



Liberty's Limits

But in our personal lives, few of us want to be masters of our own fates, without concern from and mutual ties to family and friends. Which of us would be happy going where we like all the time without considering anyone else's needs or desires? Who wants to work solely for himself, never serving a greater good such as children or parents, the Almighty, or even one of the muses?

So it seems that political liberty pertains only to government and its coercion. Yet we've lost that distinction, perhaps because we usually drop the "political" when speaking of "liberty." Such carelessness enabled a president to bamboozle Americans when he included among ["Four Freedoms"](#) two that can never be part of the Fed's Constitutional duties. Indeed, only by violating our freedom of speech and of religion can politicians liberate us from "Want" and "Fear."



It isn't only socialists and other quacks who err in this way, either. Smashing the shackles Leviathan fashions for us shouldn't mean we also smash those of morality and religion; a world without government would be paradise, but one without morality would be hell. Yet friends of freedom often twist political liberty into something it's not. Some merely "[swear]" with Thomas Jefferson ["eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man"](#); others go whole-hog *a lá* Ayn Rand and apply a political philosophy to life and morals. Such confusion frequently turns followers so grossly rude, cold, and atheistic that they might as well be statist, given the opprobrium with which they tarnish liberty's luster.

Government is *sui generis*, thank God. There is no other institution like it in human experience because it legally initiates brute force within a geographic area. We would vilify, shun, and retaliate against a thug who approached us to demand a cut of our paycheck, then slugged us when we refused him. Yet the State preys on us so routinely that we not only expect its abuse, we excuse it. Government also monopolizes and then licenses that legal use of force. Entities like labor unions rely on physical compulsion as well, but only with government's approval.

The State's unique nature means that most of what we think about it doesn't translate to anything else. Analogies usually don't work, either. Statists throughout history have compared government to the family, fondly imagining that wise and benevolent tyrants protect, shelter, and nurture their victims as fathers do children. Balderdash. We'd condemn any parent as a peerless abuser who treated his children as politicians do us, even if he imitated only one of the State's habits, *i.e.*, if he sent his son to



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war against the heavily armed and forewarned neighbor. And what would we say about a man who threatened to kidnap and cage his children if they didn't fork over between 15 and 38 percent of their annual income to him?

Still, too many Americans react to Leviathan as if it were a loving father rather than a vicious sociopath. They gullibly trust bureaucrats to feed and house them, educate them, and heal them when they're sick while protecting them from dirty air, water, and life's vicissitudes. The threats that arouse such horror in those who prize liberty - [government's agents peering](#) at us naked in airports, eavesdropping on our conversations, [reading our emails](#) - strike these folks as the protective actions parents take. They clamor for politicians who "care," seeking from government the love, comfort, and support only family and friends can provide.

On the other side are those lovers of liberty who lump all decrees with political ones. Despite his brilliance, Jefferson made this mistake when he [wrote Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1800](#) about his conflict with Christian clergy, explaining how he hoped to thwart their "tyranny over the mind of man." That borders on nonsense: absent brainwashing and torture, which are the province of government, no man can dictate our thoughts. Jefferson was right to stymie the Congregationalists and Episcopalians' "very favorite hope" of "obtaining an establishment of a particular form of Christianity thro' the U.S.": an alliance of Christianity with the State does indeed yield tyranny, over not only minds but bodies.

Yet Jefferson implies much more in this paragraph. Famously a Deist, he rejected the Biblical Christ for a "rational" one of his own creation - a mere man, and a good one, Jefferson insists, even if He lied about His [identity and origins](#). Jefferson even appointed himself God's editor: he literally cut and pasted the Gospels to produce a hatchet job entitled [The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth](#). This shrank Christianity from God's plan for saving sinners to "[the most sublime and benevolent](#) code of morals which has ever been offered to man," or so Jefferson flattered himself.

Apparently, anyone who disagreed with Jefferson's condensation of Holy Writ was a victim of traditional Christianity's mental tyranny. But unless Christians, heterodox or heretical, coerce their victim to agree with them — an impossibility without government's help — they are no more tyrannical than Jefferson.

There's no higher political value than freedom. But we cherish a great many things more than we do personal freedom: a loving marriage, happy children, robust health, challenging work. Single folks who eschew all religious, social and moral obligations don't necessarily revere political liberty more than the devout, married mother of four who voluntarily joins a commune of health-food fanatics.

Understanding this frees us to sunder political bonds while we forge rewarding personal ones.

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