

A Critical Reflection on the Paradigm Transformation of Liberalism in the Age of Risk

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Abstract

Contemporary society is increasingly shaped by systemic risks generated within the very process of modernization. Climate change, ecological degradation, public health crises, the loss of control over technological systems, and failures of global governance no longer appear as isolated events; rather, they threaten the shared conditions of human existence and reshape the problem horizon of modern political philosophy. This article argues that such systemic existential crises expose and intensify liberalism's internal tensions between liberty and equality, the individual and the community, and neutrality and substantive value commitments. The age of risk, however, does not require a simple rejection of liberalism. It calls instead for a paradigm transformation: from a rights-centered model based on isolated individuals toward a conception of freedom grounded in the shared conditions of existence of real individuals in coexistence and co-being, and from negative liberty toward resilient freedom. Taking Marx's conception of humanity as "human society or associated humanity" as its methodological point of departure, this article argues that this conception itself contains three interrelated dimensions: a perspective of totality, a principle of real individuals, and a critical measure for understanding the unity of the individual and humanity. On this basis, it explores the possible direction of liberalism's paradigm transformation in the age of risk. It concludes that liberalism can regain theoretical explanatory power and normative vitality only by rethinking individual freedom in relation to the shared conditions of human existence.

Keywords

Systemic existential crisis; liberalism; paradigm transformation; human coexistence and co-being; resilient freedom.

1. Introduction

Human society is entering an age in which risk is deeply embedded in the very process of modernization itself. As Ulrich Beck has shown, we have entered an era in which risk is woven into the fabric of society, and in which complex causal chains may at any moment give rise to a "butterfly effect"-like crisis capable of spreading across the globe. Yet the more fundamental and more easily overlooked problem is that risk today is no longer merely a contingent "accident" or a calculable form of "uncertainty." Rather, it has become an existential reality, sedimented in the deep structures of technology, ecology, economy, and governance. Climate change, ecological degradation, public health crises, technological loss of control, the risk of war, financial turbulence, and the failure of global governance are no longer merely local or accidental social events. Increasingly, they appear as systemic existential crises that may threaten the shared conditions of human existence. The fundamental feature of the age of risk is that major risks do not begin to exist only after disasters have erupted. They are gradually generated within technological expansion, capital accumulation, institutional inertia, and everyday forms of life. By the time they manifest themselves as crises, they have often already approached a critical threshold beyond which reversal becomes exceedingly difficult. Risk, therefore, is not merely a new object of governance added to modern society. It also marks a

transformation of the problem-field that modern political philosophy must confront. It compels us to re-examine the relations among freedom, rights, equality, responsibility, community, and the shared conditions of human existence.

Liberalism, as a major tradition of modern political philosophy, once played an irreplaceable role in establishing individual rights, limiting arbitrary power, safeguarding value pluralism, and advancing institutional justice. Yet when “living on the volcano of civilization” becomes not a warning aphorism but a real metaphor for everyday existence, the traditional paradigm of liberalism has already revealed its profound untimeliness. In the face of systemic existential crises, its basic presuppositions, centered on the abstract individual, the priority of rights, state neutrality, and negative liberty, are confronted with deep challenges. The age of risk does not call for a simple negation of liberalism. Rather, it requires a paradigm transformation of liberalism. This means a shift from the protection of the rights of isolated individuals to the construction of the shared conditions of existence for real individuals in coexistence and co-being, from negative liberty to resilient freedom, and from justice within the nation-state to global publicness and intergenerational responsibility. Marx’s conception of humanity as “human society or associated humanity” [1] provides this transformation with a perspective of totality, a principle of real individuals, and a critical measure for the unity of the individual and humanity.

2. The Internal Tensions of the Liberal Paradigm

Broadly speaking, liberalism remains the dominant tradition in contemporary Anglo-American political philosophy. Historically, demands for equal suffrage and gender equality, opposition to racial discrimination and national oppression, the defense of the free-market economy and individual liberties, and resistance to political persecution have all, in different ways, been associated with the liberal tradition. Yet liberalism is difficult to define. It is not a single, closed theoretical system, but a theoretical paradigm that has been continuously redefined, expanded, and contested in changing historical contexts. It is also a tradition shaped by ongoing adjustments among individual freedom, state power, social justice, public reason, and cultural pluralism. Reflecting on the concept of liberalism, Bell observes that “The history of liberalism... is a history of constant reinvention.” [2] Liberalism has thus acquired multiple, and at times even mutually contradictory, meanings in political thought and the social sciences. The theoretical predicament of liberalism, therefore, does not arise solely from external critique; it is also rooted in the internal tensions of its own normative structure.

