TRANSCENDENT FREEDOM: HARMONIZING LIBERAL AND COMMUNITARIAN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Freedom, a core value that shapes individuals' lives within a political state, has been extensively explored in political philosophy. Its history is complex, stretching from ancient thinkers like Aristotle in his 'Politics' and Plato in his 'Republic' to medieval scholars such as Aquinas, and Enlightenment leaders like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Hegel. More recent scholars, such as Rawls and Arendt, have also deepened our understanding. Today, its definition is primarily viewed through a liberal lens, influenced by social contract theory and a communitarian perspective, as outlined by theorists such as Hegel. These views form the basis of modern political and social ideas of freedom. Most scholars argue that this approach more accurately reflects its true meaning. However, we believe these perspectives—whether liberal or communitarian—are limited and cannot fully explain freedom if, as these theorists claim, it is a universal value. In response, this paper will argue that neither perspective provides a complete explanation of freedom. By challenging their narrow view, the paper presents what we call transcendent freedom—a concept that overcomes the flaws of both perspectives and establishes freedom as an authentically universal value.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the concept of freedom remains one of the most fundamental and critical ideas in political philosophy. It is considered a basic value, essential for truly understanding what it means to be human. Many philosophers, including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Simone de Beauvoir, made this idea a central tenet of their political theories. Locke, for example, argued that to take away the freedom of someone else is to take away everything else from the person, because freedom is the foundation of all the rest.[1] Rousseau shared a similar view when he said, "to renounce one's freedom is to renounce one's quality as a man, the rights of humanity, even its duties. There is no possible compensation for someone who renounces everything. Such a renunciation is incompatible with man's nature, and to deprive his will of all freedom is to deprive his actions of all morality."[2] Building on these ideas, freedom emerges as a crucial element in understanding the individual as a member of the political state. De Beauvoir, for example, argues that it is what gives human ends meaning. It is "the supreme end at

[1] Locke, John, *Second Treatise of Government*, edited by C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), Chap. II, par. 4.

[2] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "On Social Contract," In *Basic Political Writings*, Translated and Edited by Donal, A. Cress, 153-252 (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2011), Bk. I, Chap. IV.

which man must aim… which alone is capable of establishing the value of every end."[3] Without freedom, there can be no just state, as it would just become a totalitarian entity.

Despite the importance of freedom, some philosophers, particularly in the past, have rejected the notion that it is a vital aspect of being human. Thinkers like Baron Paul d'Holbach, in the 18th century, rejected the idea that freedom is a fundamental part of every human being, arguing instead that free will does not exist. According to him, a person's life is a path that nature controls entirely, without ever allowing him to deviate from it, not even for a moment. He is born without his own say; his body and mind depend on factors beyond his control; his thoughts come involuntarily; his habits are shaped by others who influence them; he is continuously changed by causes, whether visible or hidden, over which he has no power. These causes naturally influence how he lives, color his thoughts, and shape his actions. He is good or bad, happy or miserable, wise or foolish, rational or irrational, without his having any choice over these states. Yet, despite these constraints, it is claimed that he is a free agent—able to choose his will and determine his condition independently of the causes that influence him.[4] Although some hard-core determinists, like D'Holbach, still deny the existence of freedom today, modern academic discussions generally assume that the value of

[3] De Beauvoir, Simone. The Ethics of Ambiguity (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2018), 121.

[4] D'Hollbach, Baron, The Systems of Nature Translated by H. D. Robinson (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 98.

freedom is an essential part of every human being. It is crucial in evaluating every human action. Without it, actions cannot truly be considered human. While recognizing the fundamental importance of this concept, what exactly is freedom?

To answer this question, it is necessary to understand that the concept of freedom is quite broad. In this essay, while acknowledging other aspects, we will focus on its civil expression within the state. From this perspective, it has been primarily studied through two key philosophical frameworks: liberal freedom, which views the individual as an independent member of society, and the communitarian perspective, which considers the individual as an integral part of society. Liberal freedom emphasizes individual rights based on the social contract theories of Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke. Meanwhile, the communitarian view regards freedom as a shared experience rooted in membership in the civil state, as advocated by thinkers such as Hegel and Rousseau. This idea is connected to the ancient theory of the state, as discussed by thinkers such as Aristotle in his Politics and Plato in his Republic.

