

Why Freedom

The eloquent champion of unrestricted liberty as the first and fundamental plank of conservatism answers the provocative piece of Brent Bozell

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In reply to Brent Bozell's article, "Freedom or Virtue?" (Sept. 11), I should like first to plead innocent to his friendly indictment that I have "labored earnestly in recent years to promote and justify modern American conservatism as a 'fusion' of the libertarian and traditionalist points of view." Rather I (and others with whom I share a common outlook—he mentions Stanton Evans by name) have been attempting something very different from an ideological—and eclectic—effort to create a position abstractly "fusing" two other positions. What I have been attempting to do is to help articulate in theoretical and practical terms the instinctive consensus of the contemporary American conservative movement—a movement which is inspired by no ideological construct, but by devotion to the fundamental understanding of the men who made Western civilization and the American republic.

That consensus simultaneously accepts the existence of an objective moral and spiritual order, which places as man's end the pursuit of virtue, and the freedom of the individual person as a decisive necessity for a good political order. From the first of these principles it draws as corollaries its opposition to positivism, relativism, and materialism; from the second, it draws its demand for principled limitation of the power of the state, for the strictest guarantees that the power of the state will be foreclosed from interference in the moral and spiritual sphere, in the economic sphere, or with the liberties of individual persons—so long as they do not by force or fraud coerce others.

That this double allegiance to virtue and to freedom is the over-all consensus of contemporary American conservatism, the most cursory acquaintance with the conservative movement demonstrates. Mr. Bozell, I am sure, would agree that this is

the actuality, no matter how much he may disapprove of it.

Every important publication of the movement exhibits the two motifs; so do the platforms of both conservative youth organizations, the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists and the Young Americans for Freedom; and the most widely read conservative book of the century, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, is an epitome of that unity.

Traditionalist and Libertarian

If I have "labored" to demonstrate the potential congruity of the "traditionalist" and "libertarian" positions, it has not been because I was "attempting to promote . . . a fusion," but because I have thought that the rigid positions of doctrinaire traditionalists and doctrinaire libertarians were both distortions of the same fundamental tradition and could be reconciled and assimilated in the central consensus of American conservatism. It is only when virtue or freedom is wrenched out of the intrinsic interdependence in which they have existed in our tradition that ideological opposition arises.

I have recently dealt in these pages with some of the results that occur when virtue is denied as an end for men and freedom raised to the sole

end of man's existence. In "The Twisted Tree of Liberty" (*NR*, Jan. 16), I tried to demonstrate that freedom, essential though it is as a condition for the virtuous life, is by itself without content or purpose if the existence of an objective moral order which men should strive to understand and move towards is not accepted. The results of such ideological abstraction of freedom from its functional foundation in the human condition are observable again and again as the pure libertarian develops his position—in the craven retreat before Communist tyranny of the pure libertarian of the nuclear pacifist breed, as in the arid subhuman image of man and the calculated cruelties of Ayn Rand.

If, on the other hand, freedom is denied as a necessary condition of a good political order, and the state is endowed with the right to enforce virtue upon individual persons, a parallel distortion occurs. Virtue, which is only virtue when freely chosen (this Mr. Bozell at bottom admits—as, being a Christian, he must admit), is made inaccessible to the coerced citizen, wherever and to the degree that the state compels his action. His actions may look like virtuous actions, but they are the actions of an automaton and cannot be truly virtuous, because being unfree

to reject virtue, he is unfree to choose it. Even this assumes, however, that the men who hold the power of the state will use that power to enforce actions that are the simulacrum of virtue. But Lord Acton's insight still remains true, that there is in power a tendency to corrupt, and the more



absolute the power, the more absolute the corruption. The experience of mankind has demonstrated this sad truth, however different may have been the philosophical foundations of those who held power that approached the absolute. Diocletian and Constantine, Inquisitionist and Cromwellian, Nazi and Communist—all have exhibited the corruption that power brings in its train. Each had a vision of how men ought to live and was determined to force that vision upon those subject to their will. If the state is endowed with the power to enforce virtue, the men who hold that power will enforce their own concepts as virtuous.