There has always been a tension between liberty and equality that cannot be fully dissolved. Mill’s claim that “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign,” [3] may be said to have established the basic intuition and position of modern liberalism, namely that individual liberty should be protected to the greatest possible extent, and that the state and society may interfere with the individual only for the purpose of preventing harm to others. Berlin’s statement that “The wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom,” [4] further defines negative liberty by marking out the boundary of non-interference implicit in Mill’s conception of freedom. In classical liberalism, individual liberty is thus taken as the core value. It emphasizes the individual’s right to be free from arbitrary coercion and to choose a way of life autonomously. Yet if freedom is understood merely as a formal right or legal status, without regard to differences in wealth, education, health, class position, and the distribution of social resources, it may in practice become an institutional condition that enables a small number of advantaged groups to realize their own interests more fully. Rawls’s turn to egalitarian liberalism therefore redirects liberal concern from the limitation of power to the justice of the basic structure of society. Liberalism is not merely concerned with protecting individuals from interference; it also requires social institutions to arrange rights,

opportunities, and resources in a fair manner. As Rawls states, “the fundamental idea in the concept of justice is fairness.” [5] Dworkin’s revision mainly centers on Rawls’s classification of primary goods for the least advantaged. He argues that “the difference principle is tuned to only one of the dimensions of equality,” [6] and therefore proposes the “equality auction” and the “hypothetical insurance market” as alternatives to the Rawlsian difference principle. For Dworkin, these two procedures are capable of realizing a just distribution of resources. From Rawls to Dworkin, egalitarian liberalism seeks to correct the formalistic tendency of classical liberalism through fair equality of opportunity, the difference principle, or equality of resources, thereby showing that genuine freedom cannot be detached from certain egalitarian conditions. Within liberalism, however, disagreement also arises over whether distributive justice infringes upon rights. Unlike Rawls, Nozick emphasizes the constraints that rights and property rights impose on redistribution. Libertarianism, represented by Nozick, consistently maintains that “a distribution is just if everyone is entitled to the holdings.” [7] It rejects the Rawlsian attempt to arrange social distribution according to a predetermined pattern, arguing instead that the key to justice lies not in whether the final distributive outcome is equal, but in whether the processes of acquisition, transfer, and rectification are legitimate.

The tension between the individual and the community constitutes a deeper subject-theoretical predicament within the liberal paradigm. Liberalism usually understands the individual as a bearer of rights, a subject of choice, and a contracting agent. Yet the individual is not an isolated atom existing prior to all social relations. Locke’s natural-rights theory begins from the idea that “every Man has a Property in his own Person,” [8] thereby making the individual the primary bearer of rights and political legitimacy. Mill radicalizes this liberal individualism by linking liberty with individuality and self-development. Rawls’s liberalism is similarly grounded in the political conception of “the citizen as a free and equal person,” [9] although this conception remains abstracted from concrete social identities. Liberalism nevertheless continues to take the individual as its basic normative unit, emphasizing the priority of the individual as the bearer of rights, the subject of choice, and the addressee of institutional justification. Yet, as communitarian theorists such as Sandel, Taylor, and MacIntyre have argued, this conception of the individual tends to construe the subject as an abstract person detached from history, culture, tradition, and social relations. Sandel criticizes liberalism for presupposing an unencumbered self for whom “the self is prior to its ends” [10]; Taylor emphasizes that “our identity is partly shaped by recognition” [11], thereby showing that identity, autonomy, and moral judgment are formed within relations of recognition and cultural contexts; and MacIntyre further argues that “The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest” [12], indicating that individual life has a narrative structure and that rationality and virtue are always embedded in particular traditions and common practices. The individual, therefore, is not an isolated atom existing prior to all social relations, but a real subject formed within communal relations. Relational autonomy theorists similarly insist that “persons are socially embedded,” [13] which makes autonomy dependent on social relations rather than opposed to them. Human identity, value judgment, agency, and self-understanding are all formed within specific historical, cultural, institutional, and communal relations. Raz’s liberal multiculturalism also recognizes that “individual freedom and prosperity depend on full and unimpeded membership” [14] in a flourishing cultural group. His argument concerning the relation between cultural membership and individual freedom shows, from within liberalism itself, that individual autonomy does not exclude social relations; rather, it depends upon certain social, cultural, and institutional conditions.

