



POLITICAL MEDIA: GUARD- DOGS OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY OR TOTALITARIAN LAPDOGS?

Posted on January 1, 2023 by Peter Redpath



A common presumption held by many Western elites today who tend to control today's major communications media, is that they constitute some sort of global world political order, an Enlightened World Scientific State.

My chief concern here is to consider the political rights and moral responsibilities of modern communications media. By "political rights" I mean extent of "circumstantial freedoms," of freedom to exercise speech unfettered by political interference. Since political freedom consists in exercise of human actions toward others, and since the moral virtue of justice is the measure of the limits of right and wrong action toward others, by "moral responsibilities" I mean the limits placed upon unfettered communications-media free speech that justice demands in any and every political order.

Three Senses of "Freedom"

To answer this question with some precision, we have to understand the nature of human freedom in general, how circumstantial freedom differs from human freedom considered generically, the nature of political association, and the function that government essentially plays within political organizations.

Like we do in most cases of speech in any native language, when we use the term "freedom," we generally do so by referring this term analogously: chiefly to some cause existing within a subject that generates the activity in question, and secondarily to anything else that, in some essentially useful way, relates to this cause. For example, when we use the term "health" analogously, this is generally understood to refer to some quality existing within a living body that results from some internal harmony of organic relations occurring within the body. Nonetheless, in an extended way, we also refer the term "health" to medicine, exercise, diet, and even books because they help to promote, preserve, and protect it.

The same is true regarding the term "freedom." When we talk about it, what most adult human beings tend chiefly to be talking about is a cause internal to a human being that generates some individual independence from outside interference in executing free choice.

In this sense, in its most perfect instance, freedom is a cause that exists within individual human beings that the great French author Yves R. Simon has called "an active indifference caused by masterful

choice." This definition chiefly refers to "moral freedom," a kind of freedom possessed as a quality of soul belonging to a person who tends to understand the natures of things, the organizational constitution, relations of parts that exist in things, which exist around a person and to which a person knows how to relate in healthy ways.

This moral sense of "freedom" differs from another positive sense of "freedom," which refers chiefly to the natural ability to make choices. While such freedom is a reality, it is freedom in a deprived sense, just as health as a natural condition found in most people is not the strongly possessed health of a person who follows a strict regimen of nutritious diet and rigorous exercise.

Both these senses of "freedom" differ from a third sense, which refers simply to not being restrained to act by some external agent or agency. In all human generations, this sense appears to be the way most youth and emotionally infantile people tend to understand freedom. Yet this is freedom in its most deprived and negative sense. Considered in and of itself, freedom to act amounts to nothing if a person is externally unrestrained from acting but has no internal abilities to act, no internal qualities (talents) that cause human actions to be strong, healthy, masterful, great.

Not being externally restrained from acting is not the chief cause of human action being free. Internal qualities of excellence, greatness, are its chief causes. These qualities are principally the classical moral and intellectual virtues recognized by healthy cultures, societies, cultures, and States within any and every age.

Nonetheless, since no human being can perfect natural abilities without freedom of exercise, without some limit of unfettered ability to execute external actions (without some limit of circumstantial freedom), and because, by nature, all human beings have a moral responsibility and duty, to pursue human happiness, all human beings have a natural right and moral duty to pursue just limits of circumstantial freedom in different forms of social life.

I say that all human beings have a moral responsibility, a moral duty, to pursue human happiness because the natural inclination to pursue our happiness, to exercise human acts and bring them to mature, healthy development is a necessary condition for exercising moral liberty, human freedom in its highest form. Moral rights and responsibilities are properties of human liberty relative to the highest pursuit of natural human goods—the greatest of which is human happiness.

Liberty, Political Associations, and “the State”

Individual liberty is only desired because it is an essential enabling means for exercising human action, for living a good human life in as perfect a fashion as possible. This moral duty to pursue human happiness through exercise of individual human freedom is the source of all moral rights, including the natural human right to form political associations and to establish communications media to insure that governmental agencies do not overstep their limits of just authority as agents of the State, of political self-governance.

Understanding the rights and duties of communications media is impossible in any age without a precise understanding of the nature of political associations, especially today that of States and nation-States. One reason for this is because, since media are parts of organizations, understanding the rightful limits of media activity essentially depends upon knowing the kind of wholes, organizations, of which these media are a part.

Many people today, especially utopian socialists and politicians of many different persuasions, make the mistake of misunderstanding the nature of the political organization to which political media (print and other news organizations) essentially belong. They tend to do this by identifying a State with a government. In doing so, knowingly or not, such people often unwittingly fall into the trap of adopting the political mindset of a totalitarian, or despot.

No government is a State. Governments are agents of a self-governing people, just as are real estate agents, stock brokers, and educational administrators. Politicians are agents through which human beings constituting a self-governing political organization called a “State” engage in associational self-governance.