Theocracy

Such a state of affairs is the opposite pole—and as great a distortion—as the anarchistic worship of freedom as an absolute good without purpose or end. It is theocracy. That is, it is giving to some men the right and the power to enforce upon other men their own particular, limited and perforce distorted, finite view of the Infinite—of God's will. And this remains true whether their God is the pagan god of Diocletian, or the Christian God of Constantine, Philip II and Cromwell, or the *Volk* of the Nazis, or the dialectical materialist History of the Communists.

Mr. Bozell denies that his is a theocratic outlook, and indeed the positions he has taken in practice are far from theocratic, far from authoritarian. But the theoretical presuppositions put forward in *Freedom or Virtue?* nevertheless lead directly to theocracy. Whenever he wishes to justify his accord with practical measures conducive to freedom, he falls back upon the safeguards of "prudence." In his prudence I would have great confidence; but prudence is an art inherent in the men who exercise it. To hope that the men who exercise theocratic power will be prudent is a slender reed on which to base the defense of the freedom integrally necessary to a virtuous society.

For men imbued with the certainty of their vision of reality it will always be difficult to restrain the temptation to enforce that vision upon others and thus to deprive them of the right freely to choose the good. It is the glory of Western civilization, with its Christian understanding of the shimmering tension between freedom and

ALICE IN SHANGRI-LAW

A *Plagiarist* by SEAN MCDOE

"Today is not yesterday," the Walrus said with a smile.

"Whatever does *that* have to do with the case?" asked Alice.

"It is the overriding judicial doctrine," explained the Joker, "of the Fast Deal."

"What does 'judicial' mean?"

"When we use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what we choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

Alice thought for a moment that bells began to peal, but it was really hundreds of little men chanting, in surprisingly deep voices: "And that is the Law of the Land, in the Land of Shangri-Law. . . ."

virtue, that it has in its essence held firm to its insistence upon both—although to the doggedly rational mind, the paradox of virtue in freedom is as much "a folly to the Greeks and a scandal to the Jews" as the Incarnation itself, which is the ground from which the strength to hold this paradoxical belief proceeds.

Christian Humanism and Positive Virtue

Mr. Bozell attacks "humanism" as the sin which pervades the belief in freedom, but there is a humanism implicit in the glorification of man by the Incarnation. It is his rejection of the humanist element in the Western and Christian tradition that leads Mr. Bozell to his insistence upon the radical opposition of the good society to the free society. The humanist side of that tradition has always held in check the Puritanical and Jansenist drive towards a conception of man as a totally corrupt creature. Realizing his tendencies towards corruption, the balanced tradition of the West has seen him at the same time as a son of God, who by the aid of Grace and of the reason implanted in him possesses the highest of potentialities.

Therefore, it has conceived virtue not merely in the negative terms of subduing evil inclinations, but also in positive terms—in terms of achievement of potentialities which, although finite, are immeasurably

great. Rejecting the Manichean disdain for the things of this world, it has considered the joy of created being as a high good. Its concept of virtue is positive, the performing of acts honorable, noble, valorous, glorious, generous. The free law of love is its highest command, not the meticulous performance of scheduled actions, the chalking up of gold stars and black marks in the records of a Divine Scorer.

Freedom, then, is a necessary political condition of a virtuous society, not only because the high likelihood is that the standards imposed by men with the power of the state would not in fact be virtuous standards; but also because, even if they were virtuous, to impose them upon individual persons would immensely reduce their ability to act virtuously at all and absolutely destroy their potentiality for active, creative, positive virtue.

Political Freedom

The key to the preservation of freedom is the limitation of the state. Political freedom can be defined as freedom from coercion in life, limb, liberty, or property, by force or fraud; it has nothing to do with the ideas, the persuasions, the customs which go into forming every human person. To refuse to see, as Mr. Bozell seems to do, the differences between coercive acts against the person and the civilizational influences which help to

form the person, is to deny the difference between the authoritarian imposition of human power and the persuasive authority of truth and good.