Liberalism also faces tensions among neutrality, value commitments, and cultural difference. In his later political liberalism, Rawls explicitly takes “the fact of reasonable pluralism” [15] as a basic condition of liberal democratic institutions. Through the ideas of public reason and overlapping consensus, he seeks to show that, when irreducible comprehensive doctrines

coexist, citizens must consider what political reasons they can reasonably offer to one another, and that the state should not favor any particular comprehensive religious, moral, or philosophical doctrine. Dworkin, by contrast, defends liberal neutrality from the principle of “equal concern and respect.” He argues that “government must be neutral on what might be called the question of the good life,” [16] emphasizing that the government should not grant special privilege to a way of life simply because it is regarded as superior, nobler, or more valuable. Liberal neutrality, in this sense, is not a simple evasion of questions of value. Rather, it is intended to safeguard personal equality and the priority of rights under conditions of value pluralism. Yet this neutrality is not neutral in the sense of being free from all value presuppositions. It already presupposes normative commitments such as personal autonomy, equal personhood, the priority of rights, and tolerance. Berlin’s value pluralism explicitly rejects the attempt to reconcile all human ends through a single formula. As he puts it, “the ends of men are many” and “not all of them are in principle compatible.” [17] He shows that value conflict and the tragedy of choice cannot be completely eliminated, and that values such as liberty, equality, security, happiness, and justice cannot always be reduced to a single measure, nor can they necessarily be brought into final harmony. Raz’s argument for autonomy further shows that autonomy does not consist merely in non-interference. Personal autonomy itself depends on certain social conditions and a valuable background of options. If the state is to sustain an autonomous life, it must actively engage in “creating the conditions of autonomy” [18] and thereby promote freedom; it cannot remain completely neutral toward all forms of life. Taylor’s theory of recognition and Kymlicka’s multicultural liberalism likewise show that culture is not a merely contingent background external to individual choice. Since “freedom of choice is dependent on social practices” and culture forms “the context of individual choice,” [19] identity is to some extent shaped by recognition, while non-recognition or misrecognition may cause real harm and even become a form of oppression. If liberalism addresses cultural difference only through abstract universal rights, it may overlook the substantive situation of minority groups with respect to language, identity, and public recognition.

It follows that liberalism is a political-philosophical paradigm marked by continual adjustment among liberty, equality, rights, community, value pluralism, and institutional legitimacy. Once modern society enters the age of risk, however, these tensions no longer remain at the level of abstract theory. They are further amplified by the real structures of systemic risk.

3. The Impact of the Age of Risk on the Liberal Paradigm

The preceding examination of liberalism’s internal theoretical predicaments shows that its threefold tensions, under conditions of normal politics, are primarily expressed as debates within normative theory. The tension between liberty and equality concerns the relation between formal rights and substantive capabilities; the tension between the individual and the community concerns the relation between the abstract individual and social relations; and the tension among neutrality, value commitments, and cultural difference concerns the basis of political legitimacy in modern pluralistic societies. Yet “Being at global risk is the human condition at the beginning of the twenty-first century.” [20] Beck emphasizes that global risks break through national boundaries and turn “distant others” into “internal others” drawn into the same risk horizon. Risk is no longer confined within any particular nation-state, but reorganizes the existential structure of modern society on a global scale. Gardiner’s analysis of climate change likewise shows that systemic risk is not a policy problem at a single level, but an accumulation of “global, intergenerational and theoretical problems.” [21] Major risks confronting human society are therefore often latent, structural, transregional, irreversible, and intergenerational. They do not begin to exist only after crises erupt, but are generated through the mutual entanglement of modern modes of production, technological systems,

capital flows, institutional inertia, and structures of global interaction. Accordingly, the problem facing liberalism is no longer merely how individual liberty can be protected from state interference, nor simply how rights and the public interest can be balanced in a general sense. Rather, when the shared conditions of human existence are under threat, liberalism must reconsider how individual freedom, social equality, common responsibility, institutional legitimacy, and global publicness can be normatively reconfigured.

