

On Freedom

By David Chandler

[This was part of a response in an email conversation with someone who was urging laissez faire economics in the name of freedom.]

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> I am also passionate about freedom.

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I believe in freedom too, but this word has too much flag-waving "slogan potential" in my opinion. I believe everyone should have the right to develop and fulfill their human potential, to be themselves, to express themselves freely, to be free to think their own thoughts free of doctrinaire ideological straight jackets or the beliefs of others.

The concept is all intertwined with individualism, however. American individualism distorts freedom. We can only fulfill ourselves as individuals within human community. No one is a "self-made man". What we do affects everyone else and vice versa. Individual fulfillment is maximized when the individual participates and feels a part of a supportive community. Therefore there must be interpersonal and community values tied to the concept of freedom. For example, we value "America" as an ideal partly because the Bill of Rights supports our urge to individual fulfillment and encourages us to be ourselves without fear of being suppressed. (The Constitution is a community document, spelling out how we will relate to each other and share power and governance.) On the other hand, the constitution (in its original form) locked large groups of people into various degrees of disenfranchisement (slaves, native-Americans, women, etc.). To the extent that the political/economic system locks groups of people out of potential for fulfillment it is not an environment that promotes true freedom, in any meaningful sense. People can also be locked out of meaningful participation by the economic system too.

Today corporate power is a major threat to freedom. [Spending money to promote a political candidate has been held by the courts to be a "first amendment" right.] Freedom for corporate power at the expense of individuals turns the concept of freedom on its head. Corporations are not people (regardless of their legal status). They are abstractions that can attain overwhelming power over people. Corporations do not have a need or right to self-fulfillment as true people do, so the concept of freedom is abused when applied to them.