LIBERTY VS CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND CONSTANT'S ROMANTIC APPEAL TO THE PRINCIPLE OF PATRIOTISM[1]

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Abstrak

Artikel ini merupakan studi tentang teks klasik dari Benjamin Constant yang berjudul *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns*. Argumentasi dasar dari artikel ini adalah bahwa kunci untuk memahami teks ini yang merupakan pidato Constant di Athénée Royal, Paris, adalah pemahaman yang memadai akan dua bagian teks yang disusun berdasarkan kondisi historis yang berbeda. Pemahaman ini merupakan jalan masuk untuk merunut secara sistematis garis merah argumentasi yang disulam secara halus tapi dengan misi untuk menyakinkan para pendengarnya. Saya setuju dengan pendapat Stephen Holmes bahwa untuk memahami perubahan argumentasi yang diusung Constant di bagian kedua dari teks tersebut, kita harus membacanya dalam konteks kebangkitan pengaruh politik kaum Ultra-royal di masa Restorasi Bourbon. Kesalahan Holmes adalah ketika dia tidak menyadari bahwa peran dari dinamika antara partisipasi politik dan kebebasan individual telah dipersiapkan oleh Constant dalam bukunya yang ia tulis sebelum pidato tersebut. Bagian akhir dari tulisan ini, saya memberi evaluasi kritis terhadap romatisisme politis dari Constant.

Keywords: ancient and modern liberty, civic participation, civic liberty, individual freedom, and patriotism.

Many authors have underlined Benjamin Constant's prominent role in highlighting the characteristics of French liberalism and, through his works, revealing the peculiarity of French liberalism as occupying the

1 Another version of this article with great emphases on limited political sovereignty, modern freedoms, and particularly on the role of the representative system, has been published in *Ethical Perspectives* 17:3 (2010), 389-414, entitled "Benjamin Constant and Modern Freedoms: Political Liberty and the Role of a Representative System." The version relies heavily on Benjamin Constant's work, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments* (1806-1810),

middle ground between counterrevolutionaries and radical, progressive republicans.[2] While the former firmly promoted the spirit of the conservative Right that wished to renew the glorification of the *Ancien Régime*, the latter unstintingly condemned the restoration of French monarchy and thus represented the force of the turbulent left-wing French politics. In their ambitious efforts to preside over the vacuum left by the discharged king, neither was successful in securing the stability of political order on the one hand, and uncorrupted popular sovereignty on the other. Both were instead trapped in their own atrophy: the revolutionary Left in violent anarchy and the classical French monarchy in political despotism. Against these aseptic extremes, Constant consistently focuses on the establishment of neutrality in government which can effectively hinder the impudent violation of sovereignty and the ignorant absorption of civic liberty. As he is faithful to his strategic goal to create a substitute institution in place of the failed classical monarchy, Constant carefully investigates various experiments of political structure through his political odyssey.[3] In other words, although his proposed solutions to French political commotions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries altered several times, his overriding question as to how to recognize democratic branches of political power and individual political liberty without downplaying the neutrality of government remained.

One of Constant's works, which represents the complexities and richness of his understanding of modern liberalism and its constitutive elements, is the 1819 speech given at the Athénée Royal in Paris, entitled "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns."[4] Given that this lecture is written after his 1815 work *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Representative Governments* in which his political constitution-

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which is shortened in his *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Representative Governments* (1815) where he elaborates closely the representative system. This present work, on the other hand, focuses closely on his work, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns," the famous 1819 speech given at the Athénée Royal in Paris. In this work, I carefully try to put more emphasis on his idea of civic participation and his romantic turn.

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2 For example, Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, Liberal *Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 146; K. Steven Vincent, "Benjamin Constant, the French Revolution, and the Origins of French Romantic Liberalism, *French Historical Studies* 23: 4 (2000), 636-637; and Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2003), 51.