In examining these two modern conceptions of freedom, this essay will argue that both perspectives, although essential for understanding the concept, are insufficient to provide a complete picture of it. It will contend that any thorough understanding of freedom must start with its transcendent source, without which neither the liberal nor the communitarian perspective can help humans realize their full potential as citizens of the state. In early philosophical views, freedom was mainly associated with

men, especially as citizens of the state, as exemplified in Athens. Women and slaves were excluded, which prevented them from having full membership and freedom. During the medieval period, it was mostly understood through a religious lens, focusing on citizens as members of the Christian monarchical states. That is why it did not apply to groups like Heretics, who, as members of the state, lacked the freedom to challenge official religious teachings. In the modern era, it is claimed to apply to all individuals as members of the state, regardless of their social, political, racial, or religious backgrounds.

Thus, today, a core idea of freedom is its universality. This essay aims to establish a foundation that supports the universal claim of freedom, emphasizing that our racially divided and stratified societies have yet to fully embrace this high ideal fully, thereby exposing a fundamental flaw in our current political and philosophical understanding of freedom, as delineated by liberal and communitarian views. We begin by examining liberal freedom.

LIBERAL FREEDOM

Freedom, as a value, is connected to two main ideas: the individual who exercises it and the society in which it occurs. A proper understanding of freedom includes these two aspects. Therefore, in its traditional sense, it involves three key elements: the agent of freedom, the limitations or restrictions from which one is free, and what one is free to do or not do. To fully understand freedom, these three elements must be considered. Unfortunately, in its liberal sense, the focus has often been more on the first two

elements, with less attention to the purpose of that freedom. This already reveals a problem with what is often called liberal freedom, which refers to a person's abstract right to make choices regardless of the specific nature of those choices. This kind of liberal freedom matches what Isaiah Berlin calls "negative freedom," meaning the absence of constraint. This type of "freedom is the opportunity to act, not the action itself; the possibility of action, not necessarily that dynamic realization of it."[5]

This form of freedom can be described as a limited freedom that is detached from any specific reality. In this sense, like Rawls's view, it is a kind of "a framework for people to pursue their own self-chosen ends and goals but is neutral with respect to any particular ends or preferred ways of life."[6] According to these liberals, "right" must take precedence over the "good".[7] Understanding freedom in this way is essential, but it does not provide the complete picture of what freedom entails. This view is associated with a specific idea of both the individual and the state. It considers the individual as an absolute, atomistic, autonomous being for whom the idea of freedom relates solely to expressing their power and rights. He is that self-centered being whose primary concern is his desires. The individual is regarded as a liberal monad whose existence is solely for his own benefit, while he uses others whenever it suits him. As Iris

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[5] Berlin, Isaiah, Liberty, edited by Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 35.

[6] Smith, B. Steven, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 2.

[7] Smith, Hegel's Critique of Liberalism, 2.

Young argues, this conception of the individual "presumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. This individualist social ontology usually goes together with a normative conception of the self as independent. The authentic self is autonomous, unified, free, and self-made, standing apart from history and affiliations, choosing its life plan entirely for itself."[8]

From this perspective, the state is viewed by the individual as a social contract based solely on consent.
Here, one is exclusively an economic being living within the state, with all interests centered on personal gains. Viewing the individual as an economic being, the state is regarded as a tool for fulfilling each person's desires. In this context, "economics decides everything."[9] This liberal perspective does not view the state as having any higher or more significant value in a metaphysical sense, except to meet the economic and material needs of individuals. Locke exemplified this view when he states:

> Forasmuch as we are not by ourselves sufficient to furnish ourselves with competent store of things needful for such a life as our nature doth desire — a life fit for the dignity of man —therefore to supply those defects and imperfections which are in us, as living single and solely by ourselves, we are naturally induced to seek communion and

[8] Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 50.
[9] Reno, *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Regnery Gateway: Kindle Edition) 74.

