

**A FOURTH DIALOGUE CONCERNING
LIBERTY: CONTAINING AN EXPOSITION
OF THE FALSITY OF THE FIRST AND
LEADING PRINCIPLES OF THE PRESENT
REVOLUTIONISTS IN EUROPE, PP. 1-66**

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A Fourth Dialogue Concerning Liberty: Containing an Exposition of the Falsity of the First and leading principles of the present revolutionists in Europe, pp. 1-66 by Jackson Barwis

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JACKSON BARWIS

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By JACKSON BARWIS, Esq.

Il est vrai que, dans les Démocraties, le Peuple *paroit* faire ce qu'il veut ; mais la Liberté Politique ne consiste point à faire ce que l'on veut.—Dans un Etat, c'est-à-dire, dans une Société où il y a des Loix, la Liberté ne peut consister qu'à pouvoir faire ce que l'on doit vouloir, & à n'être point contraint de faire ce que l'on ne doit pas vouloir.

MONTESQUIEU, Tome I. p. 355.

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DIALOGUE IV,

POLITICAL Liberty, for the last twenty years, has been the subject of continual discussion; and there has, doubtless, been much light thrown on it by its numerous advocates and friends, and even by its enemies.

But as it frequently and unfortunately happens, that the best things are spoiled, and the best intentions defeated, through intemperate zeal; which determines the mind before it understands its object, and which hurries it to conclusions before it has examined principles; it is hoped that the following Dialogue may have a tendency to abate such zeal, and to reduce the mind to that temper which is

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indispensably necessary in the investigation and comprehension of truth. Certain it is that so many voluminous works could never have been written on morals and politics, had the *same ideas* been affixed to the *same words*, by the numerous competitors for literary fame.

It is now, seventeen years ago, since a friend of mine attempted a correct definition of the moral and political meaning of the word *Liberty*, in several conversations which were conveyed to the public in three Dialogues. A fourth is now produced, rather reluctantly, as my friend seemed to think enough had been said in the three former.

Being on a visit at his agreeable retirement in the country; according to our usual custom, we took our walks, and held our conversation, of which he always

has

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has an inexhaustible fund. We long amused ourselves with general observations on what had been said, written, and done, in these days of revolutions: when, perceiving that he was not at all satisfied either with the doctrines or practices of the leading Champions of the day, in the cause of *Liberty*, I drew him at length to explain himself, to nearly the following purport.

Far be it from my thoughts, said he, to impute blame to any of the *true friends* of Liberty; having, you know, always shewn myself ambitious of being enrolled among them. But it must be considered as of the greatest importance to *the cause*, that we clearly and truly understand each other; and that, by the word *Liberty*, we signify the *same ideas, the same thoughts, and the same intentions*; and that we do

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not entertain *very various*, but even *very opposite ideas*; and which may extend to *licentiousness*.—I assented.—For moral and political words, continued he, are so indefinitely used, that men do not easily understand each other. Hence that eternal writing and reasoning on the *same subjects*: and hence too false eloquence derives her authority, and rules with magic force the illiterate and gaping multitude. But in the search of truth, her falsties must be detected and exposed, and her florid and delusive vanities must be thrown aside; not merely as worthless, but as destructive to the native simplicity of truth.

Amidst the fanciful and endless imaginations of the mind, unshubdued and uncorrected by a pure affection for nature, and for truth; every moral and political
word

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word has a thousand shades of meaning, and admits of innumerable combinations; which, under the direction of a *vain and disingenuous wit*, throws a perpetual and almost impenetrable obscurity around the plainest and most undeniable truths.— Certainly, said I; but proceed.

There can be no just reasoning, continued he, where this *variegated verbosity* prevails. If we desire to obtain any real knowledge, our ideas must be founded on some *real existences* in nature; our words must be accurately defined, and all epithets, similes, allusions, and figurative expressions of every kind, must be read with a very jealous eye: if it were not that most readers like *amusement*, much better than *knowledge*, words could not pass so currently, and with so little attention to their relative signification.

A few

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A few words, which have been employed by the several competitors in the present great controversy concerning *Liberty*, from the want of being accurately defined, or from being totally incapable of definition, on account of their representing *no ideas derived from any existence in nature*; have been the causes of much error and falsehood, and most certainly tend to much practical mischief.—I am all attention, said I.

The word *Sovereignty*, continued he, as used by a late French writer*, to signify *the supreme power, or will of a whole nation collectively*; and as perceived, felt, and understood by a whole nation, as if it had but *one mind*; has doubtless not the least foundation in nature; and is a most ridiculous and fanatical imagination.

To

* J. J. Rousseau.