

Beethoven and Freedom: Historicizing the Political Connection

How many are the ideas of
which we can say that we
understand them conceptually,
without remembering in
any original sense what they
mean!

—Frederic Jameson

Sanna Pederson

Performances of Beethoven commemorating September 11 demonstrate that, to concert givers and audiences at least, the connection between freedom and Beethoven is self-evident. For instance, at each of the Berlin Philharmonic's three appearances at New York's Carnegie Hall in 2001, the program was changed to include a Beethoven symphony. A statement from the orchestra explained that the management "felt that the works of Beethoven, a composer who was motivated by great ideals and believed strongly in liberty and freedom, are an appropriate musical statement in light of the tragic events of Sept. 11."¹ For the opening concert of the New York Philharmonic's season a year later, John Adams's "On the Transmigration of Souls," commissioned by the Philharmonic to mark the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks, was scheduled to be paired with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. At the last minute, however, the *Leonore Overture No. 3* was substituted, making it an all-Beethoven concert.²

These performances, only two of many I could mention, beg the question: what is this freedom that Beethoven has come to stand for? This is a difficult question to answer, because it depends on being able to define freedom. The current discourse on freedom is, and perhaps always has been, incoherent. The historian Eric Foner,

1. Anthony Tommasini, "As Ever in a Crisis, Beethoven Reigns," *New York Times*, 5 October 2001, online edition.

2. Lack of rehearsal time was the reason given for not performing the Adams work on the opening concert. This decision was generally judged to be a mistake; see Anthony Tommasini, "Maazel Shows His Firm Hand from the Start," *New York Times* 20 September 2002, online edition.

author of *The Story of American Freedom*, has stated: “Rather than seeing freedom as a fixed category or predetermined concept, I view it as what philosophers call an ‘essentially contested idea,’ one that by its very nature is the subject of disagreement.”³ Yet, such is the powerfully magical quality of the word that politicians and other public speakers can invoke it without having to use it in a logical way. For example, U.S. Congressman J. C. Watts from Oklahoma declared in his “Constituent Update” at the end of 2001: “We regard freedom as precious and absolute in this country. It cannot be bought, bartered or borrowed. It must be vigorously defended. Under this administration, it will.”⁴ Coming from the other end of the ideological spectrum, the American Civil Liberties Union has tried to refute the government’s argument that individuals need to give up some of their civil liberties in order to preserve the nation’s safety with the slogan “We can be both safe and free.”⁵

Although the word has been used in a whole range of responses to the terrorist attacks, there does seem to be a basic agreement that, as a terrorist act, September 11 made us aware of freedom by taking it away. Frederic Jameson expresses this aspect well (if abstrusely) when he describes freedom as taking the form of “a sudden perception of an intolerable present which is at the same time, but implicitly and however dimly articulated, the glimpse of another state in the name of which the first is judged.”⁶ The intolerable present of a terrorized world, tensed for catastrophe, gives us a glimpse of a state of freedom where there is no fear.

So, even as freedom is currently being used as a powerful and effective rallying cry that we all can respond to in some way, the term itself is underdefined and ambiguous. This quality of freedom can be greatly intensified with music. As Beethoven is played at these commemorative concerts, freedom does not need to be defined in order to be experienced. A musical performance lets the definition of freedom float away from the particular instance into a nether region of abstract universals. Who is to know what freedom means for any given individual who experiences it in Beethoven’s music? Even someone who tries to articulate it can only speak for him- or herself. Subjectivity is given free range within not one but

3. Eric Foner, “The Idea of Freedom in American History,” *German Historical Institute Bulletin* 43 (2004), 27. See also Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).

4. Congressman J. C. Watts, Jr., “2001 End of the Year Constituent Update.”

5. “Civil Liberties After 9–11: The ACLU Defends Freedom,” www.aclu.org (accessed 2 Feb. 2003).

6. Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), p.85. (The epigraph on the opening page is from this source, p.83.)

two abstract categories: Beethoven's music and the idea of freedom. The conceptual space where the two can converge is too enormous to try to define. Instead, I would like to begin to gather the historical materials that form the basis for this connection. I would like to investigate the question: to what degree historically has Beethoven been associated with the political concept of freedom?

