

C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom

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Although C. S. Lewis, the great Christian apologist and author of the *Chronicles of Narnia* was not a political scientist, a thorough study of his apologetics and fictional writings reveal a well-developed political philosophy. This article analyzes Lewis' political ideas through the theoretical framework of two profound semantic debates among political philosophers and political economists regarding the definition of freedom—namely, positive versus negative freedom and political versus individual freedom—by comparing Lewis' writings with those of, among others, Saint Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Benjamin Constant, and Friedrich von Hayek. The author concludes that Lewis' concept of freedom is most accurately described as Christian libertarian.

The idea of liberty has ultimately a religious root; that is why men find it so easy to die for and so difficult to define.

—G. K. Chesterton, *A Miscellany of Man*

When Winston Churchill offered Clive Staples (C. S.) Lewis (1898–1963), the great Christian apologist and author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the honorary title of Commander of the British Empire, Lewis declined on the grounds that accepting would strengthen the hands of “knaves who say, and fools who believe, that my religious writings are all covert anti-Leftist propaganda.”¹ Those somewhat familiar with C. S. Lewis' writings might infer that his reluctance to involve himself in politics simply reflected his personal preference for evangelization in the private sphere. It would be a mistake, however, to infer that his religious writings were apolitical. Indeed, in his essay “Meditation on the Third

Commandment” (1941), Lewis acknowledged the political dimension of evangelization: “He who converts his neighbour has performed the most practical Christian-political act of all.”²

Although Lewis was not a political scientist, a thorough study of his writings—religious and nonreligious, as well as fiction and nonfiction—reveal a well-considered political and economic philosophy—a kind of Christian libertarianism that combined Aristotelian, medieval Catholic, and classical liberal traditions regarding democracy, natural law, and human nature. Central to his political philosophy was the sanctity of personal liberty. Therefore, it is logical to begin any systematic analysis of Lewis’ political ideas by organizing and analyzing them according to a theoretical framework that employs the semantics of one of the most profound debates within political science—specifically, the definition of freedom. (Note that most political scientists generally assume that the modern English words *liberty* and *freedom*, though derived from Latin and Old English, respectively, are synonymous—an assumption that might trouble an English professor such as Lewis.) Accordingly, this article will survey and analyze several writings of C. S. Lewis that correspond to the most common political-philosophical distinctions regarding the meaning of freedom and will demonstrate significant similarities between his concept of liberty and those of major classical liberal and libertarian theorists.

Christianity and the Nature of Negative Freedom

The first distinction regarding freedom is that of so-called positive freedom and negative freedom. Notions of freedom held by most classical liberals are generally regarded by modern political scientists as negative in that freedom was defined as the *absence of coercion* by individuals against one another. For example, John Locke (1632–1704) in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690) maintained that liberty is to be “free from restraint and violence from others” and “not subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man.”³ Moreover, Adam Smith (1723–1790) in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) wrote, “All systems either of preference or of restraint, therefore, being thus taken away, the obvious and simple system of natural liberty establishes itself of its own accord.”⁴ For contractualists such as Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) and John Locke, the arguments for freedom as a natural right were deontological and deistic, and freedom’s value was intrinsic. For naturalists such as John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) and Adam Smith, the arguments for freedom were teleological and usually agnostic, and freedom’s value was merely instrumental. Nevertheless,

both strands of classical liberalism defined liberty without reference to the power of persons to benefit from their freedom.

By the twentieth century, the classical tradition of liberalism had faded, but its concept of freedom survived among libertarians. For example, the British-Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek (1899–1992) defined freedom as “independence of the arbitrary will of another.”⁵ Similarly, the American philosopher Robert Nozick (1938–present) delimited freedom in terms of a “non-aggression principle” and began his seminal treatise *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) by returning to Locke’s state of nature in which individuals enjoy “perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave or dependency upon the will of any other man.”⁶ Not surprisingly, these negative concepts of liberty naturally connected libertarianism, like classical liberalism, with capitalist, free-market economics.