> fellowship with others; this was the cause of men's uniting themselves at first in politic societies.[10]

With this idea of the individual as a selfish entity solely interested in personal needs and the state as the arena where this individual exists to pursue their own interests, the expression of every individual's freedom is always chaotic. This situation has been described well by Reno, "the free market is anarchistic in a precise sense: It has no telos, no higher purpose or ultimate end. It depends on nothing substantial and relies on no essence other than man's desire to maximize his utility. This desire for greater personal utility is a truth about the human condition, to be sure. But it is a small one and does not implicate us in the transcendent."[11] In this view, individuals perceive each other as competitive adversaries constantly vying to outdo one another, rather than as collaborative partners for whom the world is a project to be improved through cooperation. Benjamin Wiker highlighted this reality well when he argued that in such a state, there is no:

> Higher goal for political life, such as the cultivation of virtue (as in Aristotle) or the cultivation of our souls for the sake of eternal life (as in Aquinas)… the only goal for our common life, and for the laws that define and direct our common life, will be economic… To redefine our political goal as purely economic amounted to

[10] Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Chap. II, par. 15

[11] Reno, Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and theFuture of the West, 92-93.

> redefining our highest pursuit as material pleasure, rather than spiritual perfection.[12]

When examining most of our current capitalist mentality, we see a situation where financial interests and gains primarily define the civil state. This view of the state does not lead us to consider transcendence. This mindset has led people to see the civil state not as a space to embody transcendent values like love, generosity, peace, and other virtues, but rather as a place where individuals appear as self-interested egoists living solely for their own interests. Against this mentality, they see the state existing only "for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a greater security against any that are not of it."[13] Unfortunately, viewing the state as a place where people compete only for their material gain suggests that any virtue the state encourages is "only to the extent that this is required to guarantee the rights of one" to gather and acquire as much material wealth as possible.

Among the pioneers of this view of individual freedom and the state is Hobbes. When one considers his view that "Self-preservation"[14] is the only reason why individuals enter into a commonwealth, this viewpoint becomes clearer. Thus, according to Diggs, for Hobbes, "each individual by nature seeks good for himself, and the state, somewhat paradoxically, is a natural product of the

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[12] Wiker, Moral Darwinism (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 170-171.

[13] Locke, Second Treatise of Government, Chap. VI, par. 95.

[14] Hobbes, Thomas, Leviathan (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1998), 31, par. 1.

endeavors or forces of the individuals who compose it… once constituted, society and the state are nothing other than these individuals."[15] Given this liberal view of freedom, which sees the individual and the state mainly from a self-interest perspective, it becomes clear that it partly reacts against the medieval Christian idea that considers the individual as part of an organic whole within a state created by God.

The medieval concept, for example, as promoted by Aquinas, is rooted in ancient ideas of the state. This medieval Christian conception aligns with the ancient philosophical theories of philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato. Thus, they "did not think of the polis in terms of rights, and they would have considered it wrong to limit the welfare at which the modern state supposedly aims to [the] protection of either rights or external goods."[16] Therefore, the earlier Ancient-Christian conception viewed the state as an embedded reality that extends beyond "a cooperative venture for mutual advantage."[17] It is more of a cooperative venture where freedom, as a value, is meant to aid the individual as a member of the state with its divine origin from God. It is in opposition to this ancient/medieval backdrop that the social contract theory is situated. According to Gierke, for the social contract, the state is:

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[15] Diggs, B. J. The State, Justice, and the Common Good (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1974), 31.

[16] Diggs, The State, Justice, and the Common Good, 13.

[17] Gauthier, David, "Justice as Social Choice," in Morality, Reason and Truth, edited by David Copp and David Zimmerman, 250-269 (Totowa: Rowman and Allenheld Publishers, 1985), 269.

> No longer derived from the divinely ordained harmony of the universal whole; it was no longer explained as a partial whole which was derived from, and preserved by, the existence of the greater: it was simply explained by itself. The starting-point of speculation ceased to be general humanity: it became the individual and self-sufficing sovereign State; and this individual State was regarded as based on a union of individuals, in obedience to the dictates of Natural Law, to form a society armed with supreme power.[18]

Analyzing this individualistic view of the state reveals that the state exists solely to serve the individual. It does not regard the state as a collective effort where the well-being and good of others are as important as one's own, except when doing so results in a significant benefit for oneself. This mindset underpins our modern society and has elevated selfishness to a highly valued trait, often pursued at any cost. It is this self-interest perspective, shared by both the individual and the state, that liberal freedom promotes. And it is against that that the communitarian view is established.

