immortalized in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a model father, lawyer, and leader. Against a background of racial distrust and inequality in the South, Finch provides a laudable example of exhibiting political courage to recuperate ancient freedom that I argue for in this thesis.

Finch's courageous action is evident in his defense of an African-American, Tom Robinson, accused of raping a young white woman, Mayella Ewell, in 1935. Atticus defends Tom after being appointed by Judge Taylor to the case—so one should not pretend that Atticus volunteered for the job. However, Finch's aggressive defense of Robinson, coupled with his criticism of racial norms, leads one to believe that he acted courageously.

However, Finch's courageous actions are not without grave potential costs, many of which are understood when he takes the Robinson case. Finch, as a former politician (in the state legislature), knowingly risks re-election after his aggressive, public attack of the Ewells and the status quo: "People were content to re-elect him to the state legislature that year, as usual, without opposition."⁹⁸ As a businessman who runs his law firm in a small town, Finch risks being ostracized and no longer being able to support himself and his family. As a widowed father with two young children, Finch's actions ultimately put their lives in immediate danger, as evidenced by Ewell's assault on the children and their rescue from the threat of death by Boo Radley. From a practical perspective, even if Finch's defense was successful, it might have caused more carnage.⁹⁹ It is difficult to envision a situation in which these risks make the decision to defend Tom Robinson entirely rational or self-interested.

⁹⁸ Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Ch. 26, 257.

⁹⁹ Shaffer, "The Moral Theology of Atticus Finch." Also see the examples of the indictment H. Patterson and Scottsboro boys, and Horton's subsequent not guilty ruling that resulted in the lynching of five innocent individuals (204-205).

I argue that Finch's acts and behavior is an exhibition of ancient freedom in a nuanced fashion in the small town of Maycomb. The act of the defense, much like Pericles' funeral oration, is in and of itself freedom, as Atticus uses rhetoric in the public spectacle of a trial, attempting to prove the innocence of an innocent man to a jury of fellow citizens. Finch's acts also draw attention to the inequality and inequity in the small community of Macomb. As it was, African-Americans were treated as second-class citizens (or worse) in the small town, unable or discouraged from voting, lawfully forced to lead segregated lives, causing a forcible rift in the community. Furthermore, as evidenced by Tom Robinson's guilty verdict, African-Americans in Maycomb did not enjoy the same equality and fairness under the law as that of white citizens. As described in Chapter I, these inequalities and divisions make it impossible for individuals in a community to truly exercise freedom, drawing them into a qualitatively deficient form of rule: master over slave. Not all members of the civic body are held equally, share in administration and decision of rule, are allowed to deliberate, or share in their protection of the law. Atticus' courageous action, while immediately seen as a failure, paves the way for the possibility of the later integration of races and widening of polis. Scout, and others present at the trial, hear his arguments, which expose and illuminate the evil and exclusionary nature of racism present in the town. While Finch is not immediately successful in securing justice for Tom Robinson (with grave consequences), his courageous action contributes to the struggle to promote further equality and justice necessary to revive the richness of ancient freedom.

President Obama's quotation of Finch signals the political relevance of a such a character in modern life. Political courage, combined with sources of empathy derived from community (such as *koinonia* which I have outlined), allow us to capture some of the richness lost when moving from ancient conception of freedom and self to a modern, Hobbesian, individualistic

conception of self. The following additional case studies outline actual, real examples of political courage in America that exhibit and lead to a reconstitution of ancient freedom in modernity.

Arguably the greatest example of political courage and freedom in the American democratic tradition occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Actors at all levels of politics, from grassroots to the Presidency, worked courageously to extend political membership and freedom to millions of neighbors and fellow citizens.