Beethoven was born into the age in which the idea of freedom was most profoundly articulated. But it is significant that actual revolution occurred in America and France, not in Germany. Germany had to take on freedom primarily through philosophy and art. Immanuel Kant's thought as a whole can be characterized as revolving around the question of freedom, as can that of Hegel. Friedrich Schiller is often known as the "poet of freedom"; political freedom is a central theme of his dramas. He is also an important figure for the idea of aesthetic freedom. His *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* makes the famous declaration: "It is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom."⁷ While perhaps less associated with freedom than Schiller, Goethe contributed to the idea in his political dramas.

We know that Beethoven read and admired Kant, Schiller, and Goethe. It is unclear, however, to what extent Beethoven understood and endorsed the various and complex uses of freedom in their work. Maynard Solomon acknowledges the "striking convergence between Schiller's and Beethoven's ideas," but is unwilling to claim that Beethoven was directly influenced by specific works by Schiller.⁸ Even so, Lewis Lockwood has recently stated that

it seems beyond doubt that Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* informed Beethoven's view of the potential power of art (and music) to enlighten individuals and society in a new way and to bring them to higher levels of understanding and behavior. If Schiller as innovative playwright had been a potential model for him in the 1780s, Schiller the philosopher-artist of the 1790s became an even more potent influence on Beethoven's moral and political outlook.⁹

The contrasting views of these two eminent Beethoven scholars show that the relationship between Schiller and Beethoven is subject to dispute. And this is our strongest case: there is far less evidence for a specific influence on Beethoven from Goethe, Kant, or Hegel. The effect of these thinkers on Beethoven can only be broadly assumed, not specifically determined.

7. For an examination of Schiller's idea of freedom, see Alexander Rehding's essay in this issue.

8. Solomon, "Beethoven and Schiller," *Essays*, p.211.

9. Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven: The Music and the Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), p.72.

It does seem that we can generalize that Beethoven garnered ethical messages from these writings: lessons on how to live and behave. Rudolph Bockholdt has speculated that if there is an aspect of Kant's idea of freedom that Beethoven understood and endorsed, it would be the freedom that comes from acting according to the moral law, of fulfilling one's duty to follow the categorical imperative without regard for one's natural desires.¹⁰

It is harder to make the claim that Beethoven was influenced by the aesthetic theories of any of these writers. Kant and Schiller were crucial for developing the notion that, for the artwork, a precondition for freedom is autonomy. The work must be created under conditions that allow it to be independent of these very conditions. Although Beethoven's works are usually considered this way, there does not seem to be any evidence that, after reading Kant and Schiller, Beethoven consciously endorsed the notion that only the autonomous artwork could have something to do with freedom.

If relating Beethoven's music to contemporary aesthetic and philosophical ideas of freedom is a delicate operation, situating Beethoven's music within the political theories of freedom of the time is no less complicated. Beethoven lived through the French Revolution and the Wars of Liberation, a time that encompasses the whole spectrum of political possibilities from revolutionary anarchy to reactionary repression. During such unstable times, the understanding of freedom could undergo drastic changes. For instance, Schiller's aesthetic theory changed significantly as he responded to political events in France. Similarly, Beethoven's music and politics cannot be reduced to the spirit of the French Revolution, but must include the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath as well. In his recent book, *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works*, Stephen Rumph has argued for a major revision in our understanding of Beethoven's stylistic development and political outlook after 1809: "From this point on he begins his metamorphosis from a cosmopolitan composer writing heroic works with a distinctly French flavor to a patriotic German writing propaganda pieces against Napoleon."¹¹

The reception of Beethoven's works after his lifetime has also affected our understanding of their relation to freedom. For instance, the story of changing the dedication on the title page of the *Eroica* was made known only after Beethoven's

10. Rudolf Bockholdt, "Freiheit und Brüderlichkeit in der Musik Ludwig van Beethovens," *Beethoven zwischen Revolution und Restauration*, ed. Helga Lühning and Sieghard Brandenburg (Bonn: BH, 1989), pp.85–90.

