

Freedom Is a Tricky Concept.  
Posted On:December 31, 1969

"Freedom" is an interesting idea, one that is much used in ways that are often contradictory. Freedom is understood to mean: "Doing what one wants to do without restraint." Freedom is absolute if the person is a hermit, living entirely alone. However, the definition that is generally accepted in modern societies is that one can generally do what one wishes, unless it deprives another of the same freedom. A more common definition is: "My freedom stops at your nose."

In theory, a person should have the freedom to ingest any drug, alcohol, or mind-bending substance. It is one's own body. However, because substance abusers are not hermits, their freedom deprives others of freedom in automobile accidents, in abuse of spouses and children, and in belligerence against bystanders. Being drunk is no excuse for beating a wife. This is abuse of freedom.

Recently, a polygamist cult was arrested, despite the protests of the cult leader that his freedom of worship was violated. However, his freedom of worship deprived his harem of women comparable freedom.

During the Arab Spring demonstrations, with shouts of "we want freedom," their definition of freedom did not include sharing such freedom with women. Women daring to go out in public in Cairo, a freedom enjoyed by all men, are deprived of that freedom at the hands of gropers, rapists, and seducers. They are never free because freedom is not for females.

The fascinating debates about health care in our Congress also have a strange notion of freedom. Some arguments are that people should be free to have only the insurance that is relevant to their bodies. For example, men should not have to pay for insurance that pays for women's health or pregnancy, nor should the young pay for insurance that serves the elderly. This is clearly a case of ignoring the idea that one's freedom stops at another's nose. For health insurance to work, everyone must have skin in the game. Even a young and healthy male might suddenly find himself injured or with a serious illness. His freedom to have a cheap policy will not be freedom at all.

People who drive cars do not have the freedom to drive without insurance, even if they are completely without accidents. Taxpayers who have no children are not free to pay no taxes to support public schools for children. Our actions do have consequences, and that includes responsible uses of freedom.

In the United States, we take our freedoms for granted, even to the point, at times, of selfish freedom that deprives another of freedom. But in other parts of the world, freedom is not a given at all. Just consider a remarkable conference held in London July 22-24. This was the International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression, the largest gathering of ex-Muslims in history. More than 70 notable speakers from 30 countries honored dissenters against "apostasy" (leaving Islam for another faith), and blasphemy (insulting Islam). The speakers were those who had first-hand experience with persecution, exile, imprisonment, and had friends who died for violating these offenses against freedom.

In Muslim-majority countries, being an "ex-Muslim" is apostasy, punishable by death. There is no freedom of thought or freedom of religion. However even in our own bastion of freedom, California, a famous Atheist, Richard Dawkins, who criticizes Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism without raising hackles, was dis-invited to a public address in Berkeley by KPFA, a supposedly liberal radio station, because of his "hurtful" comments on Islam.

The American first amendment, obviously the most important freedom vested in our nation, is freedom of speech. This is not freedom that can be abridged because someone might be insulted. It is freedom that, in the form of free press criticisms on abuse of power protects us from those who cry "Fake News" in an attempt to take away everyone's freedom.

Freedom is not free; it requires responsibility as well. We can learn from those who have fled cultures that oppose such freedoms, cultures where only the leader is free. Let's not take it for granted. It is a rare gift.

682 words

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