John Lewis

John Lewis exemplifies this political courage at the grassroots level. Lewis was born in 1940 to sharecroppers near Troy, Alabama. As a young man, Lewis showed promise, skipping fieldwork to attend an all-black school house twenty miles away.¹⁰⁰ In perhaps his first glimmer of political courage, after being denied access to the public library, Lewis, against his parents' wishes, circulated and submitted a petition for admittance to the library to the county government.¹⁰¹ Signed mainly by his cousins, the petition was never returned.¹⁰² Inspired by Rosa Parks' 1955 protest and Martin Luther King Jr.'s rousing speeches, Lewis entered seminary to become a preacher, only to discover his talent and passion for social action after attempting (and failing after Black seminary leaders labeled him a "troublemaker") to organize an NAACP chapter in Little Rock, Arkansas.¹⁰³

While studying at Fisk University, Lewis began studying nonviolence and quickly began to organize protests, starting at the municipal level at Nashville's department stores.¹⁰⁴ Many participants still had the image of Emmitt Till fresh in their mind, an innocent 14-year-old whose

¹⁰⁰ Carpenter, "Profiles in Courage for Our Time: John Lewis." 322.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. 322.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 323-324.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 324.

eyes were gouged out and whose body was found at the bottom of the river after allegedly making a flirtatious comment to a white woman in 1955, and recognized the personal danger involved in their protest.¹⁰⁵ The protests went on, and when the students refused to leave, white counter-protesters came, poured mustard and ketchup all over the students, and proceeded to beat them.¹⁰⁶ Lewis was arrested for disorderly conduct.¹⁰⁷ After four months, the protests were successful.

Lewis then organized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and continued to participate in grassroots political acts. While testing a Supreme Court decision (*Boynton v. Virginia*) that desegregated terminals and interstate trains and buses, Lewis' bus was firebombed.¹⁰⁸ After miraculously escaping the exploding bus and against the urging of many civil rights leaders, Lewis continued his bus ride, only to be arrested in Jackson, Mississippi, for using a "Whites Only" urinal.¹⁰⁹ After spending some time in the local jail, Lewis and fellow activists were transported in the middle of the night to a state penitentiary, where he describes in his memoir:

We were led into a cement building where deputies with cattle prods stood by while we were ordered to strip naked. For two and a half hours we stood there wearing nothing. [...] When we were finally led, two by two, into a shower room guarded by a sergeant with a rifle, I thought of the concentration camps in Germany.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 329.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 326.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 326.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 327.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 328.

¹¹⁰ Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*. 169.

During his time in that prison, Lewis and the others were subject to dousing in icy water and were not allowed to exercise.¹¹¹ Lewis witnessed one of his fellow activists miscarry a child while a guard watched on.¹¹²

Lewis was released within about a month, having become a celebrity after the coverage of his courageous actions.¹¹³ He was soon elected as SNCC chairman, and was invited to the White House the following week to participate in the President Kennedy's meeting with the Big Six, including Martin Luther King Jr.¹¹⁴

Lewis' most famous—and possibly most courageous—moments came after the March on Washington and the passage of the Civil Rights Act. In response to the murder of Jimmie Lee Johnson, African-Americans began to picket and protest in Selma, with the goal of carrying Johnson's casket from Selma to the capital in Montgomery.¹¹⁵ While Johnson was buried shortly after, the idea of the march gained traction, and garnered enough interest to attract Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which vowed to lead the protest and swooped in much to the chagrin of the SNCC coordinators, who believed Selma and this project to be “their turf.”¹¹⁶ It is important to note that Lewis had been facing pressure from his organization and fellow activists, who called him a “square” and a “Christ-loving damn fool”, and had experienced many defections to black nationalist groups and lost friendships due to his commitment to non-violence and prevention of militancy.¹¹⁷ Because of the tension between the SNCC and the SCLC, SNCC refused to march with King Jr. However, Lewis, due to his personal

¹¹¹ Carpenter, “Profiles in Courage for Our Time: John Lewis.” 328.

¹¹² Ibid. 328.