Viewed against its historical background, classical liberalism took shape in an age marked by resistance to arbitrary power, the establishment of individual rights, and the limitation of state coercion. Its central concern was therefore how individual liberty could be institutionally secured. For this reason, risk had not yet entered the theoretical center of classical liberalism as a systemic existential crisis, a limitation that was conditioned by its historical context. Even in the development of modern liberalism, questions of risk have more often been addressed in relation to the protection of rights, distributive justice, social welfare, and institutional compensation, and have less often been elevated to the level of the shared conditions of human existence. Beck's observation that "wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom" [22] already indicates that modern risks are not distributed homogeneously across society, but are closely bound up with class, institutions, capital, and structures of power.

First, the problem of risk distribution reconfigures the relationship between liberty and equality. Although major risks in modern society often appear in the form of systemic crises, different groups do not bear the same capacity for, or costs of, exposure to risk. The poor, workers, marginalized groups, developing countries, and future generations are often more vulnerable to the consequences of ecological destruction, public health crises, economic turbulence, and imbalances in technological governance. Equality, therefore, is no longer merely a question of the distribution of wealth, opportunity, or resources. It also becomes a question of the distribution of risk, vulnerability, and the capacity for security. Second, the age of risk further highlights the tension between the individual and the community, while also reshaping their relationship. Issues such as public health, ecological security, technological governance, and global order show that the realization of individual freedom depends not only on the formal recognition of rights, but also on the continued maintenance of the shared conditions of existence. If liberalism remains confined to a rights-based framework centered on the abstract individual, it will be unable to respond adequately to the real structure of interdependence between individuals and communities in the age of risk. Individual actions often have pronounced externalities. Individual choice is no longer merely a matter of self-determination within the private sphere, but may affect the lives, security, and future possibilities of others through complex social relations. If liberalism continues to proceed only from the boundaries of the rights of isolated individuals, it will be difficult for it to explain how the shared conditions of existence are possible. Third, risk governance further exposes the limits of state neutrality. In the face of climate crisis, pandemic control, risks associated with artificial intelligence, or the threat of war, political communities cannot avoid substantive value judgments simply through procedural neutrality. Whether to adopt precautionary measures, whether to restrict certain market freedoms or individual behaviors, whether to bear present costs for the sake of future generations, and whether to share risk responsibilities on a global scale are all questions that involve the ordering of values among life, security, freedom, development, justice, and responsibility.

Neoliberal globalization further demonstrates the practical impact of the age of risk on the liberal paradigm. As Harvey understands neoliberalism as a theory of political-economic practices framed by "strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade," [23] neoliberal globalization should not be equated with the liberal tradition as a whole. Rather, it represents a specific historical form of liberalism under conditions of global capital mobility and market-oriented expansion. Oriented toward market freedom, capital mobility,

privatization, and the weakening of state regulation, it has promoted the expansion of global production, trade, and capital while also intensifying financialization, uneven development, and the accumulation of systemic risks. The global mobility of financial capital means that risk is no longer confined within a single nation-state. It is diffused throughout the world system through capital markets, debt regimes, industrial relocation, and international rules. Historical financial crises have shown that crises do not occur only in peripheral regions. They may also erupt from the core zones of the global capitalist system and then rebound upon the entire liberal world order. In this sense, neoliberal globalization not only amplifies the tension between liberty and equality, but also intensifies the contradictions between the individual and the community, and between the nation-state and the global order. On the one hand, capital and markets acquire a high degree of mobility. On the other hand, ordinary workers, developing countries, and vulnerable groups often bear the consequences of deindustrialization, debt pressure, welfare retrenchment, and social instability.