11. Stephen Rumph, *Beethoven after Napoleon: Political Romanticism in the Late Works* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U California P, 2004), p.96.

death. The notion that Schiller originally composed an “Ode to Freedom” that he changed to the “Ode to Joy” did not appear in print until 1849. Although Beethoven’s music gives the impression of immediacy, that it bypasses history, it is also increasingly acknowledged that his works and image have taken on lives of their own, gathering meanings and associations over the years that were never there in the first place.

It seems that, in the reception history of Beethoven and his works, freedom does not appear as a widespread association until the twentieth century. There have always been political connections, above all with the texted Ninth Symphony and the opera *Fidelio*. But freedom has not predominated over other political concepts until relatively recently. Although the idea of freedom reached its peak in both its political and aesthetic senses in the late eighteenth century, it dropped out of the political vocabulary during the repressive period afterward. One main reason for the break in continuity of the idea of freedom from Beethoven’s lifetime into the next generations is censorship.

There is the oddity of Wolfgang Robert Griepenkerl’s novella *Das Musikfest oder die Beethovener*, published in 1838. This book refers obliquely in a footnote to the “real” meaning of the finale of the Ninth Symphony as being freedom instead of joy. Whether Griepenkerl had any basis for making this assertion is open to question; he was writing ten years before Friedrich Ludwig Jahn published his account of hearing, from a man who claimed to have been Schiller’s copyist, that “An die Freude” had originally been “An die Freiheit,” and was changed after being rejected by the censor. Although discredited by most Schiller scholars today, the story contributed greatly to the image of Schiller as the “poet of freedom” in the second half of the nineteenth century and, by extension, gradually strengthened the Ninth Symphony’s connection to freedom as well.¹² However Griepenkerl hit upon the story, his linking of the Ninth with freedom did not generate a strong response, not even over the next ten years as interest and desire to participate in political matters grew and culminated in the revolutions of 1848.¹³

The year 1848 was a time when the German philosophical and political concepts of freedom seemed poised to come together. The Young Hegelians, particularly Arnold Ruge and his followers, interpreted Hegel’s writings as a blueprint for concrete political reform. A member of the national assembly that met in Frankfurt

12. Uwe Martin seems to be on a one-man crusade to authenticate Jahn’s story. See, for instance, Uwe Martin, “In Zweifel für die Freiheit: Zu Schillers Lied *An die Freude*,” *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 48/1 (1998), 47–59.

13. See Rehding’s essay for a different opinion on Griepenkerl’s influence.

in 1848, Ruge called for democratic elections, freedom of the press, jury trials, a public educational system and European disarmament. This was also the period in which ideas for politicizing music were presented systematically for the first time.¹⁴ Hegelian writers on music including Franz Brendel were looking to the future for a new kind of music. Beethoven was held up as a democrat and as exemplar of the politically committed composer. Brendel insisted that music embodied the spirit of its age, and that the spirit of the nineteenth century, “which filled Beethoven,” was “the striving for freedom, for the realization of this highest goal of humanity.”¹⁵

Although Brendel’s magnum opus, his *History of Music in Italy, Germany and France*, went through eight editions (four during his lifetime), his Hegelian approach was met with strong opposition from other writers on music. Around the time of the 1848 revolutions, this opposition took the form of a debate on what music could or should represent. Hanslick’s anti-Hegelian *On the Musically Beautiful* from 1854 objected, for instance, to the idea that Beethoven’s *Egmont* Overture could have anything to do with the ideas or political sentiments of Goethe’s play. The overture could not be anything other than “sequences of tones which the composer has created entirely spontaneously, according to logical musical principles.”¹⁶ Discussions of the Ninth Symphony at this time centered not around the message of freedom, but rather around the significance of adding words and voices to the symphony, and whether or not this was an acknowledgment of the limitations of instrumental music. For instance, there is no mention of freedom in A. B. Marx’s section on the Ninth in his Beethoven book from 1859; instead, he describes “the basic idea” as lying in “the passing over from instrumental music and the symphonic into human music, song.”¹⁷ Marx also spends far more time on the *Leonore* Overtures as “symphonic poems” than on *Fidelio* itself, which is discussed

14. See chap. 5 of my *Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995).

15. Franz Brendel, *Geschichte der Musik in Italien, Deutschland und Frankreich: Von den ersten christlichen Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart: Zweiundzwanzig Vorlesungen gehalten zu Leipzig im Jahre 1850* (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Sändig Reprint, 1985), p. 340.

16. Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), p. 74. Not all of Hanslick’s admirers agreed with him on this particular point, however. David Friedrich Strauss protested that in the *Egmont* Overture “the drive for freedom is unmistakably expressed.” (Letter to Hanslick, 31 May 1855, printed in Eduard Hanslick, “Begegnungen mit Friedrich Theodor Vischer,” in *Musikalisches und Litterarisches (Der “Modernen Opera” V. Theil.)* [Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Litteratur, 1889], p. 287). I am grateful to Rose Mauro for this reference.

17. Adolf Bernhard Marx, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Leben und Schaffen* (Berlin: Verlag von Otto Janke, 1859; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1979), II, 288.

mainly to show that Beethoven was not suited to writing operas.¹⁸ According to Paul Robinson, the reverent reception of *Fidelio* as a profound political allegory did not begin until the 1904 Vienna production under the supervision of Gustav Mahler and Alfred Roller.¹⁹

Apparently freedom was not a major component of the German reception of Beethoven in the nineteenth century. Part of the reason seems to be that freedom does not serve German nationalism well, certainly not as well as French or American nationalism. The German historian Jürgen Kocka has observed that, in contrast to the United States, “the concept of *Freiheit*—freedom or liberty—did not play such a fundamental and central role in modern Germany’s self-understanding, politics, and symbolism. Other concepts were stronger: *Volk*, *Nation*, *Staat*, for a long time ‘class,’ for a short while ‘race,’ and perhaps most recently ‘peace.’”²⁰

For France, in contrast, freedom has been crucial for constructing a non-German Beethoven who embraced French ideals. Leo Schrade concluded his book *Beethoven in France* with the comment, “France once carried Beethoven upon the wings of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. If these wings break, France is to lose her own image of Beethoven.”²¹ In fact, a performance of the Ninth Symphony in Paris in 1882 featured the substitution of “*Freiheit*” for “*Freude*,” over a century before Leonard Bernstein’s famous performances commemorating the fall of the Berlin Wall.²²

I would designate 1927, with its many events that marked the hundredth anniversary of Beethoven’s death, as the point at which freedom started becoming a familiar trope. Surely one of the most interesting periods of Beethoven reception, this was a time of anti-nationalism and Pan-European movements; aesthetically, it was characterized by anti-Romanticism and even anti-art sentiment. For the first time, Beethoven seemed vulnerable to attack or at least neglect by composers and custodians of high art. But politicians who adapted Beethoven to their causes came to the rescue and revitalized Beethoven’s image. At a centenary Beethoven congress in Vienna, thirty-six countries sent representatives, many of them prominent

18. Marx, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, I, 354–79.

19. See chap. 8, “An Interpretive History,” in Paul Robinson, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Fidelio* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), pp. 145–64.

20. Jürgen Kocka, “The Idea of Freedom in German History,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 34 (2004), 41.

21. Leo Schrade, *Beethoven in France: The Growth of an Idea* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1942), p. 251.

22. Esteban Buch, *Beethoven’s Ninth: A Political History*, trans. Richard Miller (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2003), p. 166.

statesmen. Politicians like Eduard Herriot, who was to author both a biography of Beethoven and a plan for “The United States of Europe,” gave speeches emphasizing the traditionally French interpretation of Beethoven’s political commitment. The Americans also chimed in: Ambassador Albert Washburn eulogized Beethoven as “an apostle of liberty”—although he qualified this phrase with “in the best philosophical meaning of the term.”²³