¹¹³ Ibid. 329.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 329.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 334.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 334

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 333

convictions, decided to march as a private citizen, at odds with the organization he ran and the people he led.¹¹⁸

Lewis showed up early Sunday morning to 400-600 protestors waiting on King Jr. to begin the march. King Jr. never showed—with credible motives ranging from the fear of a death threat, to stalling for a protective court order, to a previous speaking engagement.¹¹⁹ Lewis took charge of the ready group, leading them along the road and halfway across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where the protesters were met by the following:

a sea of blue-helmeted, blue-uniformed Alabama State Troopers...dozens of battle ready lawmen stretched from one end of US Highway 80 to the other...behind them were several dozen more armed men...many carrying clubs the size of baseball bats.¹²⁰

Lewis then describes “all hell breaking loose” as he received multiple heavy blows to the side of his head, lapsing in and out of consciousness with a fractured skull, leaking cerebral fluid.¹²¹ He describes hearing many choking on tear gas, mothers crying for their children, and the crack of clubs breaking bones.¹²² After the incident, he stated:

I don't see how President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam - I don't see how he can send troops to the Congo - I don't see how he can send troops to Africa and can't send troops to Selma, Ala.¹²³

Lewis' actions in Selma led President Johnson to give a speech in front of congress, comparing the events that transpired in Selma to those in Lexington, Concord, and Appomattox,

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 334

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 334.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 335

¹²¹ Ibid. 335

¹²² Ibid. 335

¹²³ Reed, “Alabama Police Use Gas and Clubs to Rout Negroes.”

promising to “defeat every enemy” of civil rights.¹²⁴ Lewis’ courage also led to a march led by Martin Luther King Jr. from Selma to Montgomery, escorted by 1,800 Alabama National Guardsmen, 2,000 U.S. Army Troops, 100 FBI agents and 100 U.S. Marshals.¹²⁵ Four months later, LBJ signed the Voting Rights Act, bringing millions of African-Americans into true political community by guaranteeing equality in the right to vote.¹²⁶

Lewis’ political courage is evident in his disregard for his own safety, with sober understanding of the potential consequences of his actions, in pursuit of the noble means of realizing human equality promoting freedom. Lewis, son of sharecroppers, endured firebombing, imprisonment, abuse, a fractured skull, and multiple attempts on his life to go on to catalyze possibly the most influential piece of legislation in the 20th century.

However, John Lewis’ politically courageous acts are not only in reference to his struggle against the dominant majority for civil rights. Lewis also fought courageously against allied African-Americans involved in the fight for civil rights. Lewis butted heads with his mother, father, and many members of the “Black Establishment” of Nashville, who advocated for more gradual change and minimization of embarrassment.¹²⁷ Future Supreme Court Justice-then NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall condemned Lewis’ tactics as a dead-end and suggested that it was necessary that the battles of the Civil Rights movement be fought in court.¹²⁸ After being included with the “Big Six” and being invited to meet with President Kennedy, he and SNCC were shunned by Johnson due to their insistence on protest and action.¹²⁹ Lewis lost the support of many famed activists and close friends due to his insistence that the SNCC maintain its

¹²⁴ Johnson, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress.”; Carpenter, “Profiles in Courage for Our Time: John Lewis.”

¹²⁵ Carpenter, “Profiles in Courage for Our Time: John Lewis,” 336.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 337.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 326.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 326.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 336.

commitment to nonviolence. Against the will of the SNCC, and after swallowing his pride after Martin Luther King Jr. took over leadership and credit for the Selma march, Lewis stuck with his conviction and led the march that would lead to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Lewis arguably acted as courageously within the internal politics his own movement as he did outside of it.

Lewis' courageous actions allowed himself and millions of others to experience the richness of ancient freedom in a modern time. African-Americans, long excluded and ostracized from public life, were now legally included in it. Given the ability to vote without molestation, they could now participate fully in democracy and the election of leaders (and thus decision-making) for the polis.

Lyndon Baines Johnson

Lyndon Baines Johnson exhibited political courage, albeit of a different sort, in the face of the Civil Rights Movement. Johnson, a Democrat from Texas, was tapped to run as Vice President on John F. Kennedy's ticket after a contentious primary and a record of legislative excellence and popularity in Congress. In 1963, when John F. Kennedy was killed by an assassin's bullet, he became President of the United States.

In an address to Congress following Kennedy's death, Johnson stated, "No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought so long."¹³⁰ To be clear, Johnson was no long-suffering crusader for civil rights—there is ample evidence of his shortcomings, frequently seen in his stonewall of civil rights legislation as a member of the Southern Bloc and his use racial slurs.¹³¹ However, in a moment of intense emotions after the assassination of a

¹³⁰ Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress."