This risk structure ultimately turns back against the legitimacy of liberalism itself. The widening gap between rich and poor, financial crises, industrial relocation, and the weakening of social security have led many people to cease viewing liberal globalization as a universally beneficial process. Instead, they increasingly regard it as an institutional arrangement that benefits elites, financial capital, and developed countries. Rodrik's formulation of the trilemma, according to which "international economic integration, the nation-state, and mass politics" [24] cannot fully coexist, precisely reveals the structural pressure that deep globalization places on nation-state sovereignty and democratic politics. The rise of deglobalization, nationalism, populism, and anti-establishment politics should not be understood simply as the return of liberalism's external enemies. Rather, it should be seen as a political feedback effect generated by the internal contradictions of neoliberal globalization. At the level of international order, the democratic peace, economic interdependence, and institutional cooperation claimed by liberalism have indeed promoted global interaction and institution-building to some extent. In practice, however, they have also often been intertwined with hegemonic structures, coercive exportation, and unequal rules. By applying Berlin's two concepts of liberty to questions of international order and intervention, Sørensen distinguishes between "Liberalism of Restraint" and "Liberalism of Imposition." His observation that "Liberal progress also produces illiberal counter-reactions" [25] reveals the tensions internal to liberal internationalism. When liberalism no longer appears as a restraint on power, but is transformed into the imposition of institutions in the name of freedom, markets, and order, it weakens the very foundation of legitimacy on which it depends. Thus, the age of risk not only exposes the structural predicaments of neoliberal globalization, but also further concretizes liberalism's tensions among neutrality, value commitments, and cultural difference.

The advent of the age of risk therefore means that the tensions already internal to liberalism no longer remain merely abstract normative debates. They are driven by real crises into a far sharper form. The central question for liberalism is no longer only how the state can avoid excessive interference with the individual. It also includes how a political community can legitimately maintain the shared conditions of existence in the face of uncertainty and irreversible risks. This impact is not merely a matter of insufficient governing capacity. Rather, it indicates that the basic paradigm itself has been challenged. This does not mean that the liberal framework of rights has become invalid. It shows, instead, that liberalism must move beyond a model of rights centered on ex post remedies and individual defense, and further turn toward a preventive, relational, and structural model of risk governance.

4. The Theoretical Grounds and Possible Directions of the Paradigm Transformation of Liberalism

The age of risk requires a reconsideration of the liberal paradigm because systemic existential crises have made the very conditions of human existence a central issue that political philosophy can no longer avoid. Traditional liberalism certainly takes the individual as its basic normative unit, and on this basis has developed its theoretical strengths in the protection of rights, the limitation of state power, and the defense of value pluralism. Yet the individual it presupposes is usually understood, first and foremost, as a bearer of rights, a subject of choice, and a contracting agent, and is less often situated within concrete modes of production, social relations, relations to nature, and the common activity of humanity. In the face of the systemic existential crises of the age of risk, an approach that begins solely from the rights of abstract individuals is no longer sufficient to explain the real conditions under which individual freedom becomes possible. For in the face of these risks, individuals do not bear risks in isolation, nor can they escape them merely through private choice. On the contrary, the realization of individual life, security, and freedom increasingly depends on the ecological conditions, institutional conditions, technological conditions, and social relations jointly sustained by humanity. It is in this sense that the age of risk brings “real human beings” and their shared conditions of existence back to the theoretical center, and also gives renewed methodological significance to Marx’s conception of humanity as “human society or associated humanity” for reinterpreting the paradigm transformation of liberalism.

Marx’s conception of humanity is neither an abstract humanism nor a theory that dissolves real individuals into some holistic subject. On the contrary, it understands human existence from the standpoint of real individuals and their sociohistorical activity, unifying the individual, society, nature, and history within human practical activity. In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx characterizes the standpoint of the old materialism as “civil society” and that of the new materialism as “human society or associated humanity.” This already shows that his problematic moves beyond the binary opposition between isolated individuals and an external society. On this basis, Marx’s conception of humanity can offer at least three methodological insights for the paradigm transformation of liberalism in the age of risk. First, the perspective of the totality of human society reminds us that modern risks and real individuals should not be understood as isolated events, but should be examined within the overall structures of modes of production, technological rationality, capital expansion, patterns of consumption, and the order of global governance. Second, the analytical principle of real individuals and their common activity requires us to understand human beings as real existences situated within historical conditions, social relations, relations to nature, and shared practices, rather than as abstract bearers of rights who exist prior to social relations. Third, the critical measure of the unity of the individual and humanity requires us to reject both an abstract individualism detached from the shared conditions of existence and an abstract holism that cancels individual rights in the name of humanity, community, or security. In this sense, Marx’s conception of humanity is not a simple substitute for liberalism. Rather, it provides critical support for liberalism’s renewed understanding of the sociohistorical conditions of individual freedom in the age of risk.

