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Freedom in Film: *Captain America: Civil War* (2016)

By Kathryn Hickok

Have you taken your children to see [Captain America: Civil War](#)? There's nothing like a summer superhero blockbuster to jumpstart a conversation about the meaning of freedom, the importance of personal responsibility, and how to know what's right to do. The Acton Institute's Jordan Ballor recently described *Captain America's* themes of freedom and conscience this way:

The basic dynamic of the film focuses on conflict between authority and responsibility. The film could well be understood as an extended reflection on Edmund Burke's observation: "Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without."

[...]Captain America champions the rights of conscience and roots the legitimacy of the Avengers in their responsible autonomy.

In *Civil War*[...]we find an expression of the perennial conflict between individual conscience and communal coercion. Cap represents the best of the liberal tradition in his emphasis on virtue, responsibility, and well-formed moral action. By contrast, Stark represents the temptation to outsource moral government to others, effectively indenturing the Avengers in servitude to some impersonal, international governmental panel....

Captain America works from the assumption that such autonomy, once given up, is perhaps impossible to regain. In a display of incisive political insight, Cap also recognizes the public choice realities of all governmental regimes. The government "runs by people with agendas and agendas change." He thus realizes the complexities of what might happen when partisans vie for power over the Avengers, and the dilemmas they would face when ordered to engage or to disengage when their own judgment would lead them to do otherwise. The truth that Captain America recognizes is that you can never really outsource the responsibility to obey your conscience. Or as the Dutch politician and theologian Abraham Kuyper put it toward the end of the nineteenth century, "The conscience marks a boundary that the state may never cross."

(Jordan Ballor's article "The Captain of Conscience" [spoiler alert] [can be found here](#).)

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