
Freedom: From What? For What?

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Are people free?

People have always talked about freedom but never so much as today. If we talk about it more, it presumably is because we are more concerned about it. Is this because there is more freedom in the world? Or is it perhaps because there is less?

On one hand, it is arguable that man's freedom, politically and economically, is diminishing (he is more under the power of the state and of state-controlled economic conditions; he is more subject to taxes, to bureaucracies, etc.).

Nevertheless many people maintain that personal freedom—freedom in personal conduct—is increasing, at least in Western societies. People are "freer" to do whatever they like morally, for example, where sex is concerned. It seems undeniable that people in general accept fewer restrictions in the area of sex than formerly. But it seems equally undeniable that this greater "freedom" in conduct somehow seems not to have produced greater happiness. And most people would agree that there is something unsatisfactory about a greater freedom that does not lead to greater happiness.

Others deny the idea of freedom altogether. People, they say, are not free: they are really conditioned beings, and the patterns of their actions are determined by their hereditary traits and their circumstances. People, therefore, are only fooling themselves in talking about freedom. Clearly one thing we should do is to try to clarify this idea.¹ When we talk about freedom, are we talking about a real thing, however difficult to define? Or are we talking about something imaginary?

Free and not yet free

Are people free? Or are we not free? I am prepared to defend both propositions—that man is free; and that he is not free. It depends on what we understand by freedom. There is a certain ambiguity in the word. If, when we say, "people are free" we mean that people have free will, that we possess a power of intelligent choice, then I am ready to defend that proposition against all determinists. There may indeed be moments when we feel that our free will has been lessened, or maybe completely overwhelmed, by circumstances. Nobody will deny that this kind of interference with personal free will really can happen in certain cases. But nobody, I suppose, will deny either that we can easily fool ourselves about such moments, and that (when we say we were swept away by passion or temper or circumstances) what perhaps really happened was that with our free will we freely chose an easier course rather than a harder one. It is handy to be a determinist if you are never prepared to choose a harder

option; if you are not prepared, for instance, to control your sensuality, or to restrain your tendency to criticize other people, or to face up to your responsibilities, or to block your self-centered ambition.

So, in allowing that there may be cases when free will is lessened or removed by circumstances, I still maintain that such cases, in normal people, are few. A normal person only has to look back on the actions of any one of his days to be convinced that he quite easily (or at least quite definitely) could have varied many—or most—of them. He could have stayed in bed in the morning, or he could have gotten up; he could have written this letter first instead of that; he could have switched to a different television program from the one he was watching; he could have had an argument with his wife instead of having avoided it—or he could have avoided an argument instead of having it.

In other words, a normal person only has to think a little to be convinced that every he has exercised a power to choose in certain directions and that he could have exercised that same power in other directions. And that is being convinced that he has free will.

But free will—the power to choose—still is not the same as freedom. I can choose this or that: fried eggs or boiled eggs, for instance—if I am given the choice. If I am only offered boiled eggs, I am free to eat or to go hungry, which is not much of a free choice. No, free will and freedom are not synonymous. With my free will I may choose to go to New York; yet I may not have the money to do it. Therefore I am not free to do it. The slave has free will. But he does not have freedom. So freedom is not just having free will. It is something more. And I maintain that we do not yet possess that something more, that we do not yet possess freedom in all its fullness.

Is freedom independence?

If freedom is more than having free will, what is it? Is it independence? Some people think that freedom essentially means independence. And when they say that people are free or ought to be free, they are implying that they are independent or are meant to be independent. Now this is something that I absolutely deny. It seems evident to me that people are not independent. They are in fact extremely dependent creatures. One of the obviously false things often said in remarks about freedom is that "man is born free." Born free? Can you imagine anything more helpless and dependent than a newborn baby? No, people are born with evident dependences. At the start of their lives their dependences are quite involuntary, almost unconscious: air, light, warmth, food . . . As they grow up they begin to choose things, and very often create new and voluntary dependences or needs. They depend on a car to get around, on smoking to calm their nerves, on aftershave lotion to stop cheeks from itching, on popularity to salve their egos, on newspapers for their views, on a spouse and family for affection ..