The perspective of the totality of human society requires modern risks to be understood as products of the overall structure of society, rather than as isolated and contingent events. When addressing questions of risk, the liberal tradition has often tended to treat them as local problems arising from the violation of individual rights, unjust social distribution, market failure, or inadequate state governance, and to respond through rights-based remedies, institutional compensation, market adjustment, or procedural correction. This approach remains significant under conditions of normal politics, but it proves insufficient in the face of

the systemic existential crises of the age of risk. Modern risks are not accidents simply external to the social order. They are produced through the interaction of modes of production, technological rationality, capital expansion, patterns of consumption, the international division of labor, and the order of global governance. Climate crisis, public health crisis, financial crisis, and technological risk all show that risk has become embedded in the operating mechanisms of modern society. The first theoretical ground for the paradigm transformation of liberalism, therefore, lies in the need to move from local repair to a perspective of totality. Risk should no longer be understood merely as a conflict among individual rights or as an exceptional event within state governance. It must instead be examined within the overall practical structure of human society. Only in this way can we explain why, in the age of risk, the question of freedom concerns how the shared conditions of existence of human society as a whole can be protected from destruction by risks produced by modern society itself.

The analytical principle of real individuals and their common activity requires us to reconsider liberalism's presupposition of the subject. The normative strength of liberalism lies in its taking the individual as the basic unit and in its emphasis on individual rights, equal personhood, and autonomous choice. This has irreplaceable significance for limiting arbitrary power, preserving personal dignity, and protecting plural forms of life. Yet its theoretical limitation also lies in the fact that the individual is often presupposed as an abstract bearer of rights, subject of choice, or contracting agent who exists prior to social relations. The age of risk further exposes the inadequacy of this presupposition. In the face of ecological degradation, the spread of pandemics, the loss of control over technological systems, and global financial turbulence, individuals neither exercise freedom in isolation nor bear consequences in isolation. Rather, they are always situated within relations to nature, relations of production, institutional relations, technological relations, and relations of global interaction. Marx's understanding of human existence begins from "real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live," [26] thereby revealing the sociohistorical conditions of individual freedom. The second direction of the paradigm transformation of liberalism is therefore a shift from the abstract individual to real individuals. This does not mean negating the individual. It means reinterpreting the individual as a real subject whose capacities, needs, and possibilities of freedom are formed through common activity. In this way, individual freedom is no longer merely a formal legal qualification, but becomes a real capacity dependent on public health, ecological security, social protection, institutional trust, and the capacity for risk governance.

The critical measure of the unity of the individual and humanity requires us to move beyond the binary opposition between abstract individualism and abstract holism. The age of risk can easily give rise to two opposite yet equally one-sided tendencies. One is to continue adhering to an individualistic standpoint, reducing both responsibility for risk and exposure to risk to individual choice, while ignoring the structural conditions behind them. The other is to diminish the importance of individual rights in the name of the whole, security, or community, and even to transform risk governance into normalized coercive governance. The significance of Marx's conception of humanity lies precisely in showing that the individual and humanity are not two mutually exclusive entities. Human society is not an abstract whole that overwhelms the individual, but a sociohistorical existence formed through the common activity of real individuals. Nor is the individual an isolated atom detached from human society, but a real subject who attains free development within shared relations. Therefore, the paradigm transformation required by the age of risk cannot simply move toward the priority of the whole over the individual. Rather, it must rearrange the relations among freedom and security, rights and responsibility, the individual and the community, within the critical measure of the unity of the individual and humanity. The shared conditions of existence cannot serve as a justification for the arbitrary sacrifice of individual rights, but individual freedom cannot exist in isolation from those shared conditions. Contemporary human society is already situated in

the age of risk. Systemic and global existential crises such as climate change, ecological degradation, public health crises, technological loss of control, the risk of war, and the failure of global governance continually remind us that risk is no longer merely a contingent event within local societies. It has become a total problem continuously produced by the structures of modern society itself. This risk condition should therefore become a new horizon for rethinking human freedom today. In the face of global, structural, and irreversible risks, the predicament of liberalism is no longer merely a matter of disputes among its internal schools or of theoretical reconciliation within liberalism itself. Rather, it concerns whether its basic paradigm can respond to the threat posed to the shared conditions of human existence. In other words, what the age of risk requires is not a series of piecemeal repairs within liberalism, but a transformation from the static protection of the rights of abstract individuals to a dynamic conception of freedom grounded in the coexistence and co-being of real individuals.