¹³¹ Caro, *Master of the Senate*.

young, charismatic, popular President Kennedy, Johnson showed the political courage demanded of a great leader.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a bill that looked to prevent segregation of public places, discrimination on the basis race in hiring, promoting, and firing, and the unequitable enforcement of voting requirements.¹³² The bill was spearheaded by President Kennedy and proved to be extremely controversial. Because of powerful chairmanships held by segregationist Democrats, the bill proved to be extremely difficult to push through the House and looked as if it would die in the hands of the Rules Committee Chairman, Howard Smith of Virginia.¹³³ After Kennedy's death, signatures for a discharge petition began to accumulate, and, avoiding humiliation, Smith allowed the bill to go forward.¹³⁴ After novel legislative measures in the Senate to prevent the bill from getting caught in the morass of the powerful committees once again chaired by segregationist Democrats, 18 Southern Democratic Senators and one Republican Senator launched a filibuster to stop the bill, lasting 60 days until enough votes were gathered to reach cloture.¹³⁵ Johnson signed the bill on July 2, 1964 at the White House.

Johnson's first decision to champion the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was exceedingly risky. The country was in crisis—Lewis, MLK Jr., and others were continuing to demonstrate and cause civil unrest in many southern states, much of Kennedy's legislative agenda was stalled in Congress, and LBJ had the small tasks of ensuring the continuity of government, reassuring the United States' allies, and investigating Kennedy's assassination.¹³⁶ In a famous late night conversation in which a staffer attempted to convince Johnson not to touch the controversial

¹³² "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission."

¹³³ O'Donnell, "How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act."

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ "U.S. Senate: Landmark Legislation: The Civil Rights Act of 1964."

¹³⁶ O'Donnell, "How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act"; Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*.

“lost cause” of civil rights and instead focus on the domestic agenda, Johnson replied, “Well, what the hell’s the Presidency for?”¹³⁷ Without Johnson’s extreme skill in legislation due to his many years of hard-won cultivation in Congress, the bill would not have passed. Caro describes his careful shepherding of the bill through congress, as Johnson was the mastermind and driving force behind the discharge petition that forced the hand of his fellow party member and old colleague, Rules Committee Chairman Howard Smith.¹³⁸ Johnson enlisted an army of businessmen, labor, civil rights, and other leaders—including MLK Jr.—and showed them a list of uncommitted Republicans, telling them to put pressure on the congressmen to sign the discharge petition.¹³⁹ Johnson personally cut a tough deal with segregationist Senator Harry Byrd to allow a vote on the tax bill in exchange for a budget submission of less than \$100 billion, clearing the way of a substantial obstacle for the civil rights legislation.¹⁴⁰ In his last stage of leading the bill through congress, Johnson broke through the senate filibuster led by Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, who was Johnson’s mentor and had catapulted Johnson in the political stratosphere as a young Senator, likely leading to his position as President.¹⁴¹ Johnson’s continual behind-the-scenes battle with friends and political allies was extremely risky—he could have easily soured relationships he had worked his whole life to cultivate and that defined him, along with stalling his forbearers’ legislative agenda and dooming his Presidency. Instead, Johnson exhibited political courage in pushing the bill through congress.

Johnson’s ultimately courageous action, however, might be actually signing the bill into law. Johnson already had risked many of his treasured relationships and political capital to

¹³⁷ O’Donnell, “How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act”; Caro, *Master of the Senate*.

¹³⁸ Caro, *Master of the Senate*; O’Donnell, “How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act.”

¹³⁹ Caro, *Master of the Senate*; O’Donnell, “How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act.”

¹⁴⁰ O’Donnell, “How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act”; Caro, *Master of the Senate*; Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*.