To think, as many people do, that human development means reaching a state of total self-sufficiency, is false, for self-sufficiency is just not possible for human beings. In the truest sense, the more you live, the more dependent—and therefore the less self-sufficient—you become. You become more dependent on a few things or on many things, on important things or on unimportant things, on things that make you more of a man or less of a man, on things that make you more or less free . . . The qual-

ity of your life is really determined in fact by the type of things you are dependent on. And we are approaching the real problem of freedom when we say it is the problem of the type of dependences you acquire in your life. The person who is dependent on drink or drugs or lust is scarcely free. To crave sex and to center your life on it can be the most abject slavery.

But human beings, precisely because they are not self-sufficient, must want something. And freedom really has very much to do with wanting and depending on things that raise people up, develop them, and ennoble them. So to want and long for truth or goodness or love is part of the process of becoming free. Gustave Thibon speaks of a "dead dependence, which oppresses a man, and a living dependence which opens him out and elevates him." And he adds, "The first of these dependences is slavery; the second, freedom."

Defining freedom

So far I have deliberately avoided the difficult problem of defining freedom. But perhaps now we can attempt to say what it is. Most people, if pushed, would probably say that freedom is the "power to do what you want to do." This is a superficial idea of freedom that just will not stand up under examination. You can do many things you feel like doing, and be less free as a result; for instance, to use the simple example given by Frank Sheed, you can eat as much as you feel like and the result is that limitation of your freedom that we call indigestion.

No, freedom is not the power to do what you want to do. It is something much more important. It is the power to be fully yourself, the power to become fully yourself, to realize fully your potential as a human being.

People are not born free. But people are born with the power to become free, to become masters of their own actions. More paradoxically still, you can say people are born with the power to become a human . . . A lion cub just naturally grows into a fully developed lion; it does not have to worry about it. But a child does not automatically or inevitably become a human. You do not become a human being just by reaching twenty-one or thirty-three. You may never become a human being. Some people never do.

A human being is not someone who is well developed physically; his physical powers develop automatically. But he also has spiritual powers; and these may not develop, or may develop insufficiently. They may remain underdeveloped. You meet fully grown people who have underdeveloped minds, and especially have underdeveloped wills; they have little or no willpower. They are not yet human. They are not yet masters of their own selves or their own choices. They are not yet free. Therefore they do not yet properly possess what most distinguishes human nature, and they may end up by losing it completely.

The person who normally acts according to what he feels like doing is likely to be very much underdeveloped as regards freedom. He is not really in possession of it. He is largely moved by comfort or instinct or passion—in other words, he is very much like an animal.

Future freedom

So, I insist, freedom is the power to realize our potential, the power to develop, to grow, to become ourselves, not to be forced to drift into something else, not to be forced to be less than human.

This is the paradox. This is why we are free and yet not free—not yet. We are free because we have free will. But we are not yet fully free because not all of our possibilities or even our wants have been fulfilled. Most people would agree that as long as we have unsatisfied desires or wants, we are not fully free. At one stage in World War II the Allied war aims were expressed in a declaration of Four Freedoms. One, I think, was Freedom from Want. This, properly understood, is real freedom: not just freedom from hunger or from material want. This is essential, but it is not enough. To be a beggar and suddenly to inherit several million dollars does not bring freedom from want. Such a person will still want more: more love, fame, pleasure, companionship, even more money. Real freedom from want is to have come to a condition in which we want nothing further; not by reduction to Nirvana, where we are satisfied because there is no desire left, but by the full satisfaction of the true needs of human nature. What these true needs are, each person has to work out for himself; he has to decide, for instance, whether love is a truer need than sex, or whether a person can be happy and free if he leaves his immense need of goodness and truth and beauty unsatisfied.

If freedom is the power to be fully ourselves, it obviously is a power in motion. It looks forward to a condition where, we hope, we shall be truly ourselves, where we shall have fulfilled the potential of our nature and where we possess ourselves fully. Now clearly we are not yet in that condition. When we speak of freedom in this sense, we are speaking of some future freedom—of the ultimate goal of our life which we try to go toward and which we try not to drift away from.

Choices matter

But let us look more closely at that present freedom which is our free will, our power to choose between alternatives, our power to say Yes or No. This is the freedom that characterizes human beings and forms the basis of their dignity and makes them into people who can carry personal responsibility. They are free and responsible because they can choose. What makes imprisonment such an indignity is that it deprives a person of so many choices. His freedom of choice is severely narrowed. He can walk in the prison yard, but not in the city streets outside or the countryside. He can eat the food offered to him or go hungry. He cannot go out and buy a hot dog. From this it is evident that to the extent to which a person has no real choice, he is not free. He is only free when he can choose this or that, when he can say Yes—or No. If he can only say Yes, he is not free. We shall return to this point.