Accordingly, the conception of freedom required by the age of risk cannot remain at the level of negative liberty alone. It must move further toward a conception of resilient freedom grounded in the shared conditions of existence. Resilient freedom does not deny the importance of freedom from coercion or the protection of rights. Rather, it emphasizes the capacity of individuals and communities to maintain the basic conditions of life, the ability for public participation, and the possibility of self-development in the face of structural risks, crisis shocks, and an uncertain future. Fineman's critique of the liberal legal subject shows that the "abstract legal subject" [27] of liberal Western democracies cannot adequately reflect human vulnerability, dependency, and institutional embeddedness. Freedom in the age of risk, therefore, should not be understood merely as individual autonomous choice. It must also take into account the institutional conditions on which individuals depend in order to sustain their capacities for life and withstand structural risks. For real individuals in the age of risk, freedom means not only freedom from arbitrary interference, but also freedom from systemic vulnerability, from the collapse of the conditions of existence, and from exclusion from risk-related decision-making. Ecological security, public health, social protection, technological governance, institutional trust, and global cooperation are not external additions to freedom. They are the shared foundations through which freedom can be concretely realized. Neoliberalism, by reducing freedom too narrowly to market choice and the absence of external constraint, often overlooks the real risks borne by workers, vulnerable groups, and developing countries within the logic of capital, the order of financialization, and structures of global inequality. On the surface, market freedom appears to expand; yet the actual life security, public participation, and realization of rights of ordinary individuals may be continually weakened. It is in this sense that the age of risk requires liberalism to move from a rights paradigm centered on abstract individuals toward a paradigm of resilient freedom grounded in the coexistence and co-being of real individuals.

It should be noted that situating the paradigm transformation of liberalism within the horizon of human coexistence and co-being does not mean abolishing individual rights, differences among nation-states, or cultural diversity in the name of an abstract "humanity as a whole." On the contrary, Marx's analytical principle of real individuals and their common activity requires us to understand human commonality from the standpoint of concrete historical relations. The shared conditions of human existence are not a homogenizing totality standing above individuals, but an existential structure constituted by the interrelations among real individuals, social groups, nation-states, future generations, and the natural environment. systemic existential crises show that no subject can completely withdraw from this structure. Yet this does not mean that all subjects bear the same responsibilities, nor does it mean that individual freedom may be arbitrarily sacrificed in the name of a common crisis. The paradigm transformation required by the age of risk must therefore uphold two principles at once. On the one hand, individual freedom cannot exist in isolation from the shared conditions of existence,

such as ecological security, public health, social equality, institutional resilience, and global responsibility. On the other hand, any form of risk governance carried out in the name of shared existence must also be constrained by individual rights, the principle of proportionality, public deliberation, and institutional oversight. Only in this sense can the horizon of human coexistence and co-being provide theoretical support for the paradigm transformation of liberalism, rather than becoming a justification for totalitarianism or securitism.