3 Cf. Kalyvas and Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings*, 146-147.

4 Benjamin Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns,* in *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 308-328.

alism has reached its complex statements, the 1819 lecture eloquently expresses Constant's principled middle path which rescues liberalism from the inebriation of revolutionary movements and the illusionary exaltation of the classical authority.[5] However, what makes reading the text still something of an effort is that there is an abrupt shift in his elaboration of the fundamental distinction between the freedom exercised by the ancients and that which is enjoyed by the moderns. This paper wants to argue that in order to reveal the richness of the 1819 text we must be aware that its two parts were written under different historical circumstances, while at the same time deciphering the argumentative thrust inherent in the text. I will start with contextualizing the two parts of the text. After revealing the historical background against which it was written, I will then go on to reveal the thrust of argumentation of the text. Firstly, I would like to make sense of Constant's endorsement of modern liberty in the first part of the text by referring to the political condition during the reign of the Directory. Secondly, as suggested by Stephen Holmes, I argue that to understand the shift Constant made in the second part of the text, we should read it within the context of the increasing influence of the Ultra-royalists in the legislature during the Bourbon Restoration. However, against Holmes who may overlook the fact that the appropriation of political liberty has been prepared by Constant earlier in the text, I contend that the spirit of both civic and individual freedom, which enlivens representative system, is the backbone of the text in its unity. Finally, I argue that the unity of the text is revealed as we read it against the aforementioned historical backgrounds while at the same time following closely the dynamics of his argument for the representative system. Crucial in this endeavour is to keenly trace the three different layers that constitute the body of the text, namely the distinction of ancient and modern liberty, civic participation, and Constant's romantic turn.

1. Historical Contextualization of the 1819 Lecture

Constant's 1819 text is an effort to elaborate the intractable difference between the liberty expressed by the ancients in the exercise of collective political power and the modern one, which consisted in individual privacy and independence, the primacy of law, peace, and commercial prosperity. After differentiating them, he dedicates a lengthy part of the text to unwaveringly championing modern liberty and emphasizing individual independence as the first need of and the true nature of modern

5 Cf. *Ibid.*, 170-307. See also Benjamin Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments,* trans. Dennis O'Keeffe and ed. Etienne Hofmann, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003). Accessed from *http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/861 on 2013-02-04*

liberty. But as the text comes to a close, he also insists on the importance of political participation as both the guarantee of individual enjoyment and the nature of modern civic liberty. Having read Constant's fervent endorsement of modern individual confinement in the peaceful pursuit of personal prosperity, which constitutes more than half of the work, the reader of this celebrated work may be perplexed as he or she encounters the altered course of argument in the final part of the text. However, as suggested by Holmes, this unfavourable perplexity can be addressed by suitably situating the text in the historical context during which it was written.[6]

Instead of being written in one period of time, the 1819 lecture is a palimpsest which was written in response to exceptionally different political events in France. The first part in which Constant adroitly distinguishes the liberty of the ancients from that of the moderns in order to underscore civic privatism as the nature of modern liberty, was written in collaboration with Mme. Germaine de Staël around 1798.[7] During this period, French revolutionary government was in major conflict with several European states as it expanded the fevered campaign of French revolutionary fervour against absolutism. With the establishment of the Directory, particularly from 1795-1799, the social and political constellation of France was mainly consisted of citizens who were weary of fervent revolutionary wars. The numbers of both those who support the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, the Ultra-royalists, and those who believed that radical republic was the best-suited form of government, the Jacobins, significantly decreased. Although the threat of foreign interference was temporarily fended off by the victorious campaign of Napoleon Bonaparte's army against the first coalition, French citizens were constantly menaced by internal wars between conflicting parties, which was intentionally preserved by the Directory. Consequently, active participation in French politics at that time would mean aligning oneself with one of those parties and thereby fuelling the hatred each side felt for the other. Given this political tumult, the original version of the 1819 speech was intended to induce the Directory to seriously attract the mind of the war-weary nation by encouraging its political self-absorption into private affairs. As such, this manuscript was not a diabolically manipulative scheme by which any despotic intention of the Directory was safeguarded, but rather one that suggested civic privatism as the appropriate choice of political life.[8]

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6 Cf. Stephen Holmes, *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 33-34.