Another point is that some of our free choices develop us more, some develop us less, while others thwart our growth. We are not static personalities. We are changing all the time—whether we want to or not, or like it or not. In part, circumstances force us to change. But what basically affects our changing personalities is our own free choices—whether we say Yes when we could have said No, whether we say No when we could have said Yes. We are like people constantly on the road, coming to crossroads all the time (every choice means a crossroads)—and choosing. Very clearly, therefore, it is

important to know what sort of things we choose, and how they affect our development as persons, as personalities. Choices, like roads, are different. They lead you somewhere—uphill or down, toward your goal (if you have one) or away from it. They may lead nowhere; they may be dead ends, tracks that sink into a swamp or run out in the sands of a desert.

Underdeveloped people

If we look back at any stage in our life—say, over the past four or five years—if we look at our own personal history, we see that we have chosen certain things; and we are conscious that we could have chosen different things, and that we would be different people today if we had chosen differently. My own personal history could have been different, for better or for worse. If we could relive those years again with hindsight, I suppose most of us would vary some of our choices, because we could see that they were poor choices that did not help us; and we think that some other option probably would have been better. Of course, we cannot change the past. But we can try to learn from past experiences, in order to judge our future choices better.

We talk a lot about “underdeveloped” countries. Generally we are speaking of countries that are making efforts precisely to develop, and perhaps are showing more signs of life and vitality than many “developed” countries. But there are a lot of underdeveloped people around: people whose lives move in very narrow circles, whose horizons are limited to small personal interests and satisfactions, who are bored at work and bored at home; who live for their golf or bingo or television; and who are making practically no efforts to develop.

Free and easy choices

How do people get into such a state of apathy? Generally by their own free choices: by their free and easy choices; by systematically choosing the easy options, the more attractive or smoother road, at every crossroads that comes along. And the result of using their freedom that way is, at best, a rut; maybe a dead end; at worst, a desert or a precipice.

A rut is simply a conditioned way of choosing, an unfree way of choosing. Sometimes a person gets into such a rut without being aware of it. He always says Yes to the same things and never thinks of the fact that he is not really living as a free man—making deliberate choices—but simply drifting. Sometimes a person is aware of the rut, or becomes aware of it. Then he would like to get out of it. But he finds perhaps that it is not easy. A habit has taken hold of him, and he cannot break it. If he really can't, then he is not free. The person who cannot help sliding into an armchair whenever he sees a television set switched on. . . or the person who realizes that he is smoking too much and wants to quit altogether but can't, has, at least in relation to these matters, lost his freedom. He can no longer say No. And to be free it is essential to be able to say Yes or No. To be free it is essential to have at least two choices. If you have only one choice, if you can only say Yes, you are not free. (One choice is of course not really a choice at all. When, in fact, a person finds himself with only one choice, he says afterward, "I had no choice." He is right.)

Freedom and sex

I feel that a note of urgency could well enter into our consideration of freedom. We are free, free to choose; and we are constantly exercising this freedom of choice, choosing roads that take us somewhere. Where? A man is completely lost in his own life unless he can say where it is leading him. He is not really in charge of his life unless he has set himself a goal and is using his choices—his free will—to attain that goal.

It is only if you have a goal in life, a goal of personal development, when you can use your free will intelligently. You can use it intelligently in a positive exercise: to choose things that help your development, that can enrich your personality and your life. And you can use it intelligently in a negative exercise. You can avoid choices which limit your development, which keep you small and underdeveloped, which get you in a rut; and, much more important and urgent, you can avoid those choices that are really dead ends. You can avoid choosing things which are capable of enslaving you more and more, and perhaps of finally destroying you.

Take an obvious heading: "Sex and Freedom." Take a person who practices restraint in sexual activity, who chooses to observe the restrictions of traditional morality, who believes therefore that sex is for marriage and who believes that sexual thoughts should be controlled, and who thinks that certain types of books and films or shows are to be avoided. Is this person less free than, say, a man who follows his every instinct, who acknowledges no restraints, who does what he likes?