By contrast, the concept of freedom associated with what most people in Britain and America today call liberalism is often attributed by political scientists to the Hegelian philosopher T. H. Green (1836–1882). Appalled by abject poverty, unsanitary living conditions, and growing alcoholism among Britain’s industrial working class, Green challenged the classical-liberal concept of freedom in his speech “Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract” (1881), wherein he coined the terms *negative freedom* and *positive freedom* and defined the latter as “a power which each man exercises through the help or security given him by his fellow-men, and which he in turn helps to secure for them.”⁷ By redefining freedom in this manner, Green transformed liberty into a collective condition and thus created a semantic nexus between modern liberalism and socialism. As Hayek observed in *Constitution of Liberty* (1960), “This confusion of liberty as power with liberty in its original meaning inevitably leads to the identification of liberty with wealth; and this makes it possible to exploit all the appeal which the word ‘liberty’ carries in the support for a demand for the redistribution of wealth.”⁸

Typical of many Christian apologists in Britain during the years following Green was G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), a convert from atheism to Anglican and later Roman Catholic Christianity. In *What’s Wrong with the World* (1910), Chesterton excoriated the so-called robber barons of the industrial revolution, “I am well aware that the word ‘property’ has been defined in our time by the corruption of the great capitalists. One would think, to hear people talk, that the Rothschilds and the Rockefellers were on the side of property. But obviously they are the enemies of property because they are enemies of their own limitations.

They do not want their own land; but other people's."⁹ Chesterton's theories of mythology and epistemology expressed in *The Everlasting Man* (1925) played a profound role in causing and shaping Lewis' conversion from atheistic naturalism to Anglican Christianity between 1927 and 1931. Not surprisingly, during the first decade of his apologetics, Lewis communicated much of the same contempt for laissez-faire economics that pervaded Chesterton's writings. For example, in Lewis' first book following his conversion, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism* (1933), the protagonist John is found hungry and destitute on the roadside by "Mr. Mammon," a caricature of the nineteenth-century industrialist who refuses to give John a piece of bread on the grounds that "it would be contrary to all economic laws" and would "pauperize" him.¹⁰

Mammon, commonly translated as "money," is of course an allusion to Matthew 6:24: "No man can serve two masters. He will either hate the one and love the other or be attentive to one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and money." However, Mr. Mammon is something more complex than a general disdain for wealth or power. He is Lewis' satirical abjuration of the utilitarian strand of classical liberalism and its materialistic ethos of enlightened individual self-interest typified by Mill, who, in *On Liberty* (1859), argued that self-interested competition among individuals served the "general interest of mankind" and that society is compelled to ameliorate suffering of individuals who lose in that competition "only when means of success have been employed which it is to the general interest to permit—namely, fraud or treachery, and force."¹¹ In "Man or Rabbit?" (c. 1946), Lewis described Mill as "good" but he could not accept the atheistic teleological morality underlying Mill's notion of freedom.

Beyond his criticisms of Mill, one might think that the Christianized Lewis had embraced the collectivistic direction liberalism had taken since T. H. Green. In *Christian Behavior* (1943), later published as book 3 of *Mere Christianity* (1952), Lewis acknowledged that in a fully Christian society "we should feel that its economic life was very socialistic and, in that sense, 'advanced,'" and that it would be "what we now call Leftist."¹² As did Chesterton, Lewis regarded earthly socialism not as a remedy for the sins of capitalism but as a far more dangerous alternative that vitiates individual responsibility by creating the illusion of Christian charity.¹³ Lewis warned, "Some people nowadays say that charity ought to be unnecessary and that instead of giving to the poor we ought to be producing a society in which there were no poor to give to. They may be quite right in saying that we ought to produce that kind of society. But if anyone thinks that, as a consequence, you can stop giving in the meantime, then he has parted company with all Christian morality."¹⁴

Similarly, in “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought” (1946), Lewis criticized proletarianism for its spiritually enervating effects on the poor working class, particularly with respect to individual responsibility: “They are convinced that whatever may be wrong with the world it cannot be themselves. Someone else must be to blame for every evil.... They have no feelings of fear, guilt, or awe. They think, from the very outset, of God’s duties to them, not their duties to Him. And God’s duties to them are conceived not in terms of salvation but in purely secular terms—social security, prevention of war, a higher standard of life.”¹⁵ Ultimately, Lewis would likely oppose Green’s collective definition of freedom because, as Lewis tells us in “Membership” (1945), Christians rightly feel that “modern collectivism is an outrage upon human nature” and that just as “personal and private life is lower than participation in the Body of Christ, so the collective life is lower than the personal and private life.”¹⁶