7 Cf. *Ibid.*, 34. See also Vincent, "Benjamin Constant," 619-620.

8 Cf. Holmes, *Benjamin Constant*, 34-35.

The final part of Constant's speech, on the other hand, was written around 1819 when France was under the Bourbon Restoration. During this period, the French monarchy was restored and the Ultra-royalists dominated the legislature. Opposed to Louis XVIII's constitutional monarchy which effectively limited the sovereignty of the king, the Ultra-royalists persistently insisted on the reinstallation of the absolute power of the sovereign. Although the turbulent movements of the Jacobins had already disappeared, French politics was still exasperated by the ambitious enthusiasm of the Ultras. Being wary of the emergence of this monarchical enthusiasm, Constant employed his earlier understanding of the ancient and modern liberty both to deplore the absolute sovereignty of the king and to display the danger of individual emancipation from politics.

Having elaborated the problem and historical context of the 1819 text, how do we understand the theoretical content of the 1819 lecture and the argumentative drive Constant developed as he combined the two sections together? I would suggest that to reveal the logic and argumentation of the text we should trace the three different layers that constitute the body of the text, namely the distinction of ancient and modern liberty, civic participation, and Constant's romantic turn.

2. Ancient and Modern Liberty

Constant opens the 1819 lecture with distinction between the nature of ancient liberty and that of modern liberty. While ancient liberty consisted in "the *exercise* of which was so dear to the ancient peoples," modern liberty was substantially characterized by "the *enjoyment* of which is especially precious to the modern nations."[9] Parallel to this differentiation, Constant then draws his audience's attention to the substantial sphere where both the exercise of the ancients and the enjoyment of the moderns were in fact articulated. The authentic expression of the ancient's participatory exercises was "in collective power" of society, whereas the locus of enjoyment so precious to the modern was associated with the private sphere.[10] From this differentiation, it is obvious that there is a hedonistic slide from "exercise" to "enjoy", a shift that will be clear as other different features that characterize the difference between ancient and modern liberty are specified.[11]

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9 Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 309.

10 Cf. *Ibid*., 316.

11 Cf. Holmes, *Benjamin Constant*, 31.

The liberty of the ancients was an active and participatory freedom which was expressed in their right to collectively and directly take part in political deliberation on war and peace, legal judgement, ratification, and punishment. This active and direct participation accordingly required the subjugation of private life, particularly in relation to individual liberty or private activities, to the realm of political citizenship. Generally, given such subjugation, the ancients needed ordinary subordinates to take care of their domestic and productive affairs leaving them a vast sphere of freedom to dedicate their lives to politics and the administration of the state.[12] Since the ancients were in fact confined to a narrow region, bellicosity was inescapably identified with the natural propensity of the ancient republics.[13] As an ancient way of being, war also resulted in the increased amount of subordinates to be subjected to household. Moreover, the ancients were limited demographically and thereby were able to easily and conveniently gather in a public place in order to perform their political activities as free men.[14]

The moderns, by contrast, were focused on their private independence, the legitimacy and rule of law, and peaceful enjoyment of commercial affluence. Due to the considerably big size of the modern state, its inevitable involvement in commerce instead of war, and the total abolition of slavery, direct participation and active citizenship were impossible for the moderns.[15] Experiencing such participation as arduous and burdensome, the moderns recurred to the representatives charging them to engage in political affairs on behalf of the nation. By doing so, modern individuals saved themselves from the compulsory commitment to such political involvement.[16]

Moreover, Constant implicitly detests Napoleon's campaign during the French Revolutionary Wars as anachronistic and reversing the universal propensity of modern nations. Instead of war, which was naturally unavoidable in the case of the ancient republics, Constant argues that in modern times commerce has taken its place in engaging the interest of other modern states.[17] As virtuous and patriotic war in ancient times increasingly became unfavourable and discomfiting to modern states, they gradually turned to commerce that provided them with tranquillity and agreeable comfort. Thus, since commerce furnished modern indi-