In practical terms, the complex predicaments exposed by neoliberal globalization also provide an opportunity, to some extent, for humanity to rethink modern models of development, the order of global interaction, and institutional resilience. Under neoliberal governance, human beings are increasingly shaped as “homo oeconomicus,” measuring themselves and their social relations by market criteria and becoming unable to think about “public purposes or common problems in a distinctly political way.” [28] The subject is no longer first and foremost a citizen in public life, but human capital that must continually invest in itself, compete with itself, and enhance its own value. This logic of subjectivation is clearly incapable of responding to the public purposes and common responsibilities required by the age of risk. Structural injustice cannot be simply reduced to the direct fault of any particular individual. Rather, it arises from “structural social processes,” in relation to which “responsibility is essentially shared.” [29] Common responsibility in the age of risk does not mean abolishing individual rights in the name of the whole. It requires real individuals and institutional actors to work together to transform the structural processes that generate risk and injustice. The high mobility of capital, the expansion of financialization, and the intensification of global inequality have made it increasingly clear that market freedom and capital accumulation alone do not automatically bring about universal freedom. On the contrary, they may produce new forms of risk accumulation and social fragmentation. The paradigm transformation required by the age of risk therefore calls for renewed attention to institutional coordination, public responsibility, social protection, the foundations of the real economy, and mechanisms of global cooperation. China’s development path, together with other non-Western experiences of modernization, may serve as an important comparative resource for reflecting on the limits of neoliberal globalization. Its significance, however, does not lie in offering a ready-made model that can simply replace liberalism. Rather, it reminds us that the realization of freedom cannot be separated from institutional conditions, social foundations, and the capacity for common development. Future globalization, likewise, should no longer remain subordinated to the speculative logic of financial capital. It should instead place greater emphasis on inclusive development, shared risk-bearing, public governance, and the maintenance of the shared conditions of human existence.

Therefore, the key to the paradigm transformation of liberalism in the age of risk does not lie in negating individual freedom, but in re-situating it within the common activity of real individuals and the shared conditions of human existence. The perspective of the totality of human society enables us to understand risk as a product of the overall structure of modern society. The analytical principle of real individuals and their common activity allows us to move beyond the limits of the abstract individual as a rights-bearing subject. The critical measure of the unity of the individual and humanity, in turn, enables us to reconstruct the relations among freedom, equality, responsibility, and the shared conditions of existence while avoiding both abstract individualism and abstract holism. Accordingly, if liberalism is to regain theoretical explanatory power and normative vitality in the age of risk, it must move from a rights paradigm centered on abstract individuals toward a paradigm of resilient freedom grounded in the coexistence and co-being of real individuals.

5. Conclusion

The challenge posed by the age of risk to liberalism is not an accidental impact exerted by external crises on a particular tradition of political philosophy. It is, rather, a profound interrogation of liberalism's basic presuppositions and normative structure. In the history of modern political thought, liberalism has taken individual rights, the limitation of state power, value pluralism, and institutional legitimacy as its core concerns. It has provided important theoretical resources for resisting arbitrary power, protecting individual freedom, and advancing institutional justice. Yet liberalism has always contained internal tensions between liberty and equality, the individual and the community, and neutrality, value commitments, and cultural difference. The emergence of systemic existential crises has transformed these tensions from abstract theoretical issues into concrete problems of risk distribution, common responsibility, precautionary governance, global publicness, and intergenerational justice. In a risk condition from which no nation-state, social group, or individual can remain completely detached, liberalism will be unable to respond adequately to the threat posed to the shared conditions of existence if it remains confined to the framework of the abstract individual, negative liberty, and procedural neutrality. What the age of risk requires, therefore, is not a simple negation of liberalism. Rather, on the basis of preserving its normative achievements concerning individual rights, the limitation of power, and value pluralism, it requires a paradigm transformation oriented toward human coexistence and co-being.

Marx's conception of humanity as "human society or associated humanity" provides important methodological support for this transformation. The perspective of the totality of human society enables us to understand modern risks as products of the overall structure of society. The analytical principle of real individuals and their common activity allows us to move beyond the limits of the abstract rights-bearing subject. The critical measure of the unity of the individual and humanity helps us avoid the dual errors of abstract individualism and abstract holism. Accordingly, the key to the paradigm transformation of liberalism in the age of risk does not lie in allowing life to override freedom, the whole to abolish the individual, or security to replace rights. It lies instead in re-situating individual freedom within the common activity of real individuals and the shared conditions of human existence. This requires a shift from negative liberty to resilient freedom, from the protection of isolated rights to the construction of shared conditions of existence, and from justice within the nation-state to global publicness and intergenerational responsibility. Only in this way can liberalism regain theoretical explanatory power and normative vitality in the face of systemic existential crises.

More broadly, political philosophy in the age of risk should not be content with piecemeal repairs within existing theoretical paradigms. It should rethink the meaning of freedom from the perspective of shared human existence, common responsibility, and a common future. Whether liberalism can renew itself in this process concerns not only the theoretical fate of a tradition of political philosophy, but also the possibility that humanity may jointly sustaining freedom, life, and the continuity of civilization in an age of uncertainty.

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