¹⁴¹ O’Donnell, “How LBJ Saved the Civil Rights Act”; Caro, *Master of the Senate*; Purdum, *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*.

shepherd the bill through Congress, but with his signing of the bill into law, he risked throwing the country into even more turmoil and severely harming himself, as a politician, and his party for years to come. Johnson purportedly stated moments after signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “We have lost the South for a generation.”¹⁴² Johnson understood fully the potential costs of his actions—his party, and thus himself, as a politician losing power (and his legacy) for a long time to come—and still acted in the face of these consequences.

John Adams

The American Revolution is filled with examples of individuals exhibiting extreme political courage. However, one example stands out as uncommon, nuanced and particularly courageous: John Adams’ decision to successfully defend Captain Preston and eight young British soldiers facing the death penalty after being charged with the murder of five colonists engaged in a fight later dubbed the Boston Massacre.

Beginning in October 1768, British presences in Boston were increased due to repeated difficulty in the enforcement of the Townshend Acts and multiple engagements with colonists.¹⁴³ On March 5th, 1770, British soldiers fired in a crowd gathered in front of the Customs House after provocation, including the striking of one of the British soldier by a thrown club, and the daring of the soldiers to shoot at the rowdy colonists.¹⁴⁴ The shots immediately killed four men: Samuel Gray, Samuel Maverick, James Coldwell, and Crispus Attucks. Patrick Carr, wounded in the attack, died of injuries days later.

Captain Preston, who was leading the group, did not command the soldiers to fire and immediately commanded them to stop.¹⁴⁵ The soldiers refrained from shooting, and as more

¹⁴² “The Long Goodbye”; Obama, “Remarks by the President at LBJ Presidential Library Civil Rights Summit.”

¹⁴³ “The Boston Massacre Trials | John Adams Historical Society.”

¹⁴⁴ Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

British soldiers came to the scene, tensions rose and it looked as there would be a serious altercation. Governor Thomas Hutchinson appeared from balcony of the Town House, assuring the crowds that justice would be applied fairly, and the British soldiers would have their day in court.¹⁴⁶ The crowds dissipated, pleased with the show of justice.¹⁴⁷ However, protest, riots, and violence continued in the city as the settlers continued to rail against the taxes levied and mourn the loss of their fellow colonists.¹⁴⁸ Paul Revere and others popularized these events and the Boston Massacre, and they were instrumental in stoking revolutionary fires in the colonies, eventually leading to the American Revolution soon thereafter.

Three weeks after the massacre, a grand jury indicted Preston and his men of murder after the events that had transpired in front of the Customs House earlier that month.¹⁴⁹ The men were unable to find legal representation and approached several lawyers unsuccessfully until Adams agreed to take on the case.¹⁵⁰ Adams assembled a team of team of three other lawyers and began to prepare the defense.

Adams took on obvious risk in taking on the assignment of defending five British soldiers accused of murder on the contentious eve of revolution. The following are the risks that can be observed in Adams' exhibition of political courage: (1) Adams risked his own physical safety as well as the physical safety of his family. (2) Adams risked his financial stability and ability to provide for his family. (3) Adams risked his career and future career potential. (4) Adams risked his friends and family from embarrassment and ostracization. (5) Adams risked his standing as a revolutionary (6) Adams risked his name and reputation standing up for an unpopular cost.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Wroth and Zobel, "The Boston Massacre Trials."

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

It is clear that Adams was well aware of these risks when taking on the defense of the British soldiers. While Adams' self-assessment is impossible to count as totally unbiased, he wrote in his diary:

In the Evening [of the trials] I expressed to Mrs. Adams all my Apprehensions: That excellent Lady, who has always encouraged me, burst into a flood of Tears, but said she was "very sensible of all the Danger to her and to our Children as well as to me," highlighting the existence and acknowledgement of a physical threat to him and his family as taking on and defending the case.¹⁵¹

Adams writes again in his journal, retrospectively analyzing the defense of the British soldiers:

"[Eighteen Guineas was] ... all the pecuniary Reward I ever had for fourteen or fifteen days labour, in the most exhausting and fatiguing Causes I ever tried: for hazarding a Popularity very general and very hardly earned: and for incurring a Clamour and popular Suspicions and prejudices, which are not yet worn out and never will be forgotten as long as History of this Period is read."¹⁵²

Again, while unable to be seen as totally unbiased analyses of his own behavior, these passages show primary evidence that Adams was knowingly risking his good name, reputation, future as a community and political leader, and future career and financial potential to take on the case.