Consistent with this subordination of the public sphere to the private sphere, Lewis also subordinated the prerogatives of the state to those of the individual and believed that the state has a moral obligation to respect individuals’ rights by minimizing its intrusions into their private spheres. In *Mere Christianity* Lewis expatiated,

It is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects—military, political, economic, and what not. But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden—that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong those moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc. are simply a waste of time.¹⁷

In the last years of Lewis’ life, his writings took on an overtly libertarian tone, emphasizing limited government and individual rights—particularly individual property rights. In “Delinquents in the Snow” (1957), Lewis complained, “At present the very uncomfortable position is this: the State protects us less because it is unwilling to protect us against criminals at home and manifestly grows less and less able to protect us against foreign enemies. At the same time it demands from us more and more. We seldom had fewer rights and liberties nor more burdens: and we get less security in return. While our obligations increase their moral ground is taken away.”¹⁸ For Lewis, like most classical liberals, the state’s moral ground was limited from its start, and he would generally agree with Nozick’s neo-Lockean contention that the “minimal state” is the only justifiable

state.¹⁹ Paralleling Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), Lewis wrote, "Government at its best is a necessary evil."²⁰

Furthermore, Lewis regarded welfare guaranteed by the state as a form of control by the state and considered private property to be an indispensable safeguard against that control. In "Is Progress Possible? Willing Slaves of the Welfare State" (1958), he explained, "I believe a man is happier, and happy in a richer way, if he has 'the freeborn mind.' But I doubt whether he can have this without economic independence, which the new society is abolishing. For economic independence allows an education not controlled by Government; and in adult life it is the man who needs, and asks, nothing of Government who can criticize its acts and snap his fingers at its ideology."²¹ Lewis' views were congruent with those of Hayek, who warned in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), "Economic control is not merely control of a sector of human life which can be separated from the rest; it is the control of the means for all our ends."²²

This instrumental reasoning seems to mimic Mill, who valued private-property rights chiefly for their utility in protecting liberty and liberty for its utility in promoting "well being."²³ However, unlike Mill, Lewis ascribed intrinsic value to liberty and traced that value to natural law, which was given by the Creator and supersedes laws given by the state. Lewis attributed many of his ideas regarding natural law to Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and Thomistic theologians and jurists of the Reformation such as Richard Hooker (c. 1554–1600) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who inspired Locke and Jefferson.²⁴ Despite his skepticism regarding Locke's "state of nature," Lewis generally accepted the Lockean view that natural law confers a duty upon every individual to respect every other individual's natural rights.²⁵ Like Lockean libertarians, he defined natural rights as duties under natural law expressed in terms of their beneficiaries that, taken together, form the private sphere as a kind of zone of negative freedom into which a person can retreat from the state. Lewis lamented that this "classical political theory, with its Stoical, Christian, and juristic key-conceptions (natural law, the value of the individual, the rights of man), has died. Hence the new name 'leaders' for those who were once 'rulers'. We are less their subjects than their wards, pupils, or domestic animals. There is nothing left of which we can say to them, 'Mind your own business.' Our whole lives *are* their business."²⁶

Lewis also demonstrated himself to be a libertarian in areas beyond economics. In "Sex in Literature" (1962), Lewis wrote, "The older [civil] law ... embodied a morality for which masturbation, perversion, fornication and adultery were great evils ... My own view— just to get it out of the way—is that they are evils, but that the law should be concerned with none of them except adultery because it offends the Hobbesian principle 'that men perform their covenants.'"²⁷ This may

seem inconsistent with traditional ecclesiastical Christianity. Yet, even Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* (1-2, q. 96) conceded, “Since then the majority of men to whom human laws apply are not very virtuous, human law forbids only the more serious wrongdoing [such as murder and theft], chiefly what would harm others and must be kept in check if human society is to be preserved.”²⁸ For Lewis and to a lesser extent Aquinas, guaranteeing personal freedom, not virtue, is the first duty of government.