12 Cf. Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 313.

13 Cf. *Ibid.*, 312.

14 Cf. *Ibid.*, 314.

15 Cf. *Ibid.*, 313-315.

16 Cf. *Ibid.*, 325.

17 Cf. *Ibid.*, 313.

viduals with enjoyment and fulfilment of their needs, it then "inspires in men a vivid love of individual independence."[18]

However, as an inevitable result of the complete subordination of the ancient individuals to political involvement, their private lives came under total surveillance by the state; whereas the moderns comparably had not enough power to influence the course of politics even in democratic states. The complication of these predicaments was that both the ancients and the moderns was kept in their own dogmatic slumber: the former sacrificed their individual affluence and freedom for the exaltation of civic liberty and the latter's self-immersion in the enjoyment of private independence and prosperity hindered them to take part in politics.

Building upon his distinction between ancient and modern liberty, Constant establishes his first claim, which considers modern liberty as "the first need of the moderns" and "the true modern liberty."[19] Constant's adherence to this liberty that empowers individual freedom and participation in economics clearly exposes his keen observation as regards the complexity of French political condition. At that time, the state witnessed the increasing political apathy among its citizens due to the seemingly never ending revolutionary wars and the republican political tyranny. Having seen the severe calamities of the republican revolution, Constant came to believe that civic involvement in politics would be in vain since it would only inflate the revolutionist's unbridled desire for war and the unhealed hatred between the Jacobins and the Ultra-royalists. While acknowledging the admiration the republicans had for the notion of ancient liberty, Constant rebuffs the reinstallation thereof because it was historically anachronistic and tacitly subverted the moderns' private sphere. With this argument, Constant aims at wiping away the illusionary dream of the ancient republic adored by Robespierre, the republican revolutionist, whose fascination with the ancient spirit was partly shaped by Rousseau and Montesquieu, both classical republican theorists. Robespierre believed both that dedication to civic virtues would invigorate the republican fervour and that giving up individual rights to general will would maintain both the state's authority and the individual's freedom.[20] Against these classical republican features, which are prone to political tyranny and arbitrary power, Constant argues unremittingly for individual liberty, the rule of law, and neutral government. "Since we live in modern times, I want a liberty suited to modern times," Constant proclaims.[21]

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18 *Ibid.*, 315.

19 Cf. *Ibid.*, 321-323.

20 Cf. *Ibid.*, 318-320.

21 *Ibid.*, 323.

3. Civic Participation and Civic Liberty

The last part of Constant's 1819 speech bears his second claim that demands popular involvement in the course of a modern state's politics. Given Constant's first insistence on civic privatism, this part appears to be a shocking shift. However, it is not as conflicting as it might seem at the first encounter. Holmes correctly argues that Constant's conscious decision to connect his pessimism and optimism with regard to civic participation has to be seen as a well contrived argument.[22] Holmes explains this by exposing the severe predicament modern individuals would encounter as they overlooked a potential political tyranny inherent in both the overemphasis on individual freedom and the blind endorsement of civic liberty. Thus, the exercise of political participation should balance the pull to both private welfare and civic liberty. With this elaboration, Holmes captures the spirit of Constant's work. Holmes is correct in suggesting that Constant does not want to follow the path taken by the revolutionists. Constant rather appropriates cautiously the republican element of proper political participation for balancing the modern demand of private enjoyment. However, Holmes may miss the fact that the answer Constant proposes to uphold the balance between individual and civic freedom, namely the representative system, had been mentioned earlier in the text. Taking this fact into his account, Holmes might have strengthened his argument for the unity of Constant's text. The result of this is a loss of one of Holmes' proclaimed projects, that is, "to do justice to the theoretical content of the lecture."[23]

From the outset, Constant declares that he wants to explore the nature of the representative system in terms of the distinction between ancient and modern liberty. By representative system, he means "an organization by means of which a nation charges a few individuals to do what it cannot or does not wish to do herself."[24] It is "a proxy given to a certain number of men by the mass of the people who wish their interests to be defended and who nevertheless do not have time to defend them themselves."[25] As such, this system could silently entice modern individuals into locking themselves within their own private sphere, while at the same time gradually promoting the "tyranny of the people's elected representatives."[26] This is so because Constant realizes how much modern individuals were embedded in commerce and the pursuit of private wel-

22 Cf. Holmes, *Benjamin Constant*, 43-46.

23 Cf. *Ibid.*, 43.

24 Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 325.