Restrictions and freedom

Is a person less free because he accepts restrictions? Do all restrictions imply a loss of freedom? Yes? Think about it. No! I would not agree that all restrictions necessarily involve a loss of freedom. Certain restrictions are in fact a safeguard of freedom. A person can accept them because he is personally convinced that they help to keep him free, and convinced that if he does not observe them he can lose his freedom.

The cabin of an airliner is definitely a restricted area, normally in fact a rather cramped one. Yet a person who wants to get to New York, has the money, buys a ticket, and enters the cabin, is not likely to step out of it in mid flight—in order to assert his freedom! The freedom that interests him is to get to New York, and the restrictions of the cabin (air-pressurized and heated, when outside there is scarcely any oxygen and the temperature is some 70 degrees below zero, and traveling at 600 miles an hour) help him to exercise his freedom to the maximum advantage.

A road is a restriction. It has a certain paved width; it has curves and guardrails. But a person who suddenly decides he will no longer be a slave to these restrictions and who, instead of following the next curve, drives straight on will probably find that this assertion of his freedom leaves him at the bottom of a ditch or wrapped around a tree. An expressway illustrates the point even more clearly than a normal road. It has more restrictions: it is fenced in, has limited entrance and exit points, maximum and sometimes minimum speed limits... Yet nobody in his right mind, when he chooses to

travel on an expressway, thinks of these restrictions as limiting his freedom, but rather as helping to make better use of it.

If a man loves a woman, if a boy loves a girl, he wants to love her truly (to love her purely, if one may be old-fashioned but clear); he wants to be free to love her. And if he is normal and sincere, he knows that his sexual nature—which can be directed toward serving and expressing his love—has to be directed toward that end. It has to be controlled, so as to be subordinated to his love. And that control is something our sexual drive does not easily accept. It tends to accept no control. It wants its own satisfactions on its own terms. And if it is left unrestrained and takes over, it destroys love and enslaves.

“I chose slavery”

Those who acknowledge no restraints in the matter of sex are in danger of losing their freedom to love, of losing their freedom altogether. By saying Yes to such a demanding instinct as sex, as often as it makes itself felt, they are losing their ability to say No. And—the point needs to be repeated—a man is not free unless he can also say No. "I can resist anything except temptation," quipped Oscar Wilde. If that was the case, he was not free. He would be a slave (though at least realizing it). And there are many people around today who are deliberately and quickly forging their own slavery (even though—maybe—many of them do not realize it).

I Chose Freedom was the title of a famous book of 25 or 30 years ago. Someone, I forget who, objected to the title: that it did not make sense, that you cannot choose freedom. Oh, but you can. And you can choose the opposite of freedom. I fear that the autobiographies of many people today sadly might have to be entitled "I Chose Slavery."

A person's choice in doing this, in seeing or reading that, may indeed be a free choice; there lies its responsibility. But, in so many cases, it is by no stretch of the imagination a choice for freedom. It is a choice for slavery.

Freely to choose slavery! This may sound absurd. And in a sense, yes, it is crazy and irrational. But such a choice no more absurd or impossible than the case of the people, in one country or another, who freely and democratically vote themselves into a Communist regime. They have freely chosen slavery.

I think there are lots of people today who talk loudly about their freedom and who are in fact riding a runaway car hurtling down a road which ends in a precipice; and they just do not know how to stop. So maybe they boost their own morale by pretending they have made a breakthrough into a new dimension of freedom. And they haven't. They have simply and sadly lost control over their own lives. Their choices are becoming more and more determined and predictable. They are heading for total destruction or total captivity.

Free for what?

A large part of present-day thinking about freedom is confused because we think of freedom as being free from external restrictions; and we forget that it is much more a matter of being free from internal restraints, from self-imposed or self-sought restrictions which hinder our development as true personalities. It is essentially a matter of having, and being able to exercise, an internal and personal power, a power which includes self-dominion, self-possession, and self-realization in intimate relationships.

"Free a man," the civil-rights leader James Farmer said, "and he is not yet free. He must still free himself." And Nietzsche wrote: "You call yourself free? I would hear of your master-thought, not of your escape from the yoke. Are you a man that should escape from the yoke? Many have cast off all their values when they cast off their servitude. Free from what? How does that concern Zarathustra? Let your eye answer me frankly: Free for what? ..."