However, what is not as clear is the impetus for Adams' actions in the face of these risks. While one can hypothesize as to why Adams might have taken the case, two are particularly persuasive and well-reasoned: Adams took on the case because of his personal political desire, and Adams took on the case due to his commitment to higher ideals of the American Revolution.

¹⁵¹ Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams Volume III*. 291-296.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 291-296.

Hiller P. Zobel argues that Adams took on the unpopular and risky case due to his political ambitions.¹⁵³ A seat was due to open in the city's legislature within the next few months, and Adams was allegedly the city's first pick.¹⁵⁴ A strong showing in the trial would put the young Adams in the perfect position to resume the post once opened, and begin his formal political career.

While there is an argument for Adams' taking on the defense in his self-interest in order to promote his career, there is strong evidence that Adams actually took on the case in a courageous act of dedication to the higher virtues of the community of which he was a part. Adams' writes in his journal, closer to the time of the trial:

The Part I took in Defence of Cptn. Preston and the Soldiers, procured me Anxiety, and Obloquy enough. It was, however, one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested Actions of my whole Life, and one of the best Pieces of Service I ever rendered my Country. Judgment of Death against those Soldiers would have been as foul a Stain upon this Country as the Executions of the Quakers or Witches, anciently. As the Evidence was, the Verdict of the Jury was exactly right.¹⁵⁵

Again, while Adams' retrospective cannot be seen as totally unbiased, it does provide evidence for his actions to be courageous. Adams realizes and understands the threats that he is bearing when he takes on the case—he even experiences what he calls “anxiety and obloquy”, which could be more commonly understood as “disgrace, especially that brought about by public condemnation.”¹⁵⁶ While Adams, at the time of his authorship of the passage, had many

¹⁵³ Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*; “The Boston Massacre Trials | John Adams Historical Society.”

¹⁵⁴ “The Boston Massacre Trials | John Adams Historical Society”; Zobel, *The Boston Massacre*.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams Volume I*. 77-81.

¹⁵⁶ “Obloquy - Definition of Obloquy in English | Oxford Dictionaries.”

achievements to laud, he viewed the defense of the soldiers as one of the most important and brave moments of his life and one of the highest forms of service to his country.

Adams held this opinion, as evident in his writing, due to his dedication to the rule of law and the reverence to the Constitution in the fledgling country. In this, Adams' courageous action allowed for the promulgation and enjoyment of a richer sense of ancient freedom, as the men were justly tried according to the law, and the ideals of the community (reverence and adherence to the law, equality) were upheld and transmitted through the public trial. The ideas and foundational elements of the American Revolution and subsequent Constitution were constructed through diligent deliberation and debate. In this, in its purest sense, the colonists were free. Through this deliberative process, the colonists ossified shared traditions and civil institutions and established a constitution, to which Adams felt accountable. While, at the time of the trial the American Revolution was but a spark and the Constitution was but a pipedream in many minds, Adams still felt accountable to the underlying philosophies of the movement, especially that of due process and a fair, equal, and just trial. In addition to this responsibility, Adams actions also reflected a responsibility to his fellow man and peers in the Bostonian community. In the face of angry mobs and Revolutionary fervor, Adams courageously stuck to these fundamental ideals, promoting a sense of freedom that would pervade his later actions as a revolutionary and eventual President.

While there are prominent examples of courageous actions throughout the American Revolutionary period, John Adams successful defense of the soldiers accused of murder at the Boston Massacre stand out as an example of an act of courage establishing a richer sense of ancient freedom that could be interpreted as based upon a certain character/commitment to virtuous behavior and a higher ideal. Through Adams primary sources, it becomes apparent that

he understood the risks involved with taking the case, and in the face of these risks, took on the case because of his political courage and commitment to character and his ideal community.