25 *Ibid.*, 326.

26 These are Constant's own words quoted in Kalyvas and Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings*, 154.

fare. They needed this system both to guarantee their right to pursue this individual happiness and to avoid them from the abuse of a despotic government. However, by rendering this system such an instrumental authority, it could grow wildly into another despotic regime that would certainly jeopardize modern individuals' interests. Thus, to combat these latent dangers, Constant adeptly demands that individuals keep a keen eye on the representative system. Understanding the modern preference for economic affairs, he strategically tried to capture modern readers' attention by referring to a financial example. A rich man may employ a manager to take care of his finance in order to save time for himself to do other things in life. But unless he is so careless and stupid, he will not let his manager work unsupervised. Similarly, as they have recourse to the representative system, modern individuals have to constantly supervise this system so as to determine if the representatives are executing honestly and justly the proxies bestowed on them by the people. Moreover, Constant suggests that they have to "reserve for themselves, at times which should not be separated by too lengthy intervals, the right to discard them [the representatives] if they betray their trust, and to revoke the powers which they might be abused."[27] Thus, while arguing for the representative system in place of the ancient absolutism and the republican arbitrariness, Constant consistently appeals to civic participation to exercise a constant surveillance over the system. Given that he has mentioned this representative system in the first page of his lecture, this suggests that Constant has planned coherently that the argument for balancing individual and civic liberty would be the spirit that invigorated the unity of the text. Accordingly, the justification of the two seemingly contradictory parts of the text as constitutive of the overriding argument of the text does not exclusively depend upon the historical approach. It is true that the historical approach enlightens Constant's motivation in championing modern individual liberty in the first part of the text and Constant's awareness of the danger of individual emancipation from politics in its final part. But, the unity of the text is even more exposed to us if we see this text as clarifying Constant's proposal to balance the demands of individual and civic liberty, namely the balanced system of representation. Thus, reading the text from both this perspective and the historical contextualization provides better understanding of the text in its unity.

Reflecting upon the rise of Napoleon as the First Consul, then as the first French emperor in 1804 and also on the Ultras' influence in the legislature, particularly during the reign of Louis XVIII, Constant correctly suspects that these absolute monarchies naturally tended to downplay popular sovereignty and extend their prerogatives to private

27 Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 326.

spheres.[28] Because they had become weary of internal political tumult and revolutionary wars, the people of France easily surrendered their own freedom in return for unguaranteed stability and a despotic hand at the reins of government. Both army and the people fell into the hands of Napoleon as the latter gained absolute power after his 1799 coup. By quelling his critics, such as *Benjamin Constan*t and *Madame de Staël*, Napoleon established an empire that was animated mostly by the spirit of the *Ancien Régime.* Again, in the name of the same spirit, the Ultra-royalists gained majority power during the reign of Louis XVIII and kept their pressure on him as they disagreed with his constitutionally mitigated monarchy. As they focused on the expansion of their absolute power and the relegation of their critics and political oppositions to the margins, these monarchies ultimately abrogated both civic liberty and individual freedom. Although championing civic liberty as well as popular sovereignty against a monarchist takeover, Constant, however, does not let himself take the chaotic and violent path left by the excesses of the Terror.

It is worth noting that Constant' argument for civic participation in government has two levels.[29] Constant first claims that civic participation and political liberty of the people would guarantee individual freedom, private welfare, and personal security from their absorption into a despotic realm. In this way, political involvement is seen simply as a means to an end, namely the secure establishment of private rights and civil liberty. Constant writes,

> Individual liberty, I repeat, is the true modern liberty. Political liberty is its guarantee, consequently political liberty is indispensable... As you see, Gentlemen, my observations do not in the least tend to diminish the value of political liberty... It is not security which we must weaken; it is enjoyment which we must extend. It is not political liberty which I wish to renounce; it is civil liberty which I claim, along with other forms of political liberty.[30]

