

 **LIBERTY AND FREEDOM:  
LIBERALS  
vs.  
CONSERVATIVES  
- VASTLY  
DIFFERENT  
IDEAS!**



By Stephen L. Bakke  April 14, 2015

*Most people on the left are not opposed to freedom. They are just in favor of all sorts of things that are incompatible with freedom. Freedom ultimately means the right of other people to do things that you do not approve of ..... People on the left want the right to impose their idea of what is good for society on others – a right that they vehemently deny to those whose idea of what is good for society differs from their own. The essence of bigotry is refusing to others the rights that you demand for yourself. Such bigotry is inherently incompatible with freedom .....*  
- **Thomas Sowell, 2008**

*In his later work, (New York University psychologist Jonathan) Haidt has rightly emphasized a sixth moral foundation, one that conservatives and liberals both respect, but that they understand differently: liberty. He finds that conservatives are more likely to emphasize the right to be let alone, while liberals emphasize the rights of vulnerable groups, such as racial minorities, whose freedom requires (in their view) government support. – Former Obama administration official Cass Sunstein, reporting on research performed by Jonathan Haidt.*

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I recently read an article by Elias Isquith from the leftist Salon magazine. His message was that “the right doesn’t understand real freedom ..... the right’s hold on freedom as a political value may be weakening ..... the GOP is beholden to an understanding of liberty that countenances rank bigotry.” As proof of this premise he offers:

- Indiana’s recent “veiled attempt to legalize anti-gay discrimination”;
- many conservatives’ opposition to minimum wage; and
- the libertarian philosophy that “the free-market will provide LGBT customers with plenty of other options.”

He essentially “guffaws” the more conservative opinion that “power is the ability to force people to do things,” which is more likely to occur in government than in the private sector. He correctly recognizes the inherent difficulty of defining “where the rights of private property end vs. where the right to equal treatment begins” and seems to opt to have his version of “equal protection” trump the conservatives’ version of freedom.

Isquith clearly used the terms freedom and liberty interchangeably.

## That got me to thinkin'! What is liberty? What is freedom?

I've always seen "space between" the meanings of liberty and freedom, and wondered if I was wrong in perceiving a difference. So, I researched the question enough to reach two conclusions: Many people see no real differences between the two; and many people attempt to make scholarly, nuanced, and much labored intellectual distinction between the two.

So I'll rely on what makes sense to me – to wit:

- My sense of the right usage of "liberty" relates to the "natural" rights as presented in the Declaration of Independence: *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.* This phrase gives examples of the "unalienable rights" which the Declaration says has been given to all human beings by their Creator, and for which governments are created to protect.
- That leaves me concluding that "freedom" demonstrates the attainment of the "unalienable" right of Liberty.  
*i.e.*
- Liberty is an "endowment," and a declaration of the "right" to be independent. Freedom is used to describe the sense of the achieved independence.



Break the chains of tyranny!  
What follows is FREEDOM!

Make sense? But no matter! Henceforth, I will **attempt** to be consistent in my use of these terms.

## Now, on to the major question at hand: conflicting interpretations of "freedom."

Many liberals believe true freedom exists only within a framework of financial security. Conservatives argue (often pretentiously) that freedom only exists if given the chance to achieve financial security exclusively on their own.

Liberals tend to believe that freedom brings with it a sort of safety net to mitigate individual failures in life's pursuits. Conservatives would argue that freedom brings with it the freedom to fail, and to have an economic structure amenable to someone bouncing back from those failures.

A liberal philosophy would support the "freedom" that comes from eliminating external worries and concerns. The conservative would claim that any program that eliminates one's worries is automatically imposing controls on an individual that seriously conflict with true freedom!

Many liberals believe that by encouraging government programs to provide their version of financial security, they are promoting freedom. Conservatives would argue that this is NOT an example of choosing freedom. Rather, their argument would be that a government financial assistance program, however worthy, achieves its goals at the expense of some aspect of freedom.

## **It's all about the perceived role of government.**

Different definitions of freedom go hand in hand with the differences in the perceived role of government.

Conservative philosophy, in its purest form, believes in government's role as defined, or limited, by the U.S. Constitution – a very narrow definition by current standards. It demands a sense of independence and self-reliance. **For most conservatives, government is the greatest threat to creating prosperity.**

Liberals tend to have a broader concept of the role of government. Recently I heard a liberal speaker say that the greatest employment and corporate opportunities come from strong involvement by the Federal government. This demonstrates the common **liberal belief that the greatest tool for creating prosperity is government.**

## **A reality we must accept!**

I believe that individuals who look to the government to “take care” of the population, thereby elevate “financial security” over true freedom. Security (whether physical or financial) is inherently in conflict with maintaining true freedom. While working to achieve a balance of security and freedom, sacrifices may be required and compromises are inevitable. Many conservatives don't like to face the reality of these sacrifices and compromises and some simply deny them. To me it's a reality – one which I can accept.