COMMUNITARIAN AND INTERSUBJECTIVE FREEDOM

This perspective challenges the notion of understanding both the individual and the state solely through a basic liberal concept of freedom. Most thinkers in this group are

[18] Gierke, Otto, Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500 to 1800, Vol. 1. Translated by Ernst Barker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Press, 1934), 40.

often referred to as communitarian theorists. Among them are figures like Hegel, Rousseau, Michael Sandel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, and others. They argue that the abstract liberal idea of freedom is insufficient to undergird any comprehensive understanding of either the individual or the state. They see the state as more than just a protector of liberal freedoms because they believe such freedoms do not fully express the true meaning of the individual within the state. These thinkers focus especially on the last part of our definition of freedom, as stated in the introduction, which questions the ultimate purpose of freedom. In other words, if freedom as a value is a means, the question becomes: for what? It is in this sense that freedom is understood in its positive aspect, which relates to a real condition aimed at reaching a specific goal.

Communitarian thinkers do not see the individual as merely a self-interested being, as liberal thinkers do, but rather as a community-oriented person inherently connected to others within the state. Here, we will highlight some perspectives to illustrate our point. We will also include viewpoints, such as the intersubjective perspectives promoted by thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Arendt's concept of civic responsibility, which argue that freedom requires engagement, since they all oppose the abstract liberal idea of freedom. Freedom from all these perspectives is "not just an abstract concept but a way of life involving both opportunity and responsibilities."[19] This responsibility is what I owe to

[19] Lee Boggs, James, and Grace, Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century (London: Monthly Review Press, 1975),154.

others, meaning that freedom is not simply the absence of constraints that grants me the right to pursue my selfish desires, but involves how my actions are connected to others, since I am part of that organic whole. It is in this light that one will understand Paul Tillich's assertion, "finite freedom is not aseity. Man can affirm himself only if he affirms not an empty shell, a mere possibility, but the structure of being in which he finds himself before action and nonaction."[20]

Freedom is therefore connected to action; as De Beauvoir writes, "freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world: to such an extent that man's project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behavior."[21] While linked to action, the question arises as to what kind of actions are being referred to. Theorists such as De Beauvoir, although not communitarian, do not believe that there is an overarching, objective concept of good based on humanity's essential spiritual nature that applies universally to the idea of freedom. Just like Rawls, who sees freedom of every citizen as insecure when founded upon a teleological principle,[22] De Beauvoir argues that reality has no fixed point from which one can start; thus, freedom is a reality that is constantly in flux and can never be fully achieved as a complete goal. Therefore, "to will freedom and to will to disclose being are one and the same choice; hence, freedom takes a positive and constructive step which causes being to pass

[20] Tillich, Paul, The Courage to Be (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2000), 152.
[21] De Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 84.
[22] Rawls, John, A Theory of Justice (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 185.

to existence in a movement which is constantly surpassed."[23] In fact, De Beauvoir broadens the idea of freedom in this positive sense when she states:

> And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; It is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbor into prison.[24]

Rousseau is another communitarian thinker, although some authors acknowledge his contribution to liberal freedom. According to Susan Dunn:

> Rousseau recognized two different types of freedom. The first, enjoyed by people in the state of nature, denoted their freedom to act as they wished, in a variety of diverse ways. This was a negative form of freedom, freedom from constraints. But there is another, higher form of freedom, according to Rousseau, a positive freedom. This is not freedom from constraint, but rather freedom for some higher good, for the enjoyment of the good, moral life. This kind of freedom, more heroic and ambitious than negative freedom, can belong to the citizen who is able to suppress his private will and consciously choose

[23] De Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity 84.
[24] De Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity 84.

> the common good over his own desires and personal benefit. This individual has mastered himself, becoming a moral and, hence, a truly free being. The originality of Rousseau's vision resides in his concept of freedom, not as the province of the autonomous individual but rather as that of the self-sacrificing citizen.[25]

Here, Rousseau's idea of freedom is akin to Hegel's concept, which transcends the randomness of self-interested egoism. According to Hegel, "the common man thinks that he is free when he is allowed to act arbitrarily, but this very arbitrariness implies that he is not free. When I will what is rational, I act not as a particular … individual, but in accordance with the concepts of ethics in general: in an ethical act, I vindicate not myself but the thing [Sache]. But a person who does something perverse gives the greatest prominence to his particularity."[26] Thus, as Allen Wood notes, "Hegel does not mean by 'freedom' what most people mean by it. Most people, according to Hegel, think that freedom consists in possibilities of acting, but freedom is really a kind of action."[27] For Hegel, liberal freedom that is always after self-interest is "shallow and immature' he insists that we are free only

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[25] Dunn, Susan, "Introduction: Rousseau's Political Triptych", in Reusseau, Jean-Jacques, The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses (New Heaven: Yale University, 2002), 11.