IV: Conclusion

Freedom and courage are words central to our everyday political life. Ancient conceptions of freedom, while having many shortcomings, presented communal richness and autonomy largely absent from modern life. While we decidedly live in modern times, modern conceptions of freedom are inadequate for political life, holding humans as overly individualistic, materialistic, and skeptical of our ability to cooperate with one another. I claim that political courage offers us a way to experience some of the abundance of the ancient freedom while living in modern times, under systems that hold modern conceptions of freedom.

How might we exhibit this courage and improve our communities in our pursuit of the good life? The case studies illuminate implications for courage that we can apply to our everyday lives. John Lewis, in his longstanding perseverance, shows the importance of practice and cultivation of courage. Beginning from the collegiate and municipal level, Lewis, in the face of great risks, exhibits outstanding courage each step of his journey, eventually encountering politically massive situations. I would argue, because of his practice and cultivation of courage, Lewis is prepared to exhibit political courage on a large scale, such as leading the march of hundreds from Selma, and on the largest political stage, in the Oval Office with the President of the United States. While Lewis' courage is legendary, us mere mortals can learn from the lesson he provides in the cultivation of character. Political courage is not an isolated action, it is the result of practice and preparation.

Because of the cultivable nature of political courage, it is useful to imagine how we might encourage it in our communities. While it is never too late to begin practicing courage, youth

presents a time where individuals learn important lessons and begin to develop habits that will carry over to adulthood. I would encourage parents and schools to make clear the importance of political courage, and provide ample opportunities for youth to exhibit political courage. For example, if a school has robust student government program, children can learn how to interact politically (i.e. give public speeches, represent diverse interests, etc.) in a relatively low-risk environment as to cultivate courage and develop habits to prepare them to take on larger and more consequential projects in the future. Furthermore, parents can encourage and provide avenues for their children to develop the capacity for political courage. For example, a parent might bring a child to a political march or organization, and make themselves available for questions. Or, more directly, a parent could bring their child to a town hall meeting or the Mayor's office, encouraging them to ask one public question. Institutionally, it is important to make these opportunities exceptionally accessible and approachable as to encourage participation and cultivation (i.e. having meetings later in the evening as to be accessible to working parents and children in school, having an agenda section for open new business, etc.). These consequentially small actions could teach children how to exhibit political courage, preparing them for times where the consequences of political courage (or cowardice) are enormous, such as in the case of John Lewis.

President Johnson's example of courage shows that it is never too late to change one's course and take a politically courageous action, and that one does not have to make *every available* politically courageous decision to exhibit political courage. Johnson was admittedly racist in his previous years and supported segregationist policies. Furthermore, he was imperfect in his Presidency and made decisions that some might consider antithetical to political courage. However, Johnson both saw the error of his deep-seated opinions and earlier actions, and made a

politically courageous decision that allowed for the expansion of the exercise of freedom. While Johnson was not a perfect individual or leader, his act of political courage, coupled with his position of power, allowed for an outsized impact on the world. Similarly, John Adams' example encourages politically courageous action at all stages of life, no matter how small or seemingly politically insignificant. Adams was an attorney by trade, and took the case in his line of work. While there is evidence he aspired to be a politician, at the time, he was acting in the capacity of his job. His robust defense not only fulfilled the responsibility of his job, but also allowed for the further exercise of freedom. In our everyday professional lives, there are examples for us to undertake politically courageous action—ranging from speaking up in class, advocating for the free exchange of ideas, or simply pointing out where injustice or inequality is taking place. This is similar to those in leadership positions today—whether that be a city councilperson, a business leader in a community, or a member of the board of a local non-profit. While they may feel unqualified to take politically courageous actions, it is never too late to change previous opinions or get started in cultivating political courage, with greater positive consequences.

In conclusion, it is our prerogative to cultivate political courage in ourselves and foster the cultivation of it in others—whether this means encouraging a friend to take courageous action, speaking up in class or at a meeting, or critically examining our own life to find ways in which we can become more politically courageous. As I have claimed throughout this thesis, cultivating and exhibiting political courage in communities of all sizes leads to an increased exercise of ancient freedom, overcoming many of the pitfalls and shortcomings of modern freedom, creating continually improving communities. In such communities, we may become truly autonomous and free, and aid one another on the quest for the good life.

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