Ultimately, according to Lewis, the natural object of personal freedom is happiness. However, unlike the earthly happiness underlying the hedonistic philosophy of Lucretius (95–54 B.C.) and other Epicureans who inspired Jefferson, Lewis’ ideal of happiness beyond the ordinary happiness of this life is otherworldly, and its pursuit requires charity and humility. Nevertheless, Lewis praised the American Declaration of Independence as “august” and “words cherished by all civilized men.” Both Jefferson and Lewis, articulated that the right to pursue happiness does not mean the right to attain happiness.²⁹ Such a right would be, according to Lewis, “as odd as a right to good luck.”³⁰ Lewis elucidated this point in his last essay before his death, “We Have No Right to Happiness” (1963), “For I believe—whatever one school of moralists may say—that we depend for a very great deal of our happiness or misery on circumstances outside all human control. A right to happiness doesn’t, for me, make much more sense than a right to be six feet tall, or to have a millionaire for your father, or to get good weather whenever you want to have a picnic.”³¹

Not surprisingly, C. S. Lewis’ sentiments about freedom and happiness also parallel modern libertarians such as Hayek who observed that “we may be free and yet miserable” and that “to be free may mean freedom to starve, to make costly mistakes, or to run mortal risks.”³² Hence, it appears logical to conclude that Lewis generally shared the classical liberal and libertarian concept of what Locke and Smith called natural liberty. Indeed, this conclusion is crucial to understanding Lewis’ convictions with respect to the second distinction regarding freedom—political versus individual freedom.

Political Freedom and Lewis’ View of Human Nature

Political freedom, sometimes called civil liberty, refers to the ability or right of citizens to participate in the election of their government and to influence the processes of legislation and administration. Whereas individual freedom, particularly in its negative sense, is concerned with the condition of individuals

in relation to other individuals, political freedom is a collective form of liberty because it relates to the power of individuals in relation to a community. For many, if not most, classical liberals of the Enlightenment, political participation, in theory, was not a necessary condition of individual freedom and had no intrinsic connection to any form of government beyond that form best-suited to safeguard individual liberty. Though most classical liberals in practice favored democracy, they feared that increasing political freedom without checks and balances on the will of the masses would merely replace tyranny of the few with what Mill and others called the tyranny of the majority.

The semantic dimension of this dilemma was identified by the Franco-Swiss political philosopher Benjamin Constant (1767–1830) who, like Lewis, was deeply troubled by collective notions of freedom. In “The Liberty of Ancients Compared to That of Moderns” (1816), Constant warned,

[W]e can no longer enjoy the liberty of the ancients, which consisted in an active and constant participation in collective power. Our freedom must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private independence.... Individual liberty ... is the true modern liberty. Political liberty is its guarantee, consequently political liberty is indispensable. But to ask the peoples of our day to sacrifice, like those of the past, the whole of their individual liberty to political liberty, is the surest means of detaching them from the former and, once this result has been achieved, it would be only too easy to deprive them of the latter.³³

By contrast, more radical philosophers of the period tended to conflate individual freedom and political freedom and thus the public and private spheres. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), for example, argued in *On Social Contract* (1762) that the freedom of the community, the “general will,” subsumed the freedom of the individual. For Rousseau, therefore, maximum freedom meant maximum political equality. Accordingly, Rousseau advocated the creation of small, purely democratic city-states in which all citizens have direct and equal roles in enacting laws. Being extremely optimistic about human nature, Rousseau believed that direct democracy and proper education would eliminate most conflicts between individuals and the state. Nevertheless, he concluded that a state legitimized by democratic mandate has the authority to coerce citizens who are unable or unwilling to act according to the general will—that is, the state has the right “to force men to be free.” Whereas much of Rousseau’s enthusiasm for civil liberty survived in modern liberalism, Constant’s emphases on individual freedom lived on among libertarians such as Hayek, who observed that a “free people ... is not necessarily a people of free men” and that “the value of freedom

would be pointless if any regime of which people approved was, by definition, a regime of freedom.”³⁴

Like Constant and Hayek, C. S. Lewis was deeply suspicious of Rousseau’s notion of democracy, especially his conflation of individual freedom and political freedom, which, Lewis believed, rationalized forms of totalitarianism at both ends of the political spectrum. In “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” (1959), Lewis reveals through the devil Screwtape his vision of Evil’s grander strategy for enslaving humanity by twisting the meaning of liberty:

Hidden in the heart of this striving for Liberty there was also a deep hatred of personal freedom. That invaluable man Rousseau first revealed it. In his perfect democracy ... the individual is told that he has really willed (though he didn’t know it) whatever the Government tells him to do. From that starting point, via Hegel [and thus Hegelians like T. H. Green] ... we easily contrived both the Nazi and the Communist state ... Democracy is the word with which you must lead them by the nose.³⁵

As most of Rousseau’s critics, Lewis believed that Rousseau vastly overestimated the competence, intelligence, and moral potential of the masses and thus set democracy up for failure. In his essay “Equality” (1943), Lewis warned of the antiliberal consequences of unlimited political freedom,

A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government. The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they are not true. And whenever their weakness is exposed, the people who prefer tyranny make capital out of the exposure. I find that they’re not true without looking further than myself. I do not deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation. Nor do most people—all the people who believe advertisements, and think in catchwords and spread rumours.³⁶

One needs only to recall the downfalls of the Russian Provisional Government in 1917 and that of the Weimer Republic in 1932 to appreciate Professor Lewis’ sentiments.

Ironically, one can easily get the impression from Lewis’ writings that Lewis was among those who preferred hierarchical societies. Lewis lamented, “I don’t think the old authority in kings, priests, husbands, or fathers, and the old obedience in subjects, laymen, wives, and sons, was in itself a degrading or evil thing at all. I think it was intrinsically as good and beautiful as the nakedness of Adam and Eve. It was rightly taken away because men became bad and abused

it. To attempt to restore it now would be the same error as that of the Nudists.”³⁷ In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis tells us that in a fully Christian society, though its code of courtesy and obedience would seem to us “rather old-fashioned” and “ceremonious and aristocratic,” the private sphere would be better protected from the “busybodies” frequently coddled in vulgar democracies.³⁸ We find similar sentiments in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). At the end of the story, the “Sons of Adam” and the “Daughters of Eve” assume the royal thrones of Narnia and make “good laws” that “generally stopped busybodies and interferers and encouraged ordinary people who wanted to live and let live.”³⁹

For C. S. Lewis, the human spirit is a paradox. It simultaneously craves privacy but needs community; it demands equality and yet longs for authority; it yearns for freedom but is drawn to obedience. Lewis feared that in secular democracy, where political freedom is equal and traditional authorities are less respected, most human beings will submit themselves to the worst busybodies and demagogues who appeal to their most base and self-destructive passions. In this context, he argued that hierarchical institutions, especially the Church but even ceremonial monarchies, could serve a useful purpose in a democratizing world by focusing human fealty toward symbols that connect liberty with morality.⁴⁰ Otherwise, he warned, “Where men are forbidden to honour a king, they honour millionaires, athletes, or film-stars instead: even famous prostitutes or gangsters. For spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food and it will gobble poison.”⁴¹

That is not to say that C. S. Lewis was an antidemocratic reactionary who opposed political equality. In fact, he frequently militated against political elitism across the spectrum. In *The Abolition of Man* (1943), for example, Lewis expressed fear that future technologies, particularly genetics, would lead to “the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men” and that “the man-moulders of the new age will be armed with the powers of an omniscient state.”⁴² In *That Hideous Strength* (1945), the third novel in Lewis’ space trilogy, he speculates how British democracy could be supplanted by a technocratic oligarchy—in this case, the fictional “National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments” (N.I.C.E.), a progressive think tank of academic elites that insidiously assumes extra-constitutional powers of state.⁴³

Still, Lewis’ ambivalence regarding democracy and his sympathies for hierarchical society do, to some extent, parallel Aristotle (384–322 B.C.). In book 4 of *The Politics*, Aristotle tells us that even a perfect democracy, *polity*, would be inferior to monarchy and aristocracy in their perfect forms because a single ruler or small group of rulers would govern more harmoniously. According to Aristotle, when nature makes mistakes by enthroning men intended to be slaves

as rulers of their cities, aristocracy and monarchy degenerate from the best states into the worst states, *oligarchy* and *tyranny*. For both Aristotle and Lewis, democracy is usually the lesser of evils. In contrast to Aristotle, however, C. S. Lewis accepted the common Christian view that the fall of man, as explicated by Isaiah 31:3 and Romans 11:11, extended to all human beings except Christ and believed that neither nature nor the efforts of man could produce incorruptible monarchs and aristocrats. Lewis wrote, “Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with the unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.”⁴⁴ He thus declared, “I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man.”⁴⁵