[26] Hegel, G. W. F., Elements of the Philosophy of Right, edited by Allen W. Wood and translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), par. 15.

[27] Wood, Allen, "Editor's Introduction," in Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy Philosophy of Right, edited by W. Allen, VII-XXX, and translated by H.B Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), XI.

when we overcome 'particularity' and act 'universally' or 'objectively', according to the 'concept' of the will". [28]

In his Philosophy of Right, Hegel rejects what he calls abstract rights as sufficient to define any genuine concept of freedom. When presenting the abstract right of the social contract, Hegel emphasizes its inadequacy and minimalism in supporting an accurate notion of freedom within the state. For Hegel, the state is more comprehensive and tied to an ethical purpose, so it cannot merely depend on the contractual whims of individual members to realize its true meaning. While the state aims to protect individual liberties, this is incomplete since it does not fully define the state. Thus, the role of the state should not simply be to protect liberal freedom since man is more than just about his self-interested needs. He contends that the freedom that is individualistic in nature, which is only to support the individual in the pursuit of his interests, is incomplete. Thus, according to Gough, "Hegel enunciated a political philosophy totally at variance with the social contract and portrayed a human life closer to history and reality than the abstractions of the contractarian school."[29]Again, another thinker, though not a full communitarian, who has a broader conception of freedom and the state, like Hegel, is Hannah Arendt. In her view of freedom, she offers a broad perspective on the state. She writes:

> Under no circumstances could politics be only a means to protect society —a society of the

[28] Wood, "Editor's Introduction", XII.
[29] Gough, J, W., The Social contract (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 185-186.

> faithful, as in the Middle Ages, or a society of property-owners, as in Locke, or a society relentlessly engaged in a process of acquisition, as in Hobbes, or a society of producers, as in Marx, or a society of jobholders, as in our own society, or a society of laborers, as in socialist and communist countries. In all these cases, it is the freedom … of society which requires and justifies the restraint of political authority. Freedom is located in the realm of the social.[30]

In fact, Arendt summarized this broader view of freedom in the state when she notes, "The realm of the polis, on the contrary, was the sphere of freedom."[31]

With this broader conception of individual freedom, the state was viewed not simply as a collection of individuals but as a natural organism that receives life from and gives life to its members and is seen as the culmination of this rational process.[32]In other words, the nature of the state is connected with the freedom of all, and each individual as a member of the state is connected to the freedom of others. In analyzing this communitarian view of freedom, one would acknowledge that it represents an advancement over the self-interested liberal perspective; however, it does not provide us with a complete understanding of freedom. The limitation of such a view is that the value remains centered on the human person as a social being. For example, in Hegel's understanding, he moves beyond

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[30] Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 31.
[31] Arendt, The Human Condition, 31.
[32] Diggs, The State, Justice, and the Common Good, 152.

its negative sense to include its positive sense, which involves the community. Still, the nature of the individual as part of that community is not fully explained to help promote true holistic freedom. The individual is only seen through their communal and social identity, such as being a citizen of a state.

When viewed through the lens of social identity, the individual is simply a member of a specific group. Therefore, the individual is oriented toward their community. While this improves upon the abstract idea of the individual, it still does not offer a universal model of freedom. It excludes those who do not share such a communal identity. For example, it overlooks issues like treating immigrants as outsiders or racial and tribal discrimination against those outside their own groups. If freedom is to be universal, the key question is: how? How can it serve as a universal value that applies to everyone, regardless of who they are or where they live? How can an immigrant experience freedom in a country where he is not a citizen? How can a Hausa man enjoy freedom in southeastern Nigeria, and so on? To address this, we introduce the concept of transcendent freedom—an approach that provides everyone with a broad sense of freedom.

TRANSCENDENT FREEDOM

When considering the American Declaration of Independence, for example, it is interesting to see how it interprets the idea of the individual and their freedom. The Declaration states:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,-That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.[33]

When analyzing this declaration, one observes that, among other key points, it presents a view of the individual as a being created by God. It is this divine source that underpins individual freedom. In other words, the fundamental basis of freedom must berooted in the transcendent nature of the individual, who is not simply a product of self-interest or social ties alone. Within this framework, Tocqueville argues, "religion is no less the companion of liberty in all its battles and its triumphs; the cradle of its infancy, and the divine source of its claims. The safeguard of morality is religion, and morality is the best security of law and the surest pledge of freedom."[34] That is why, in our view, the concept of freedom must

[33] Lee Boggs, Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century, 154.