A few important musicians also reinterpreted Beethoven politically in 1927, although with the Soviet Union more in mind than a united Europe. Hanns Eisler made the case for the contemporary relevance of the Ninth Symphony, commenting that “in reactionary times we must say *Freude* when we want to say *Freiheit*.”²⁴ This was also the year that the politically and artistically progressive production of *Fidelio* premiered at the Berlin Kroll Opera, conducted by Otto Klemperer, with an essay for the program booklet by Ernst Bloch.²⁵ Bloch’s writing on *Fidelio* proved tremendously influential for understanding this opera as transcending its historical situation to communicate freedom and hope across the ages: “Every future storming of the Bastille is implicitly expressed in *Fidelio*.”²⁶

Musicology did not play a direct role in connecting Beethoven to an idea of freedom at this time, although we do have Robert Haven Schauffler’s popularizing biography, *Beethoven: The Man Who Freed Music*, from 1929, which is probably more influential than musicologists would care to admit. In his chapter, “How Beethoven Freed Music,” Schauffler does not scruple to list the ways: “He freed music from that cloistered outlook which ignored the march of events in the outside world”; “he emancipated personality in music, detonating in his scores such a profound charge of thought and passionate emotion that the world still vibrates with the shock”; he freed music “from the shackles of literature”; “he freed modulation,” “he liberated form”; and finally: “by sheer personal magnetism, force of will, and

23. Cited in Buch, *Beethoven’s Ninth*, p.190.

24. “Freude mußte man im Zeitalter der Reaktion sagen, wenn man Freiheit meinte.” Hanns Eisler, “Ludwig van Beethoven: Zu seinem 100. Todestage am 26. März,” *Die Rote Fahne*, Berlin, 22 March 1927 (cited in Buch, *Beethoven’s Ninth*, p.184).

25. See Robinson, *Fidelio*, pp.155–58; and David Drew’s intro. to Ernst Bloch, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), pp.xxvii–xxviii.

26. Bloch, *Essays*, p.243; cf. Robinson, *Fidelio*, p.75: “At the ideological centre of *Fidelio* stands the abstract idea of freedom. It is not expressly connected with any particular political movement or social group, nor is it elaborated into particular freedoms such as freedom of speech, religion or the press. Rather it is freedom *tout court*.”

intensity of genius,[he] liberate[d] the art of music from the long-standing indignity of being carried on by lackeys.”²⁷

Beethoven’s music was used extensively as propaganda during World War II, both for and against Germany.²⁸ After the war, the taint of the Third Reich’s appropriation of the Ninth Symphony and *Fidelio* lingered long enough for Thomas Mann to express his consternation. He asked how anyone could have listened to *Fidelio* in Germany during the Nazi era “without covering one’s face and rushing out of the hall.”²⁹ Yet the symbolic power of Beethoven was so strong that it quickly bounced back to serve both parts of the newly divided Germany. East Germany drew on a tradition of linking his music to Communist workers’ movements that went back to the beginning of the twentieth century. West Germany concentrated on anything but politics, from the “music itself” to Beethoven’s nephew, very possibly because “freedom” had already been appropriated by the other side.³⁰ It was only with the fall of Communism that the “Ode to Freedom” could be proclaimed in a united Germany.

It is in Theodor Adorno’s writings on Beethoven, which date from the 1930s to the 1960s, that the concepts of autonomy, individuality, and freedom become the central philosophical and political categories for understanding the composer’s significance.³¹ In his *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (1962), Adorno declares that “the central categories of artistic construction can be translated into social ones”: there is a relationship between bourgeois society made up of free individuals and Beethoven’s autonomous artworks. The relationship is complicated; for instance, Adorno refers to Beethoven’s “greatest symphonic movements” as “the most sublime music ever to mean freedom by continued unfreedom.”³² Adorno

27. Robert Haven Schaufler, *Beethoven: The Man Who Freed Music* (New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1929), pp.493, 490, 494, 492, 492, 489.

28. See David B. Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), pp.142–74.

29. Cited in Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics*, p.175.

30. See Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics*, chap.5, “Germany Divided, and Reunified,” pp.175–203.

31. For a discussion of freedom in music after Beethoven, see Rose Rosengard Subotnik, “The Historical Structure: Adorno’s ‘French’ Model for the Criticism of Nineteenth-Century Music,” in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1991), pp.206–38.

32. Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), pp.209, 210.

refers here to “the force of crushing repression, of an authoritarian ‘That’s how it is,’” that can be found even in those works of the middle period that come closest to meaning freedom.