A tendency on the part of administrators within any and every agency, however, often arises (especially within large, centralized, bureaucracies) for administrators to think they constitute the whole organization. Instead of realizing that they constitute a topmost part of an organizational whole, they often tend to get the grandiose idea that they are the whole, that they do not represent a rule of law (command and control) imposed by others, but that they are the rule of law. The existence of free communications media within political associations is crucial to prevent this sort of misunderstanding from occurring, of shaping healthy public opinion so as to maintain public awareness of politically relevant social interactions of benefit or harm to a political body.

In the past, before the advent of new, internet communications, this moral responsibility fell largely on the shoulders of a free press and television news media. In the present age of electronic media, this situation is changing dramatically; other forms of social media networks are growing that are starting to compete with, and even beginning to replace, traditional print media and television news organizations.

The only way to distribute power is to divide it. In every case this involves preventing monopolization of power in the hands of one, or a few, people. Within democratic political organizations a free media is essential for decentralizing governmental administration, for helping, through relatively unfettered governmental interference, constantly to help distribute leadership roles to parts of a political organization with the talents, qualifications, to execute those roles.

Hence, all legitimate, democratic, political media (not propaganda organizations: presently often called "fake news" outlets) have a natural right to a just amount of circumstantial freedom as is necessary to conduct their work of conveying political truth to help shape the informed public opinion needed to engage in cooperative self-rule through representative government. The just limits of such freedom are constituted by no less circumstantial freedom as is necessary to exercise this political duty and no more than is compatible with the just exercise of circumstantial freedom of other essential political institutions that foster individual self-governance.

To be able to execute their work and precisely understand the just limits of their circumstantial freedom, members of legitimate news media (not propaganda institutes posing as legitimate news media) must have a precise understanding of the nature of the modern State and the essential role that members of the communications media play as a watchdog within the State.

Regarding the nature of the State, they need to understand that the government is not the State. The State is a free association of people, including members of a free press, seeking more perfect union through peaceful cooperation. In this sense the State is a free association of people involved in collective self-government through a rule of law, agreements of just self-regulation, for which they hire the services of different administrative agents.

The government's job is chiefly to represent the people to secure peace through enforcement of just laws made by informed citizens through their representatives. As such, the government, like the media, is simply an agent of citizen self-rule and regulation (that is, an agent of the State). And an essential role of a communication's media within the State is to represent the people considered as a political whole

to insure that the government does not exceed the circumstantial freedom that citizens invest in it to represent them in citizen self-rule. Beyond that, the media has an inalienable moral right and responsibility (which no political government has the moral right unjustly to limit) to communicate to citizens any and every political danger that really threatens citizens and the State and any political good that enhances peace and cooperation among citizens and citizen self-rule.

The Situation Today

Unhappily, today, under the grandiose, utopian socialist, misunderstandings about human nature, the nature of political associations, and political self-rule, members of different forms of media often fall into a form of self-misunderstanding in which, instead of following their moral responsibility to be guard-dogs of individual liberty, they become propagandistic lapdogs for totalitarian despots.

A common presumption held by many Western elites today—especially by economic and educational bureaucrats, and members of the entertainment industry—who tend to control today's major communications media, is that they constitute some sort of global world political order, an Enlightened World Scientific State. Being possessed of true social science, understanding the true nature of Freedom as scientific control of individual action, they are hell-bent on destroying every vestige of individual liberty and national sovereignty so that they can establish their Enlightened, scientifically-regulated, and technologically-controlled freedom that will finally liberate all the rest of us poor, backward, fools from clinging to our petty bourgeois, philistine idea of individual freedom.

That being the case, a chief moral duty and professional responsibility of today's political media is be vigilant guardians of individual liberty and the justly possessed right of people's to self-governance. And a chief moral obligation this media has is not to pander to despots for career advancement or similarly self-aggrandizing motives as Enlightened despots seek to mislead citizens into believing that our true liberty consists in living the life of an Enlightened serf.

Peter Redpath was Professor of Philosophy at St. John's University. He is the author/editor of 17 philosophical books and dozens of articles and book reviews. He has given over 200 invited guest lectures nationally and internationally, and headed many prestigious organizations. He is the only non-Polish

*scholar to hold the Laudatio Achievement Award for attainment of intellectual and organizational wisdom, from the Department of Philosophy, Culture, and Art at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, in Poland. More information is found [at his website](#). [Portions of this essay were originally published in the *International Journal of World Peace*, Vol, 18. No. 1 (March 2001). This article appears through the kind courtesy of the [Catholic World Report](#).*

Featured: *A toy spaniel, a Pomeranian and a Maltese terrier at a basket*, by Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Wegener; painted in 1855.

