

[Notes and Communications]

How a Fat Slave Can Make His Soul Noble: Takenori Inoki on Liberty

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The Aesop's Fables were written in the sixth century. Among the fables, there is a tale called "The Dog and The Wolf." When a lean wolf got hungry, he encountered a house dog. He asked the house dog for some food in return for work. The dog told the wolf that he would introduce the wolf to his master. "I will easily arrange that for you! Come with me to my master, and you can share my work!" On the way there, however, the wolf noticed that the hair on a certain part of the dog's neck was rather thin, and looked like it had been worn away. The wolf asked the dog how that had happened. "Oh, it is nothing! That is the place where the collar is put on me at night while I am chained up. It chafes a bit, but one soon gets used to it." When the wolf heard this, he turned down the dog's offer to be introduced to his master. The wolf said, "Better to starve free, than to be a fat slave."

Between the life of a fat slave (house dog) and the life of a lonely wolf with a risk of starvation: which life do humans expect to have? In *A History of Ideas on Liberty*, Takenori Inoki asks the following question: "Does a man not feel like "I want to follow up with something?" There must be a human desire to eat enough even if we are restrained" (Inoki 2016 a, 4).

However, this must be a controversial issue. To put it in terms of economics, people would calculate their subjective costs and benefits vis-a-vis both options, becoming a fat slave and being a lonely wolf, and then choose one of these based on their individual preferences. People might prefer to become a fat slave or to become a lonely wolf.

Throughout both his newly published books, *A History of Ideas on Liberty* and *Conditions of Liberty*, based on his concern for Catholic communitarianism, Inoki pays attention to a possible liberty that is different from the freedom with a risk of starvation. Humans are not the lonely wolf that denies slavery. They can choose another liberty that is available when they slave themselves or convert themselves. Such an idea remains a constant through both his books.

However, what is the nature of this possible liberty? Slavery for becoming fat and conversion (devotion) to God are very different modes of not being in the state of the lonely wolf. The question that must be asked here is how the desire to become a fat slave brings rich qualities of spiritual aspiration in humans. The normative theory of a good society must respond to this question.

When we admit unrestrainedly to slave ourselves to others from the desire “to become fat,” we might turn our society toward totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is a political regime that results from people’s slavery to the great whole. In order to constitute a free society, there must be various institutional devices that make people sublimate their desires to acquire noble qualities. Along with such an academic freedom, the freedoms of association and expression, local autonomy, the jury system, and other equipment must be necessary for this purpose. We must examine the functions that these various devices play.

What Inoki pays attention to is “the principle of subsidiarity,” which has been intensely discussed in the argument of the legitimacy of the European Union in these decades (Inoki 2016 a, 44–45; 2016 b, 36–39). The background of the principle of subsidiarity is grounded in the idea of the “dignity of individuals” which is included in the philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church. The principle of subsidiarity says that the central organization (the church or the state) should complementarily accept to do only what cannot be done by individuals and autonomous organizations. Through such complementary relationships, a society becomes balanced, where the four layers, including individuals, intermediate groups, the state and the super-state organizations, such as the EU, play a mutually complementary role. Such an idea of multilayered inclusions would be a shared view in Roman Catholicism, and among Alexis de Tocqueville, Peter Koslowski, and other modern communitarian philosophers.

Here, I would like to point out that the principle of subsidiarity is the principle of social organization, and it is not only based on individual dignity, but also on the human nature of seeking “fat slavery” by escaping freedom with a risk of hunger. People who seek solitary freedom with no constraints by others do not require institutions such as the state or the EU. On the other hand, people who seek fat slavery call for a great whole, such as the state or the EU. It would be a realistic view to follow the principle of subsidiarity and allow slavery as a basis to lead to satisfy our desire.

Such a view on human beings is based on the fact that people are to abandon the idea of “keeping their individual dignity in hunger,” and to accept the idea of “becoming fat under the condition of slavery.” There must be a fundamental sense of self-abandonment that makes people turn down their own views. Such a being that chose to escape hunger and become fat like a house dog is the very being that gives priority to satisfying desires, and withdrawing

from its own values. A society that makes people get fat by compromise does not necessarily seem to be based on the idea of “individual dignity.”

The way people live with such compromise is by the abandonment of the self as a being, and at the same time, the affirmation of desire. Humans sometimes prioritize a comfortable life that satisfies their desires in slavery, rather than the achievement of a worthwhile objective and nobleness of their spirit without slavery. The subsidiarity that such humans seek is slavery that operates through various activities. A society based on such slavery has a layered structure of slavery. However, a slave can become a person who seeks “a good life” under the condition of slavery to the great whole. For example, people may pursue moral values by taking responsibility in their families or communities. People may organize a small group based on their will such as a “chess club” or a “photo club,” and find out the significance of their lives when they exercise their individual creativity and efforts in such groups. Exercising ingenuity and effort in a small association is also a way of living, and it minimizes the relationship of slavery to the authority. Unlike lonely and noble wolves, people will be able to live their collective lives while maintaining their nobility in a certain form of a “slavery relationship.”