In what follows, Constant was aware that at that time the pull to the liberty of the moderns was much stronger than the pull of the idea of exercising collective freedom in politics. This was the case due to the progress of civilization, the achievement of modern industry, and significant changes in the nature of commerce, circulation, and money. These stunning changes in the life of the moderns overturned the political powers which were at the centre of the ancients' spirit, thus leaving wealth as "a power which is more readily available in all circumstances, more readily applicable to all interests, and consequently more real and better

28 Cf. Vincent, "Benjamin Constant," 608.

29 This point is suggested by Holmes. Cf. Holmes, *Benjamin Constant,* 40-43.

30 Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 323-324.

obeyed."[31] Referring to the absolutism of Napoleon and the Bourbon Restoration, however, Constant indentifies the critical risk of the modern fascination with personal freedom and individual welfare. As the moderns let themselves be captivated by such a fascination, a man or a group of people would insistently encourage the modern fascination with personal wealth and liberty and would thereby slowly gain the political power needed for serving their despotic desire.[32] This despotic regime will in turn endanger individual freedom and wealth. To consolidate its power, a despot has to lure modern individuals into personal solipsism because an individual captured in the pursuit of private enjoyment will be more attracted to the immediate commercial gains than the ideal of politics. As a result, from the perspective of such an individual, civic liberty and political involvement are insignificant and disposable. Thus, to circumvent the rise of a dictatorship, Constant insists on civic participation in government as a guarantee for securing private happiness and enjoyment.

However, Constant immediately realizes the weakness of his instrumental argument for civic activism, namely that it cannot singlehandedly wake modern individuals up from their civic slumber. He then resorts to questioning the purpose of human life. Indeed, he admits that people need and enjoy prosperity but this alone will not define the whole definition of being human. Unless they gaze beyond this private enjoyment, they would end up undermining morality, renouncing civic activities, and setting noble desires aside.

> ...I bear witness to the better part of our nature, that noble disquiet which pursues and torments us, that desire to broaden our knowledge and develop our faculties. It is not to happiness alone, it is to self-development that our destiny calls us; and political liberty is the most powerful, the most effective means of self-development that heaven has given us.
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> Political liberty, by submitting all the citizens, without exception, the care and assessment of their most sacred interests, enlarges their spirit, ennobles their thoughts, and establishes among them a kind of intellectual equality which forms the glory and power of a people.[33]

Appealing to self-development as the elevated aim of human life, Constant reconstructs his first instrumental argument by promoting the nature of political liberty. Political liberty is not only a political means to protect private wealth but also a fundamental and universal right endowed by a divine power, and by virtue of which citizens establish their own dignity. This substantial argument for political involvement justifies its indispensability in the course of human life. In this way, Constant

31 *Ibid.*, 325.

32 Cf. *Ibid.*, 326.

33 *Ibid.*, 327.

appropriates this particular element of the ancients' liberty not as an instrumental supplement to the liberty of the moderns, but as a substantial right of being citizens.

4. Romantic Appeal to the Principle of Patriotism

K. Steven Vincent has suggested that Constant's defence of liberalism is intricately entwined with his appeal to the significance of romantic sentiment and emotion and that his turn to the romantic sentiment had already preoccupied Constant in his early writings.[34] Against Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Robespierre who claimed that in the name of the good of society and the general will people had to give up their personal gains and particular will, and that citizenship was spirited by civic virtues, Constant argued for modern self-interest. However, realizing both that the inertia of this entrenched self-interest would lead to egocentrism and privatism and that the latter in turn would fall prey to the absolute monarchy, Constant then called for the civic sentiment of enthusiasm. But this sentiment, on the other hand, could be withered away by passivism conditioned by absolutism, or by the excess of self-interest.[35]