Modern man wants to be free. But he does not know what he should be free for. And as a result of this confusion he is in danger of losing or abandoning his freedom, even if simply because he is less and less capable of seeing any worthwhile use which it can be put to.

Stuck at the crossroads

In the end freedom is of little use to a person without values or ideals, just as it is of less use still to a person who is afraid to commit himself. And modern people are both very unsure of their ideals and very suspicious of almost any real commitment.

Freedom is of little use to a person lacking values or ideals; for if he has no worthwhile goals, then his choices can mean little to him. Fundamentally his problem is that he cannot respect the things he chooses. Even if it were true that there is more freedom (external) in the world today, of what use can this be to a world with a lessened sense of values? It is sad to boast of having it all at last, the roads open and unrestricted before us, if at the same time we have a growing feeling that none of them leads anywhere.

And what is the point of having all the roads open before us, if, deep down, we are afraid to choose any of them, or at least afraid to make more than tentative and very temporary choices; ready to take a few steps along one road, but even readier to retrace those steps as soon as we get bored with it or find the going tough; and then ready try another road (another job, another cause, another husband, another wife . . .), and another, and another?

People today are so suspicious of committing themselves that they are in danger of voluntarily paralyzing their power of choice, their very freedom. For every choice is a commitment. And people who are afraid to choose, or who exercise very tentative choices and quickly revoke them, contradict and annul their own freedom. Modern people, like people of all ages, stand at the crossroads of choice. But since modern people are afraid to commit themselves, they remain at the crossroads.

Progressive paralysis

This progressive paralysis of freedom, this growing inability to make a real and lasting choice of anything that demands "sticking power," is not just the ordinary difficulty inherent in the power to choose, the difficulty which derives from the simple fact that the choice of any option involves the exclusion of other options.² This exclusion always has been true, and that is why any thinking man always has hesitated before a serious choice, like marriage, for instance. In choosing this woman, I am excluding all the rest; in committing myself to one girl, I renounce the ever-so-many other girls. There is an evident risk in this; and there should be. Freedom has always been a risk. But in the past most men, sooner or later, have preferred to accept the risk. In the case given, they have preferred to go ahead with the idea, moreover, that it meant a life-long commitment! As it used to be put popularly, they preferred to "take the plunge" rather than risk remaining "high and dry."

This preference for commitment is changing today. That a man is no longer prepared to buy a washing machine or a car without a 12-month warranty may be no more than a sign of reasonable caution. But that more and more men are not prepared to enter into marriage without mental reservation—perhaps an implicit or even unconscious, but a real reservation—about the possibility of divorce, is a sign of a deep-rooted mistrust and a fear of commitment, which is ultimately a fear of love.

It is true that the advertisement-dominated world we live in does not encourage trust. We are told so much about the incredible qualities and extraordinary good value of practically everything that we end up believing in the real value of practically nothing.

But if perhaps we can blame the advertisers for our mistrust of the quality of so many man-made goods, we have only ourselves to blame if we mistrust God-given goods such as social relationships, friendship, love, or marriage. We have abused so many of the good things God has given us that they no longer work in our service. We no longer trust them because we have deformed them and made them what they were never meant to be.

Commitment and love

It is clear that if man is not free (does not possess himself), he cannot love (which is to give himself). But it should also be clear that if he does not love, he cannot be really free. Freedom is meant for love, and freedom without love makes little sense and is practically worthless.

To choose things that we cannot love, or that we cannot at least respect, is to choose a life without values; it is to degrade human nature. Pushed to the limit, it is hell, for hell is a condition where we only choose what we hate. The will that can only choose what it hates is not a free will; it is absolutely enslaved. So every choice made without love is, at best, a poor use of freedom—so poor that, at worst, it can be a step toward total loss of freedom.

We have to love—and love something worth loving—in order to be really free. Then we can freely commit ourselves, and all of our commitments will be commitments of love; for the essential need of love is to commit itself to the loved one.