In a sense, “a good society” is said to be one in which people abandon their own values and choose to be “fat slaves,” while minimizing their relationship of slavery to the authority. Of course, people may not have abandoned their own values through slavery, because people are not born with their values. A society where a person accepts “slavery to the great whole” before recognizing his own values, and then discovers the value of life in the process of satisfying various desires, may be called a good society. “The freedom of slave dogs” still offers the possibility of a good life within a tame life. However, how does “slavery” bring us “freedom”? I would like to divide this fundamental issue into the following three questions:

(1) How can humans who seek “fat slavery” suppress their slavery and be free from “the great whole” (e.g., nation-state) ?

(2) How can humans who seek “fat slavery” control their desire to get fat and live “a good life”?

(3) How can humans who seek “fat slavery” transform their desires toward having “a good life” (e.g., devotion to God or spiritual excellence) ?

These three questions are interrelated. For example, the “freedom of expression,” is a matter of “freedom from the state” and of realizing a good life at the same time. Furthermore, this freedom is about being excellent through the idea of expressing one’s truth. The problem of freedom is to reveal the relationship between these three dimensions.

According to Catholic communitarianism, (1) is guided by (2), and (2) is

guided by (3). Freedom from the state is guided by the philosophy of “realizing a good life,” and “the realization of a good life” is guided by “devotion to the divine.” Charles Taylor is one of the thinkers who developed a normative theory from this perspective. However, the author does not fully accept the idea of Catholic communitarianism although he resonates with the idea.

For example, there is a controversial issue of whether the freedom of suicide should be accepted in our society or not. While liberalism admits to this freedom, Catholic communitarianism does not. According to the latter, suicide is not a realization of a good life. There is a conflict between “a free society per se” and “a free society that pursues the realization of a good life.” In response to this problem, the author writes that suicide in our age cannot necessarily be considered as “free choice by free will.” There are cases where it can be regarded as “death due to mental illness,” that is, “disease death.” He points out that “it is becoming impossible to treat it as a matter of pure ethics with no reference to knowledge of psychiatry” (Inoki 2016 a, 101). Suicide might not necessarily be a result of free choice on part of the person himself. However, the crucial question is, what kind of an attitude should our society have toward people who want to commit suicide out of free will. For example, if a person with disabilities, who depends on people in their life because of their lack of limbs, wishes to commit suicide with free will, should the activities of those who help this disabled person be prohibited by law? Catholic communitarianism does not allow assisted suicide and regards assistants as guilty. Suicide would not lead to a good life, in itself. However, the author of *A History of Ideas on Liberty* avoids these controversial issues and thus, his stance on Catholic communitarianism remains unclear.

Another topic that *A History of Ideas on Liberty* discusses is the freedom of expression. Which society is more desirable: a liberal society with the freedom of expression or a society that restricts this freedom toward ensuring a “good life”? The author examines Yukichi Fukuzawa on opposing textbook examination, the exclusion of heretic books in the Middle Ages, and Tocqueville on “freedom of publication,” as opposed to censorship and others (Inoki 2016 a, 142, 169, 184). In these discussions, however, the implications of Catholic communitarianism are not clear. The idea that it is undesirable to restrict the freedom of expression using the criterion of “good and bad” is also acknowledged by liberalism. Of course, certain communitarians may call for the realization of the “good life” in public spheres. However, the author does not make such a claim, but only criticizes the “excessive destruction of honor, invasion of privacy, ugly, self-revealing, and false advertisements” (Inoki 2016 a, 71) and in this respect, it seems not to contradict the position of liberalism.

A History of Ideas on Liberty discusses the “freedom of university” in its

final chapter. In a university, without having any idea of “a good life” as the purpose of life, it is possible to have spiritual time within leisure and to meditate on divine things. The author defends such a life of contemplation. Perhaps even those who are seeking “fat slavery,” will be able to contemplate beyond their secular lives through the practice of liberal arts at a university. However, in these arguments, the author does not particularly develop Catholic communitarian theories. His whole argument is based on a conventional theory of liberal arts. It is true that the life of meditation on divine things is possible at a university. However, such a life is open to various interpretations on religions and cosmological grounds. A communitarian might emphasize on the idea of a community of meditation. A liberal might regard the life of meditation as a purely personal good.