[34] Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, Vol. I and II (Kindle Edition. 2007), 30.

originate from a transcendent reality that is larger than the individual or their community.

Man, we must agree, is divinely endowed with his freedom. Therefore, freedom as a positive value must support individuals in fulfilling the purpose for which God created them. Gregory of Nyssa notes that through freedom we create our own destiny. He writes, "We are, in a sense, our own parents, and we give birth to ourselves by our own free choice."[35] And "such a choice becomes possible for us when we have received God into ourselves."[36] Thus, "as spirit, man is a free being … who is in a position not to let himself be determined by natural drives."[37] As Tillich notes, "he is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become, to fulfill his destiny. In every act of moral self-affirmation, man contributes to the fulfillment of his destiny, to the actualization of what he potentially is."[38]

If true freedom is to be based on a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be human, the challenge lies in truly understanding what it means to be human. What is the nature of the human persona? While finite liberal freedom argues that there is no universal concept of goodness and that each person creates their own idea of what is good, it is crucial to recognize that this mindset is built on a flawed idea of a person.

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[35] Gregory of Nyssa, "From a Homily on Ecclesiastes", Homily 6: Patrologia Graeca 44, 702, 703. -

[36] Gregory of Nyssa, "From a Homily on Ecclesiastes", Homily 6: 44, 702-703.

[37] Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, par. 18.

[38] Tillich, The Courage To Be, 52.

Although our contemporary mindset, based on the calculus of empirical verification, "tends to be suspicious of grand theories of human destiny or the good, preferring instead to protect individual rights and freedom, and living lay the faith that human progress is most likely if individuals are left to find their own way toward whatever they happened to conceive of as the good,"[39] experience shows that absolute liberty has led to our own destruction rather than salvation. Jacques Maritain argues that this conception of freedom is a false philosophy since it does lead to a situation where "man's obligations either toward truth or toward the common good simply vanished away".[40] As Aristotle rightly notes, "absolute freedom is a Mirage in a Democracy for where absolute freedom is allowed, there is nothing to restrain the evil which is inherent in every man."[41] The current state of our world attests to this fact.

Thus, while one may not deny an individual's right to pursue whatever goals they choose, we refuse to accept the idea that there is no objective concept of good that everyone should be encouraged to pursue. It is in this context that we introduce the idea of Transcendent freedom. Freedom is a universal value inherent to every human being, regardless of their membership in any civil society. While it is an essential value for the individual within a state, its origin does not come solely from either the individual or the social group; instead, it derives from

[39] Wood, "Editor's Introduction," xi.
[40] Maritain, Jacques, Man and the State (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 180.
[41] Aristotle, Politics, Translated by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 139.

God. Therefore, individual freedom is not just tied to being a member of any state but relates to something more profound and more fundamental to our nature as human beings. From this perspective, freedom must include our shared universal identity, applicable to every individual as part of this common humanity. As Erich Fromm states, "Freedom can be fully understood only on the basis of an analysis of the whole character structure of modern man."[42]

From this perspective, freedom must be built both horizontally and vertically. It is a value that surpasses the individual, since "the essence of man's freedom is that he be able to transcend himself, the material things of earth, and choose to live in companionship with God. Indeed, it was so that man might enjoy freedom that God, Absolute Liberty Himself, made man in His own image and likeness."[43] It is along this line that we argue that any comprehensive freedom must be able to serve this need, which the liberal and communitarian dimensions may not. Freedom, in this sense, refers to a value that enables one to realize one's whole, essential nature. Philosophers such as Cornel West and Immanuel Kant have provided us with conceptual tools to develop this idea of freedom.

Generally, it assumes that there is something inherently moral about us that extends beyond the limits of empirical experience. We are moral beings rooted in God, with freedom being a core part of our moral nature. Cornel

[42] Fromm, Eric. Escape from Freedom, (New York: Avon Books, 19665), vii.
[43] Miceli, Gods of Atheism(New York: Arlington House, 1971), 139- 139.