There is a necessary interconnection between freedom, commitment (choice), and love. As St. Josemaría put it: "Any opposition felt between freedom and commitment is a sure sign that love is weak; for freedom resides in love. For that very reason I cannot conceive freedom without commitment, or commitment without freedom; one reality underlines and affirms the other."³

Doing what you like

Earlier we rejected the idea that freedom is "the power to do what you want to do." As we pointed out, this is an idea that will not stand examination. If it nevertheless has always enjoyed popularity as a notion of freedom, this popularity must be considered either as superficial thinking, or else a libertine idea of freedom, giving the noble name of "liberty" on what is simply uncontrolled impulse. And it is clear, from what we saw above, that when a person is not in control of his impulses—when they control him—he is not free; and the end of such runaway selfishness can only be the submergence of self in total slavery.

It is interesting to recall St. Augustine's dictum: *Ama et fac quod vis*, which in other times, when libertines were more cultured if not more sincere, was a popular classical quotation among them. *Ama et fac quod vis*: "Love and do what you choose." Yet it was not in his libertine period, but after it—after he had fully experienced how freedom without real love can enslave—that St. Augustine formulated this striking phrase. A little reflection makes his meaning clear. The love—the liberating love—he refers to is the love of God. The person who tries to make love for God the motive of his actions, who wants what God wants, likes what God wants. Therefore, since it is always possible to do what God wants, he can always do what he likes and will be the freest of men. Freedom, for him, is indeed the power to do what he likes; and, as long as he keeps on loving, he will always be doing what he likes.

We might add, incidentally, that the person who tries to live this way has solved one of the major problems of morality: that of liking what one ought to do. He will do what he ought, what God wants of him (or at least he will try to do it), because he wants to do it, because he likes to do it.

Roads to freedom

Freedom, as we said earlier, is the power to be fully yourself. There is the goal: to become what you have the potential to be. Loss of potential is the reason why many roads freely chosen are not roads to freedom. They are roads that prevent people from becoming fully human. They are roads to self-limitation, self-frustration, or self-destruction. A person is limiting himself or destroying himself if he chooses a road of pride or lust or self-pity or insincerity or meanness.

The road to freedom is an uphill road; and the difficult steps by which a person follows it are truth, justice, service, humility, chastity, love ... The more a person fights his way uphill along this road, the freer he becomes. And the freer he becomes, the more he possesses himself, the more he exercises full possession and control over all his faculties. His is the freedom of having your lower faculties or instincts properly and dynamically subordinated to your higher faculties—lust to love, anger to justice, for instance—and of having one's higher faculties joyously related to higher values: love to goodness, knowledge to truth. It is along this uphill road that a person must struggle if he wants to find freedom.

And yet two facts seem to make his quest vain. The first is the fact of death. No matter how free a person may become, no matter how much he possesses himself in the realization of his possibilities, if death ends all, he loses all at death.

The second fact is that full self-realization seems a necessarily impossible goal for man, that he is destined to the frustration of never being able to realize himself fully or to satisfy all his wants fully; destined therefore never to be fully free. After all, if, as we indicated above, freedom particularly implies freedom from want, it seems clear that man is destined never to be fully free in this world for no matter how much he possesses he will always want more. And the person who is conscious of some unsatisfied desire does not feel fully free.

Maybe man's desire for pleasure or for goods can be fully sated. Yet the fact that man can actually come to a point of feeling disgust at pleasure or boredom with consumer goods is a sure sign that his self-fulfillment does not lie along the path of these desires. However, there are two needs of man—precisely his greatest and noblest needs—that never can be fully satisfied in human experience. These are man's need for truth and his need for goodness, his need to know and his need to Love.

These are man's greatest needs. They are needs that may be dulled or deadened. But it has remained a constant of human history that, if they are kept keen and alive, nothing on Earth can satisfy them fully.

Man wants God

Man wants to know truth; he wants to know truth without limit. And he wants to find and possess goodness, and still more goodness, and still more. He wants eternal and infinite goodness, and eternal and infinite love. In other words, he wants God. This is why, even on the natural plane, it is clear that man is made for God and nothing less than God can satisfy him. Only in the possession and enjoyment of God can man be truly himself and truly free.

Those who do not believe in God can seek perfect freedom, but they will not find it. If they feel themselves called to be Messiahs, they can promise full freedom to others, but they cannot give it. God is the only Messiah who can do that.

Salvation and self

You find yourself or you lose yourself in finding—or losing—God. And the finding or the losing of yourself is what, on the human level, is implied in the terms “salvation” or “damnation.” Salvation, on the natural plane, means to save yourself, to achieve real selfhood, to possess yourself fully, in full and free exercise of all of your powers and faculties.