In his 1819 lecture, Constant again valorises the romantic sentiment in the last pages of the text. After enriching political liberty with the indispensable status as a substantial right, the next question Constant tackles is how the sense of this right could permeate the life of modern individuals. To answer this question, Constant holds that by virtue of the sentiment of patriotism, which definitely differs from the patriotic spirit of the left-wing Republicans, political liberty would be "the most effective means of self development" to ennoble the spirit, thoughts, and the intellectual equality of citizens. In other words, the sentiment of patriotism would penetrate and enliven modern individuals' awareness of the significance of political liberty in civic life and of its nature as an ineradicable right. While he believes in the importance of human sentiments over the sovereignty of reason in politics, Constant seems to emphasize the alternative he took in dealing with contradicting political forces. He did not let himself be trapped in both the absolutism that tended to stifle individual activity with passivism and the riotous revolution of the Jacobins that abused the nature of patriotism. On the other hand, he also did not lure himself into the latent risk of atomized individualism, political indifference, and the alienated pursuit of happiness.

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34 Cf. Vincent, "Benjamin Constant," 625-637.

35 Constant wrote, "[c]haracters are still too small for the spirits, they are worn down, as the body, by the habit of inaction or by the excess of pleasure." Quoted in *ibid*., 627.

Given the importance of political liberty and other rights in articulating the dignity of citizens, Constant seems to insist on the role of political institutions in guaranteeing the exercise of these rights. Interestingly enough, Constant immediately declares that the main function of such institutions is to provide the moral education for citizens.[36] This seems to allude to Constant's nervousness about and his growing mistrust of political institutions since he had already experienced the repugnant susceptibility of institutions to being abused by the sovereign.[37] Early in his carrier as a politician, he witnessed the ideological war between the extreme royalist right and the extreme Jacobin left and already tried to occupy the principled middle path endorsed by the moderates.[38] While the same spirit and problem invigorated his passion throughout his political participation, his solutions to the problem varied.[39] Having experienced the egoistic thrust of every party in the legislature (the Jacobins was striving for the classical Republic and the Ultras for the restoration of the Old regime monarchy) and the people's weariness as regards involvement in politics during the reign of the Directory, it is very likely that Constant distrusts the capacity of the legislature to educate people about morality. But this does not mean that he wants to dispel the legislature in his political scheme. On the contrary, as we have seen, Constant believes that the representative system would secure individual and civic freedom from the reach of the arbitrary general will and absolutism.

5. Closing Remarks

Constant's turn to the romantic sentiment of patriotism gives rise to several questions. Firstly, Holmes has pointed to the practical problem of how to galvanize individuals to participate in politics. He seems to concede to Constant's answer which invokes the sentiment of patriotism. However, given that commerce has not only been "the only aim, the universal tendency, the true life of nations" but also the inspiration of the modern vivid love of individual liberty, how can patriotism be cultivated in every citizen who has been exposed to that commercial life?[40]

It seems also difficult to convince people immersed in the modern world and caught in basic economic problems to take part in politics so that they will not corrode the nature of their dignity as citizen. These

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36 Cf. Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 328.

37 This point was suggested by Prof. A Braeckman (*Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*), during our RGSPP discussion on Constant.

38 Cf. Vincent, "Benjamin Constant," 614.

39 Cf. Kalyvas and Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings,* 151-152.

40 Cf. Constant, *The Liberty of the Ancients*, 314-315.

people may easily surrender their political rights in place of the fulfilment of their basic needs. In a state where commerce determines all aspects of life, citizens may perhaps fall into civic absenteeism since what defines their achievements are no longer being active in politics but rather wealth and private enjoyment. For example, if they want to participate in social life, they perhaps prefer social charity to the struggle for universal suffrage. Therefore, it is not immediately clear how Constant's proposal to cultivate patriotism amongst modern individuals will work.

Secondly, Constant emphasizes and inflates only one dimension of the problem, namely politics and sociality, as he employs the sentiment of patriotism. The overemphasis of this sentiment may in turn result in the inadvertent negligence of privatism. As such, Constant actually reproduces structurally the same problem from the other side. Although this problem of overemphasis is not his intention, the logic of his solution to the problem of civic absenteeism leads to the articulation of the problem. But, it is clear that one important thing that we can learn from Constant's preoccupation with his intellectual problem is his insistence on coping with the same underlying question of how to protect individual freedom, private welfare, the rule of law, and civic liberty within the framework of a neutral government.

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