

The essential freedoms

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There was discussion here recently on the merits of preparing a manifesto summarising the ideas that underpin this blog.

It was suggested that Franklin D Roosevelt's four great freedoms might be a starting point. He elaborated these in a speech in 1941. His aim was to provide a reason for the USA to break its isolationism. Later that year Pearl Harbour made the case in a very different way.

Roosevelt said these freedoms were the right to enjoy:

- * Freedom of speech
- * Freedom of worship
- * Freedom from want
- * Freedom from fear

I reflected on these, and powerful though that list is I felt it inadequate eighty years later.

As a result I suggest that people have the right to freedom of:

- * Belief
- * Speech
- * Association
- * Movement
- * Choice
- * Identity

I comment, briefly, as follows:

Belief. Important as free speech is the ultimate and inalienable right of each person is to think what they wish. This is the essence of our humanity. As such I believe it a freedom that needs to be noted. No one has the right to take that freedom away, and I think many try to do so. That is what propaganda is about.

Speech. The right to free speech is vital. Without the right to free speech there is no hope of ideas developing, changing or of influencing outcomes. This freedom includes the right to disagree, to offend and to be rightfully angry. However, it does not include the right to intimidate, persecute or prejudice. Freedom ends when another is oppressed. The right to free speech is constrained and yet within that constraint, which is virtuous in itself, it is absolute.

Association. We are communal beings. We must have the right to congregate unless that assembly has the intention of intimidating, persecuting or prejudicing, none of which is implicit in reasoned disagreement. In association with the freedoms of belief and speech I believe this right embraces the freedom to worship.

Movement. Most humans have the ability to move. We aim to provide it to those denied that ability. That movement is innate to our being. Movement is, however, about more than that. The freedom to move is a part of our desire to be who we might be, with the persons we might want to be with, doing what it is that we wish in the place that empowers us to achieve our goals. Freedom of movement is essential to the right to achieve our well-being. It is no wonder that it is at the heart of so much that is disputed.

Choice. Freedom is about the right to decide. It is our choice to decide what is right and wrong. It is our right to persuade others of the merits of our choice. It is our right to decide when to speak, or not; and to associate, and not to do so; and when to move, or not; and of what to procure from within our means, or not; and of what to offer others in exchange. This right to choose is essential to us and who we are.

Identity. The purpose of life is hard to define, and yet most people think it has one. When considered, that purpose appears to be to find out who we are, and how as a result we are best able to identify what it is that meets our needs. There are as many answers to that question as there are people, and given that we change, probably more than that. The importance of identity is that it is our essence, and so so we must be able to choose what our identity is and be respected for doing so. Identity expresses our essence.

All this being said, freedom comes with responsibility. There can be no freedom for some that denies the freedom of others, because such a freedom represents a falsehood because it is necessarily constrained by those limits it imposes.

The responsibility that the quest for freedom imposes is the duty to ensure that no one should live in fear of:

- * Want.
- * Exploitation.
- * Persecution, intimidation or prejudice.

Whilst either exists we cannot be free because the freedom of others is constrained.

This, however, creates a collective responsibility, because who is to be the arbiter of this? That is the role of democratic government.

Democratic government embraces the freedoms noted.

It should act as their custodian.

It assumes the responsibility to arbitrate on disputes on the boundaries of our freedoms, being entrusted to do so as a result of our freedom to choose.

Doing so, democratic government must also accept its responsibilities. As a result it must:

- * Seek a mandate for its actions.
- * Respect and uphold the laws it and its predecessors have enacted.
- * Respect and uphold the international obligations into which it has entered.
- * Provide a right of appeal against the decisions it has made, irrespective of the means of the person making that claim.
- * Accept its obligation to leave office when an election result demands that it do so.
- * Accept that in all it does it must ensure that, as best it is able, each person has a right to the freedoms already noted.

I have no doubt that these ideas are not fully formulated as yet.

Comments are welcome.

Saying so, please note that these are high level statements of purpose. I have yet to get to what they mean in terms of delivery. That comes next.

NB: This article was amended to add freedom from exploitation at 9.43am on 12 March. I realised its absence was a definite mistake.