And damnation is to lose your real self, to end up as a being without any unity or consistency or direction, a personality (if it can still be called that) that is no more than a battlefield between conflicting forces and desires, a being that has been reduced to torn and scattered remnants of bitterness and frustration and hatred and pride.

The difference between salvation and damnation is really the ultimate difference between freedom and slavery. The process of becoming free (of gradually obtaining your freedom), or the process of losing your freedom (of gradually degenerating into a slave), is a process that is worked out here on Earth, during the lifetime of each individual. But the final result of this process, the state of final freedom or of final slavery, is lived forever in eternity.

Therefore we never can possess full freedom here on Earth. All we can achieve here are "freedoms"; possibilities and capacities to act freely and to move and realize ourselves: the freedom to fight our way forward, to battle and overcome self-centeredness, to learn to love. We have to fight constantly to exercise these freedoms, we have to fight even to maintain them, since they are freedoms that are in constant danger and can be lost.

For we can also fall into slavery here on Earth, into one or many slaveries: the slavery of self-centeredness, the slavery of a resentful or envious spirit, the slavery of lust, or of drink, or of drugs... And yet, while we are still travelers on this Earth, these slaveries are not yet final and can be shaken off, or at least fought and prevented from getting more than a slippery and troublesome—but ineffectual—hold on us.

It is only when man's journey has reached its end, when death has cut short forever the struggle (or the lack of struggle) and terminated the process of development (or of degeneration), it is only then that man "sets" in his definitive and eternal self, in the glorious and joyous expansion of his freed self, or in the enslaved remnants of his lost self.

The gift of God's freedom

Two further things must be mentioned. Man cannot save himself on his own. He can find salvation only with God's help. If he neglects or refuses God's help, he will lose himself. Man has always hoped for perfect freedom—to be fully master of his own nature, in full possession of his faculties, and able to exercise them without restraint. But only God can give man this freedom.

The Christian, however, does not stop there in this question of freedom. For God, who loves man, has not stopped there. God's plan, in Christ, is to give man infinitely more than he ever could have hoped for. God's plan is to give him not only the full possession and enjoyment of his own human nature, with all the freedom this implies, but also to give him the possession and enjoyment of the divine nature. It is to put him in possession of God's own freedom.

So God's plan is that man, in the end, should not just find and possess himself. It is that he should find much more than himself, that he should possess infinitely more than himself. Only the Christian realizes what the fulfillment of man's potential can mean in the plan which God has revealed in Jesus Christ. For God has made man capable of God. He has made man capable of knowing and loving God—infinite Truth and Goodness—not only in a natural fashion, as a rational creature in his natural fulfillment might come to know and love God, but also in a supernatural fashion. He has made man capable of knowing and loving God as God knows and loves himself; capable, that is, of living divine life and divine freedom.

This freedom is of course a free gift—a grace—of God. Grace, for the Christian, means this: the gift which God bestows on man to enable him to live divine life and become an heir to divine freedom.

Freedom then, for the Christian, is something quite unique. It is the freedom which Christ himself has won for us (cf. Gal 4:30). The Christian vision of freedom is of a totally different order from any human dream of freedom. What the Christian looks forward to is, in St. Paul's ecstatic words, the glorious freedom of the sons of God (cf. Rom 8:21). And that freedom, like God's very own, is both eternal and infinite.

¹ The author feels bound, in justice and gratitude, to say that most and probably all of his ideas about freedom have been inspired by the words and writings of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. The author recommends St. Josemaría's works to everybody who wants to understand what freedom—and especially the greatest freedom of all: Christian freedom—really means.

² St. Josemaría makes the point with typical clarity, and adds a thought that those who are afraid of Christian commitment would do well to ponder. "The choice of one thing means that many other things, which are also worthwhile, are excluded. This, however, does not imply a lack of freedom; it is simply a necessary consequence of our limited nature, which cannot embrace everything. Nevertheless, if in each moment one chooses God—who is also the ultimate end of the natural order—in him one somehow possesses everything."

³ See Chesterton's remark in *Orthodoxy*: "I could never conceive or tolerate any Utopia which did not leave to me the liberty for which I chiefly care, the liberty to bind myself."