Despite admitting the practical superiority of democracy over monarchy and aristocracy, C. S. Lewis feared that democracy’s obsession with what he called “flat equality” posed its own threats to freedom. As an educator, Professor Lewis detested the tendency in democratic education to elevate above all other concerns the elimination of “unfair advantages” that make some students feel inferior to others and frequently complained that too often “unfair advantages” are code words intended to dumb down standards and to punish academic excellence. As the devil Screwtape explains,

In a word, we may reasonably hope for the virtual abolition of education when *I’m as good as you* has fully had its way. All incentives to learn and all penalties for not learning will vanish. The few who might want to learn will be prevented; who are they to overtop their fellows? And anyway the teachers—or should I say, nurses?—will be far too busy reassuring the dunces and patting them on the back to waste any time on real teaching. We shall no longer have to plan and toil to spread imperturbable conceit and incurable ignorance among men. The little vermin will do it for us.⁴⁶

As a democrat, Lewis feared what democratic education would do to democracy, and he often referred to Aristotle’s distinction between the type of education democracy *likes* and the type it *needs*, which according to Lewis must be traditional and, ironically, elitist. In “Notes on the Way” (1944), Lewis wrote,

A truly democratic education—one which will preserve democracy—must be, in its own field, ruthlessly aristocratic, shamelessly “high-brow.” In drawing up its curriculum it should always have chiefly in view the interests of the boy who wants to know and who can know . . . It must, in a certain sense subordinate the interests of the many to those of the few, and it must subordinate the school to the university. Only thus can it be a nursery of those first-class intellects without which neither a democracy nor any other State can thrive.⁴⁷

As a Christian, C. S. Lewis was most concerned with the negative effects of flat equality on the human soul. Like most Christians, he believed that, as the result of the fall of man, the bodies and souls of human beings were to a great extent divorced from and set against one another. In “Two Ways with the Self” (1940), Lewis tells us that what emerged from this divorce were two distinct selves, one true and one false.⁴⁸ On one hand, the true self is that part of the soul shared with God. It looks outward, denies itself, and focuses its love toward God and others seeking heavenly union with him. On the other hand, the false self is that part of the soul that looks inward, denies God, and loves only itself. Pride comes from the false self, and it is through the false self that evil lures the soul away from the freedom of God’s love and into the bondage of self-love.

According to Lewis, the desire for complete equality often originates from the “I’m as good as you” complex of the false self, which often wants what the true self wants but for different reasons, stemming from the fall of man. In “Notes on the Way” Lewis explains,

The demand for equality has two sources; one of them is among the noblest, the other is the basest, of human emotions. The noble source is the desire for fair play. But the other is the hatred of superiority ... There is a tendency in all men (only corrigible by good training from without and persistent moral effort from within) to resent the existence of what is stronger, subtler or better than themselves. In uncorrected and brutal men this hardens into an implacable and disinterested hatred for every kind of excellence.⁴⁹

In short, Lewis suspected that most populist demands for unchecked political freedom and absolute equality originate from human pride and jealousy. Consequently, he would deeply sympathize with Nozick’s adamant opposition against empowering government “to reduce someone’s situation in order to lessen the envy and happiness others feel in knowing this situation.”⁵⁰ However, Lewis would have no interest in the Nozickian aim of eliminating “widespread differences in self-esteem” since Christ in Mark 7:22 classifies pride (as Lewis would call self-esteem) among the worst human sins.⁵¹ In his exegesis of Genesis and human nature in *The Problem of Pain* (1940), Lewis concurred with Saint Augustine (354–430) that pride caused the fall of man and constitutes the most formidable obstacle to spiritual freedom and true happiness.⁵²

Lewis on Christians in Politics

In practical terms, Lewis' understanding of freedom and humanity's fallen nature precluded not only the collectivist forms of democracy inspired by Rousseau and Green but also those governments that conflate church and state. Echoing Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1693), Lewis argued that divine noninterference is manifested in natural law and compels humans to imitate God by not imposing his will on others. Consequently, he was extremely reticent about politicizing Christianity by forming Christian political parties. In "Meditation on the Third Commandment," Lewis reckoned that any such party "will have no more power than the political skill of its members gives it to control the behaviour of its unbelieving allies."⁵³ Similarly, in "Is Progress Possible," Lewis warned of the dangers of a religious party's gaining absolute power, "I believe in God, but I detest theocracy. For every Government consists of mere men and is, strictly viewed, a makeshift; if it adds to its commands 'Thus saith the Lord,' it lies and lies dangerously."⁵⁴