West, for example, sees freedom as a moral reality that belongs to every person, surpassing simple empirical relationships. He views freedom both as an existential and a social reality. He writes, "The two inseparable notions of freedom are existential freedom and social freedom."[44] In explaining this dual sense of freedom, West argues that existential freedom "empowers people to fight for social freedom, to realize its political dimension. Existential freedom anticipates history and is ultimately transhistorical, whereas social freedom is thoroughly a matter of this-worldly human liberation."[45]

Therefore, for West, it is only when freedom is grounded in this transcendent level that its civil application becomes clear and binding for everyone. Viewing freedom from this perspective highlights a crucial aspect we all share as human beings: our moral nature takes priority over our membership in any state. While we acknowledge the importance of the civil state, our shared humanity supersedes our specific society. This freedom, rooted in our common humanity and grounded in God, prevents us from using any of the various identities we possess — whether racial, social, economic, or political — as instruments of exclusion. While liberal freedom focuses on individual needs and the communitarian idea on communal needs, transcendent freedom is concerned with the moral needs of everyone. Thus, when we develop a theory of freedom that emphasizes our universal moral status, it helps guide our individual and social

[44] West, Cornel. Prophecy Deliverance (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 18.
[45] West, Cornel. Prophecy Deliverance, 18.

relationships. It enables us to balance both personal needs and the needs of specific communities, serving the overall welfare of everyone we encounter, regardless of their different identities from our own. This theory of freedom will also help us control unrestrained economic interests that have led many to believe that other human beings can be treated as expendable and sacrificed on the altar of our insatiable desire for material wealth.

The philosopher Norman has identified this concept of universality, for example, in Kant's ethical ideas. According to him, it "is to be found in the Kantian principle of respect for persons."[46] To defend this higher conception of freedom, it is necessary to reevaluate the idea of the individual, who acts as the agent of this freedom. The concept of the individual that should support this freedom resembles the Kantian noumenal or transcendental ego, as opposed to the liberal egoistic self or the communitarian individual self, associated with Hegel and others. Today, any true sense of self must navigate the cacophony of ideas of self-identity. In Kant's conception of self, according to Michael Sandel, "beyond this character of himself as a subject made up, as it is, of mere appearances, he must suppose there to be something else which is its ground-namely his Ego as this may be constituted in itself."[47] Kant views the understanding of a human person as a union of causality, encompassing both freedom and natural mechanism, where the former is

[46] Norman, Richard, The Moral Philosophers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119.

[47] Sandel, Michael, Liberalism and Limits of Justice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.

established by moral law. In contrast, the law of nature governs the latter. No human person can be understood without factoring these two aspects as belonging to the same subject, where, concerning the first, he is a being in itself, and with the second, an appearance, the former in pure, the latter in empirical consciousness.[48]

To understand the self at this level, Kant clearly states that while we are empirical beings who can be studied systematically, there is something beyond this empirical approach—namely, freedom, which surpasses all our understanding of causality. It is this deeper aspect of us as human beings that reveals our spiritual nature. This spiritual perspective on the individual contrasts with the liberal idea of the self and the communitarian view, which sees individual identity not as an origin but as a result of linguistic and social interaction, where the self emerges from social processes rather than being their foundation. [49] It is this reductionist idea of the self that underpins liberal freedom and, to some extent, the communitarian perspective as well. While recognizing the importance of social interaction in shaping us and our experiences, it is equally important to prioritize our spiritual self over our experiences. Without this distinction, our freedom would be driven solely by environmental factors and would lack universal moral significance.

[48] Kant, "Preface to the Critique of Practical Reason", in Immanuel Kant Practical Philosophy, Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, 139-147 (New York: Cambridge University Press), 5-6.

[49] Young, Justice and Politics of Difference, 52.

In conclusion, we argue that only when freedom is understood through transcendence can it harmonize both its liberal and communitarian aspects, as it reveals a universal identity shared by all creatures on earth: that each person is a child of God. Recognizing this truth, one's duty to freedom toward others will not be based solely on personal whims or social ties but will be fundamentally rooted in a shared, universal humanity grounded in God. In this way, freedom becomes a responsibility that obliges me to respect and uphold the humanity of everyone, regardless of their social class, race, tribe, nationality, religion, or other distinguishing traits—not merely as an absence of restriction that allows me to indulge my insatiable desires and wants.

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