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What is liberalism

Today's reflections on liberalism reveal an intellectual fervor unthinkable until some time ago. Today, all (or almost) say they are liberal and as such all (or almost) you show your concern for the fate of freedom. It's fine. But, as always happens in such circumstances, the risk is great that the concepts - in this case liberalism - vaporino indistinct and that, under the flag of a single heartbeat, we bring together the ideas and principles not compatible between most contradictory them. Hence the opportunity to provide the reader with some definitions that minimize the possibility of misunderstanding.

Norberto Bobbio: The Liberal State

*The doctrine of the liberal state presents itself to its beginning (in the early doctrines of the contractarian monarcomachi cd) as the defense limited the state against the state overall. For absolute state means the state where the sovereign is *legibus solitus* and whose power is so unlimited, arbitrary. The state is limited against the state in which the supreme power is limited by both the divine and natural law (the so-called natural rights, inalienable and inviolable), both from civil law through the constitution agreed (contractual foundation of power). All authors that can be traced back to the liberal view of the state monotonously repeated this concept and the whole history of the liberal state is developed in the search for techniques to realize the principle of limitation of power.*

We can distinguish, for clarity, two limited forms of power: a limitation on the material, which consists in subtracting positive and negative to the imperatives of the sovereign sphere of behaviors that are recognized by nature free (the so-called sphere of legality), and a formal limitation is to put all the organs of state power under the general laws of the State. The first limitation is based on the principle of protection of individual rights by public authorities: the second on the control of public authorities by individuals. Guarantee of rights and powers of control are the two traits of the liberal state. The first of these principles has given rise to the declaration of natural rights, the second division of powers. Briefly we can say that the proclamation of the rights and power sharing are the two fundamental institutions of the liberal state understood as the rule of law, or as a state whose business is in the double sense, that is materially and formally limited.

[Taken from: From Freedom compared to that of the modern descendants, now in his General Theory of politics, Einaudi, Torino 1999, p.224]