I would characterize Adorno as a very “strong reader” of Beethoven, which means that his analysis of autonomy, individuality, and freedom in Beethoven says more about Adorno himself and about his concerns than anything else. Because Adorno’s philosophy is heavily invested in the tradition of German idealism and concerned with the centrality of Beethoven, it may seem that it is our best guide to this topic. Yet Adorno is not the whole story. Many see Adorno’s writing on freedom, hope, and utopia as a direct response to Ernst Bloch, who was able to hear at the end of *Fidelio* “the dawning of a new day so audible that it seems more than simply a hope.”³³ David Drew suggests that Adorno’s comments on art and utopia are “inverted and retrograded forms” of themes that “are unmistakably Bloch’s.”³⁴ Jost Hermand’s recent book on Beethoven recommends reading Adorno and Bloch together for an indispensable perspective on *Fidelio*.³⁵

More recent approaches to freedom share Adorno’s linking of the idea of freedom with the emergence of the individual, as well as his emphasis on economic conditions. One such approach can be found in the writings of the Polish-born sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, whose best-known book is *Modernity and the Holocaust*, which appeared in 1989.³⁶ Unlike Adorno, who saw freedom as a lost opportunity becoming ever more remote, Bauman tries to describe freedom more neutrally as a condition continuously re-created by the way society is integrated.

Bauman’s sweeping thesis is that modern (as opposed to ancient and medieval) Western freedom is distinctive from a sociological point of view for its “intimate link with individualism and its genetic and cultural connection with the market economy and capitalism.” Historically, the location of that connection has shifted away from the area of power and production in Beethoven’s time to the area of consumption in ours. Today’s society is made up of individuals who need to have a developed sense of self in order to function in a highly differentiated, complex society. In earlier stages of capitalism, only a few were able to realize their identity as free individuals; these were the “self-made men,” who “mastered their own fate” and left their mark on the world through production, whether through building a

33. Bloch, *Essays*, p.243.

34. Drew, intro. to Bloch, *Essays*, p.xli.

35. Jost Hermand, *Beethoven: Werk und Wirkung* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp.91–92.

36. Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, Concepts in Social Thought Series (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1988).

business empire or composing masterpieces. But today, individuality is commonplace, and it is asserted and confirmed above all by what can be purchased. “The individual’s drive to self-assertion has been squeezed out from the area of material production. Instead, a wider than ever space has been opened for it at the new ‘pioneer frontier,’ the rapidly expanding, seemingly limitless, world of consumption.” In Bauman’s account, the consumer market has proved to be a much more viable solution to the individual’s need to assert his freedom, because “for virtually every projected self, there are purchasable signs to express it. . . . The freedom to choose one’s identity therefore becomes a realistic proposition. There is a range of options to choose from, and once the choice has been made, the selected identity can be made real . . . by making the necessary purchases.”³⁷

The importance of economic freedom has overwhelmed traditional political definitions of freedom, Bauman claims.³⁸ The way in which individual interests are satisfied today moves in the opposite direction of traditional collective political movements; therefore, Bauman does not think that there is much of a future for political freedom in the sense of coming together and making communal decisions.

Eric Foner has reached a similar conclusion in his history of the idea of freedom in the United States. Freedom, which he calls the single most important idea for Americans’ sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation, has become economic freedom:

A series of presidential administrations, aided and abetted by most of the mass media, have redefined both American freedom and America’s historical mission to promote it for all mankind to mean the creation of a single global free market in which capital, natural resources, and human labor are nothing more than factors of production in an endless quest for greater productivity and profit. The prevailing ideology of the global free market assumes that the economic life of all countries can and should be refashioned in the image of the United States—the latest version of the nation’s self-definition of model of freedom for the entire world.³⁹

Indeed, a striking recent example of the economic definition of freedom can be found in “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” a document defining America’s relation to the rest of the world. Issued on 17 Sep-

37. *Ibid.*, pp.36, 57, 63.

38. “The consumer market as a whole may be seen as an institutionalized exit from politics” (Bauman, *Freedom*, p.82).