That is not to say that C. S. Lewis saw no place for Christianity in politics. Indeed, Lewis fervently encouraged Christians to participate actively in democracy but to pattern their participation after the "personalist democracy" advocated by the French neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973).⁵⁵ At the very least, according to Lewis, this requires voting and "pestering M.P.'s with letters" so that politicians "have to take care not to alienate Christians, instead of a world where Christians have to be 'loyal' to infidel parties."⁵⁶ Furthermore, while he maintained that Christianity should be promoted through private evangelization, he believed that such evangelization could reinforce liberal self-government by resolving Constant's dilemma in two ways. First, while Christianity subordinates collective life to private life, its emphasis on charitable works counteracts the natural tendency of individuals in liberal democracy to neglect the needs of their communities. Second, the Christian tradition of natural law holds citizens and statesmen alike to common standards of morality and thus promotes limited government. As Lewis explained in "The Poison of Subjectivism" (1943), "The very idea of freedom presupposes some objective moral law which overarches rulers and ruled alike. Subjectivism about values is eternally incompatible with democracy. We and our rulers are of one kind so long as we are subject to one law. But if there is no Law of Nature, the *ethos* of any society is the creation of its rulers, educators and conditioners; and every creator stands above and outside his own creation."⁵⁷ For Lewis, equality of this kind was indispensable "medicine" for the fall of man.⁵⁸

Conclusion: Lewis' View of Freedom as "Merely Christian"

Had the fall of man not happened, C. S. Lewis would likely see no dichotomy between spiritual freedom and natural freedom. Had he taken up the debate regarding positive and negative freedom, he probably would have said that natural liberty corresponds to negative freedom and is the necessary condition for autonomy understood as spiritual freedom. He would likely say that in a perfect world positive freedom would mean the power of individuals to surrender their self-love for the love of God and other human beings and that in this sense it would be the manifestation of spiritual freedom in the material world. However, from a Christian perspective, the fall of man did happen, and the fully Christian society Lewis described cannot exist outside Perelandra.⁵⁹ Therefore, he would likely favor that definition of freedom, positive or negative, which would be practicable in the City of Man, not the City of God. Given his ideas regarding human nature and the proper role for government, we may conclude that he would reject positive freedom in the material world as a dangerous imitation of Christian charity because efforts by the state to grant such freedom usually involve acts of coercion. For Lewis, freedom and happiness beyond the mere absence of coercion are things that only God and not government can guarantee.

In conclusion, C. S. Lewis' concept of freedom is most accurately described in purely political-philosophical terms as classical liberal or libertarian. Yet, such terms do not entirely reflect what he believed were the religious origins of liberty. Accordingly, one could rightly call him a "Christian libertarian." However, as we learn from the *Screwtape Letters* (1942), Lewis was deeply wary of substituting for the faith itself "some Fashion with a Christian colouring."⁶⁰ Therefore, C. S. Lewis would likely insist that his concept of freedom is *merely Christian*.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 414. Churchill offered Lewis the investiture following the Conservative Party's return to power in 1951.
2. C. S. Lewis, "Meditation on the Third Commandment," *The Guardian* (10 January 1941), 18.
3. John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1986), 17, 33.

4. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993), 336.
5. F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 12.
6. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 10, 34.
7. T. H. Green, "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract," in *Works of T. H. Green* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888), 371.
8. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 17.
9. G. K. Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 42.
10. C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 43.
11. J. S. Mill, *On Liberty* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1986), 107.
12. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 81. Lewis originally published *Christian Behavior* in 1943 but republished it as book 3 of *Mere Christianity*.
13. See G. K. Chesterton, *Utopia of Usurers* (Norfolk, Va.: IHS Press, 2002), 45–46. In "The Mask of Socialism," Chesterton wrote, "I think it is not at all improbable that this Plutocracy, pretending to be a Bureaucracy, will be attempted or achieved . . . its religion will be just charitable enough to pardon usurers; its penal system will be just cruel enough to crush all the critics of usurers: the truth of it will be Slavery: and the title of it may quite possibly be Socialism."
14. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 82.
15. C. S. Lewis, "Modern Man and His Categories of Thought," in *Present Concerns: Essays by C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1986), 64–65.
16. C. S. Lewis, "Membership," in *The Weight of Glory*, ed. Walter Hooper (HarperCollins, 2000), 161.
17. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 171.
18. C. S. Lewis, "Delinquents in the Snow," *Time and Tide* 38 (7 December 1957), 1521–22.
19. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, 53.
20. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 473.