Furthermore, political freedom has no relation to the definition Mr. Bozell imposes upon the libertarian conservative, that is, "the freedom to participate in the making of public policy." This is emphatically *not* what is meant by political freedom. What is meant by political freedom is the limitation of the power of the state to the function of preserving a free order. It demands that the state be prohibited from positive actions affecting the lives of individual persons, except insofar as such action is necessary to prevent the freedom of some from being exercised to limit the freedom of others.

Political freedom emphatically has nothing to do with who governs or who chooses the governors, but only with the strict limitation of the powers of the governors, whoever they may be.

The contradiction which Mr. Bozell posits between "political freedom" and "economic freedom" is a contradiction created out of his own misunderstanding. The freedom of the economic sphere from state interference is but one aspect of the freedom of persons in other spheres of their life from state interference. It is not possible for men to "exercise their political freedom against their economic freedom," as Mr. Bozell maintains; it is only possible for an overweening state to exercise its power against men's free activities in the economic sphere. A free economy is a condition of political freedom because it is an aspect of political freedom—exactly as are freedom of persons in their daily lives, freedom of thought and press and speech, freedom of worship.

The Triple Functions of a Limited State

If the goal of a free political order is accepted, there is no mystery of the sort Mr. Bozell professes to find in the principle that the state should be limited to the triple functions of defense against foreign enemies, preservation of internal order, and the administration of justice between man and man.

In fact, the derivation of this proposition is really no mystery to Mr.

Bozell, as he makes clear a few lines later. He knows that it can be derived when freedom is considered as a political end, and certainly he is right that it could never be derived when society is considered as an "organism," of which men are cells. But to clear up whatever "mystery" there may be, I shall here briefly summarize how it is derived when men are thought of as persons for whom political freedom is morally vital. (For a further and more exhaustive consideration, I refer him, and any other readers who may be interested, to my book, *In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo*, which will be published next month.)

Briefly, then: 1) There is great danger to human freedom, and thereby to the achievement of virtue, if any more power than that which is absolutely necessary is lodged in the same set of hands. 2) The state is a necessity as an institution to preserve the freedom of men from infringement by other men through domestic or foreign force or fraud; and to settle the disputes that occur when rights

clash with rights. 3) From this necessity are derived the legitimate powers of the state: defense, the preservation of domestic order, the administration of justice. 4) The exercise, however, of these necessary functions requires a dangerous concentration of power—the monopoly of legally and socially accepted force. Any additional control over individual persons in any sphere of their lives adds dangerously to this already dangerous concentration of power. 5) No other activities of men, except these three legitimate functions of the state, require the monopoly of force. All others can be performed by individual persons and voluntary associations of persons. 6) Since the power of the state is dangerous to begin with, and since all other functions beyond its essential three can be performed by men otherwise, the preservation of a truly free political order demands the limitation of the state to these functions.



To summarize: The principle that the political order must be a free order if men are to have the maximum possibilities of achieving virtue is, I maintain, inextricably linked, in the tradition of the West and the tradition of the American republic, with the principle that the goal of men is virtue. They are both essential principles of conservatism—which by definition is devoted to the preservation, maintenance, and extension of that tradition. Conservatism, therefore, unites the "traditionalist" emphasis upon virtue and the "libertarian" emphasis upon freedom. The denial of the claims of virtue leads not to conservatism, but to spiritual aridity and social anarchy; the denial of the claims of freedom leads not to conservatism, but to authoritarianism and theocracy.

When these attitudes are only emphases, differences of stress among conservatives, they can produce a fruitful and healthy dialogue. But neither the libertarian nor the traditionalist can totally deny the ends of the other without moving outside of

the conservative dialogue and breaking continuity with the Western tradition. That tradition bears onward from generation to generation

the understanding—rooted in the Christian vision of the nature and destiny of man—of the primary value, under God, of the individual person. From his nature arises his duty to virtue and his inalienable right to freedom as a condition of the pursuit of virtue.

Neither virtue nor freedom alone, but the ineluctable combination of virtue and freedom, is the sign and spirit of the West.

The West is in decay not, as Mr. Bozell asserts, because "the free society has come to take priority over the good society"; but because freedom has declined as virtue has declined. The recovery of the one demands the recovery of the other; the recovery of both is the mission of conservatism today. *Virtue in freedom*—this is the goal of our endeavor.

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