39. Foner, “The Idea of Freedom,” p.45.

tember 2002, it states that the aim of the United States as the most powerful nation on earth is to “extend the benefits of freedom across the globe.” After extolling the virtues of freedom of speech and religion, the document declares: “If you can make something that others value, you should be able to sell it to them. If others make something that you value, you should be able to buy it. This is real freedom, the freedom for a person—or a nation to make a living.”⁴⁰

Although the current path to freedom might lead away from politics, that does not mean that Beethoven has also lost all political associations. Esteban Buch’s recent reception history of the Ninth Symphony tells a convincing story of how Beethoven has now become part of Europe’s post–Cold War image of itself.⁴¹ A two-minute arrangement of the Ode to Joy theme by Herbert von Karajan currently serves as the anthem of the European Union, the European Council, and is also played at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Besides standing for Europe, Buch observes that Beethoven is also called upon to serve as the guarantor for all of Western civilization’s humanity, especially on occasions acknowledging the existence of inhumanity, such as the performance of the Ninth at Mauthausen, the Austrian concentration camp, in 2000. With regard to the 9/11 memorial concerts, Peter Treagar has commented: “We may reside in a postmodern realm of cynical detachment from the grand aesthetic narratives of old, but when we want to dignify an occasion, the old ideas about the power of music, and Beethoven’s in particular, seem effortlessly to reassert themselves.”⁴²

This quotation brings me back to the beginning, and to the problem of what to think about those concerts. Beethoven apparently continues to perform a powerful function in our society, often in the name of freedom. As we hear his music being played, intimations of freedom are said to be experienced. Neither dismissing this assertion as ideological delusion nor celebrating it as proof of the universal values in Beethoven’s music gets us very far. A historical perspective lets us observe that the nature of freedom has changed in fundamental ways with the development of modern capitalistic society, currently configured in an unprecedented way as being dominated by one superpower nation bent on extending the benefits of freedom across the globe. Additionally, the reception history of Beethoven and his music indicates a much more discontinuous relationship to freedom than might be assumed. Beethoven’s freedom may very well not be our freedom at all, no matter how clearly we hear it in the music.

40. “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html>, dated 17 September 2002.

41. See Buch, *Beethoven’s Ninth*, chap. 12 and conclusion, pp. 243–67.

42. Peter Treagar, “The Ninth after 9/11,” *Beethoven Forum* 10 (2003), 223.

Beethoven's political engagement is indisputable, but whether it finds direct expression in his work "aside from dedications and commissions" is a sticky topic. It is contentious to argue that music can hold inherent meaning, or express anything concrete, beyond its listener's interpretation. But Beethoven's music is even more problematic because of all the other attributes that have been bestowed upon the composer. In the end, Beethoven's politics were the same that ended the stranglehold that church and kings had on Europe for so many centuries, the same politics that framed the great documents that created the United States of America, the politics of freedom and democracy. Tweet. Beethoven's Life and Death on Day of His Baptism, December 17th. Now Public. [†]. Beethoven's Religious Views. Caltech. [†]. Mass: Missa Solemnis "Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven's political views, Rumph argues, were not quite as liberal as many have assumed. While scholars agree that the works of the Napoleonic era such as the Eroica Symphony or Fidelio embody enlightened, revolutionary ideals of progress, freedom, and humanism, Beethoven's later works have attracted less political commentary. Rumph contends that the later works show clear affinities with a native German ideology that exalted history, religion, and the organic totality of state and society. He claims that as the Napoleonic Wars plunged Europe into political and economic turmoil, Beethoven belongs, heart and soul, to the political left. Centuries after his death, his music, especially if properly understood, still retains the power to transform, transfigure, and revivify, no matter how many political defeats its partisans and spiritual comrades suffer. Theodor Adorno was surely right when he said, "If we listen to Beethoven and do not hear anything of the revolutionary bourgeoisie"not the echo of its slogans, the need to realize them, the cry for that totality in which reason and freedom are to have their warrant"we understand Beethoven no better than does one who cannot follow the purely musical content. of his pieces. Freedom remained the fundamental motif of Beethoven's thought and music," Clubbe writes.