21. C. S. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible? Willing Slaves of the Welfare State," *The Observer* (20 July 1958), 6.
22. F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 92.
23. Mill, *On Liberty*, 64–84.
24. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Allen, Tex.: Christian Classics, 1989), 391–92 (II-II, q. 66). Unlike Locke, Aquinas does not directly link property rights to natural law, but he argues that private property does not contravene natural law and is consistent with Scripture. In some sense, Aquinas' view, as well as Lewis', is closer to that of Jefferson who regarded property not as a natural right but as a derived right.
25. See Lewis, "Delinquents in the Snow," 1521–22. Lewis argues that the classical concept of the state of nature "was never true as a historical account of the genesis of the State" though it "morally grounds our obligations to civil disobedience."
26. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible?" 6.
27. C. S. Lewis, "Sex in Literature," *The Sunday Telegraph* 87 (30 September 1962), 8. It is ironic that Lewis refers to Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) whose *Leviathan* (1651) epitomizes antiliberal thinking. However, Hobbes and Locke do agree on the sanctity of covenants.
28. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 291.
29. C. S. Lewis, "We Have No Right to Happiness," *The Saturday Evening Post* 236 (21–28 December 1963), 10.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, 10, 12. Lewis died on 22 November 1963. This essay was published posthumously.
32. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 18.
33. "The Liberty of Ancients Compared to That of Moderns (1816)." Retrieved on November 5, 2005, from University of Arkansas, <http://www.uark.edu/depts/comminfo/cambridge/ancients.html>.
34. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 13.
35. C. S. Lewis, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," in *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 122.
36. C. S. Lewis, "Equality," *The Spectator* 171 (27 August 1943), 192.
37. *Ibid.*, 193.

38. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 81.
39. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 201.
40. See Lewis, "Membership," 171. Lewis posits, "As democracy becomes more complete in the outer world and opportunities for reverence are successively removed, the refreshment, the cleansing, and invigorating returns to inequality, which the Church offers us, become more and more necessary."
41. Lewis, "Equality," 193.
42. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 58–59.
43. C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).
44. C. S. Lewis, "Equality," 193.
45. Ibid.
46. Lewis, "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," 122.
47. C. S. Lewis, "Notes on the Way," *Time and Tide* 25 (29 April 1944), 369–70. Lewis' own title for this essay was "Democratic Education."
48. C. S. Lewis, "Two Ways with the Self," *The Guardian* (3 May 1940), 215.
49. Ibid.
50. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, 245.
51. Ibid. Regarding Lewis' opinion of "self-esteem," see C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 51. Lewis posits, "But unless Christianity is wholly false, the perception of ourselves which we have in moments of shame must be the only true one...."
52. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 66.
53. Lewis, "Meditation on the Third Commandment," 18.
54. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible?" 6.
55. See Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, trans. Mortimer Jerome Adler (New York: Macmillan, 1940). Inspired by Henri Bergson and Alexis de Tocqueville, Maritain opposed the "bourgeois democracy" practiced in Western Europe and the United States, which he believed would cause the decline of Western culture. However, he argued that "personalist democracy" was inextricably connected with Christianity.
56. Lewis, "Meditation on the Third Commandment," 18.

57. C. S. Lewis, "The Poison of Subjectivism," in *The Seeing Eye and Other Selected Essays from Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 111.
58. Lewis, "Equality," 193. See also C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 148. The Director tells Jane, "Yes, we must all be guarded by equal rights from one another's greed, because we are fallen.... Equality guards life; it doesn't make it. It is medicine, not food."
59. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). *Perelandra* is the second book in Lewis' space trilogy and depicts an alternate Garden of Eden on Venus where Eve overcomes Evil's temptation.
60. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 91.