On the other hand, the other book, *Conditions of Liberty*, clearly reveals the author’s concern for communitarianism. The task of *Conditions of Liberty* is to consider what “common good” in the following context is: “common good as an idea that transforms individuals who have a strong interest only in their private lives to citizens who have a public spirit under the condition of democracy” (Inoki 1986b, 2). However, the author has not stepped into the issue of what the common “ideal” that human beings in our modern society possess is, by saying that it is too much for him to deal with. Instead, the author examines the following three institutions incorporated into the American democracy to overcome its adverse effects: local autonomy the jury system, and association, in line with Tocqueville. According to the author, these three institutions are considered to have the power to transform humans from “selfish individuals” to citizens considering “common good,” as seen in Tocqueville (Inoki 2016b, 47). The aim of *Conditions of Liberty* is to draw such a society that incorporates these systems, following Tocqueville’s ideas, based on his views on communitarianism.

However, when we examine this book carefully, it seems that the three systems are being defended by a philosophy that is different from common good. Even if these three systems are the conditions that enable common good, they do not seem to be defended by the idea of it.

Firstly, this book examines Tocqueville’s theory of local autonomy (Chapter 2) and Yukichi Fukuzawa’s introduction of his theory of local autonomy to Japan (Chapter 1). However, what is emphasized by the author is not the pursuit of common good in local governments, but the issue of securing human resources. This book also introduces Fukuzawa’s “middle class theory,” but what is emphasized there is “vigorous people” who led the prosperity of the country. Both these concerns are based on the idea of “prosperity through securing human resources and demonstrating their abilities,” rather than the idea of a “good

life.” There is no direct question as to the morality of the way of living.

Secondly, this book discusses the role of association. However, the association characterized in this book seems to be idealized by a different value rather than a condition that enables “a good life” (Inoki 2016b, 123). Some characteristics of the association that are listed out are, for example, the education of members and citizens, setting a professional code of conduct, setting and enforcing product safety and quality standards, recommendation and organization of volunteer activities, distribution of information on important social problems to citizens, and so on. However, these elements seem to be norms and information shared by individuals in pursuit of various objectives, rather than elements of common good. These characteristics of the association are conditions under which members can live a good life, while also being conditions for members to live freely without being bound by the idea of common good. Are they organized to realize “common good” or are they organized to realize people’s “individual freedoms”? If we do not step into the question of which one gains priority over the other, or where these two ideas conflict with each other, the normative implication of communitarianism seems unclear.

Thirdly, the jury system argument (Inoki 2016b, 144) seems to have little relation with the idea of common good. According to Tocqueville, the jury system helps plant some of the mental habits of judges in the minds of citizens. This habit is said to give people tools to be free under the rule of law. From this point of view, the author states that “law is a device for guaranteeing human freedom,” and independence alone will not bring order to society. Of course, the jury system may be considered appropriate to the idea of communitarianism, because it gives people the feeling of participation in governance, which enables them to have “political virtues as participation.” However, this virtue is guided by the idea of “freedom under the rule of law” in Tocqueville’s understanding. The philosophy of common good as political participation would not restrict the idea of freedom under the rule of law.

Thus, the above three systems, local autonomy, association and the jury system, are more like the institutions that are justified by human ability to build a free society, rather than by common good. It seems to be justified, as a system, to improve human qualities. If that is the case, the author’s position is the same as what I call “growth-oriented liberalism.” However, I want to pose a question on this issue. For example, with regard to local autonomy, can local governments like municipalities raise specific common values? Growth-oriented liberalism will only recognize growth-oriented common values such as “improving ability” or “pursuing common ideals” in local autonomy. On the other hand, what kind of value orientations can be considered as communitarianism? From answering such a question, ideological issues would emerge.

In my opinion, while we would not be able to obtain a clear and fixed agreement on what common good in our society is, including local autonomy, we can reach a consensus to make a society where multidimensional goods are nurtured. We might also be able to agree to build a society where an unknown good emerges through people's activities. I think that society as a discovery device of "good" can well be justified by the philosophy of growth-oriented liberalism rather than communitarianism.

Finally, I would like to mention a little on religious issues. In *Conditions of Liberty*, the author discusses Tocqueville's view of religion (Inoki 2016 b, 202–03, 333). According to Tocqueville, it is necessary to assume the afterlife in order for human virtue (good) to be established. In a secular society, virtuous acts are not always rewarded. Unless we assume the posthumous world, we cannot lead people to do virtuous acts. In order to foster virtuous activities, we need to have a religion that assumes life after death.

Like Tocqueville, the position to consider social governance by virtue and good will have to assume religion beyond a secular society. Then, the question must be how we should place religion in our secularized society. For example, what kind of social status should we give religious corporations? Does the government have taxation rights on religious corporations? How should we interpret the relationship between religious freedom of people and taxation rights of the secular government? These issues are not discussed in this book but may be relevant to the philosophy of Catholic communitarianism.

In the postscript of *Conditions of Liberty*, the author notes that this book is the first half of his plan of writing, as the series of his essays in the magazine was suspended due to his unexpected illness. He planned to pick up the latter half of his book as originally planned, with Henri Bergson and Frank Knight. In order to examine the whole picture of the author's thoughts, we need to wait for the latter half of his plan on this project to unfold.

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Bibliography

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