Another World IS Possible
Another World IS Possible:
Freedom, Economic Truth, and Creating a Society of Humanness

Colby Hopkins
The Humanness Project Press
New York, New York
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This book is dedicated to open-minded and openhearted people everywhere who strive to make our world a better place by prioritizing human beings and nature over money and material goods. Another world is truly possible and you will make it so.
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Preface

In September of 2011, I went to Liberty Square to join the Occupy Wall Street protests. People coming together in real open dialogue and engaging in democratic conversations with people from all different belief systems inspired me. It amazed me how people from such different backgrounds and political beliefs could unite and passionately fight our collective oppression. They realized that political and economic systems oppress all of us. They believed that they could work with people with different opinions and find common solutions. Gradually, I watched friends and family turn against the Occupy Movement (and therefore against my beliefs) as they fell victim to the corporate media’s hijacking and distorting of the movement and its messages.

I wrote this book because, like most Americans, I am sick of two things: I am sick of the political polarization in the national debate and I am sick of the extreme power of the political, corporate, and financial elites. Our current social and political structures do not respect the variability in human beings or how humans impact each other. We do not live in a democracy, but I want to.

Unfortunately, our dominant media is owned and operated by colossal corporations. They are more interested in drumming up dramatic fights to boost ratings than they are in productive dialogue and democratic processes.

Once at an Occupy march, I was gathering with a group of friends when a man on the way to his Wall Street job walked by. He started cursing at the protesters and yelled, “Why don’t you get jobs you goddamn socialists?!” I persuaded this man to stop and talk to me so I could explain a little bit about Occupy Wall Street that he may not know. I told him about the methods Occupy uses to be a platform for all voices, how the media spins the real dialogue, and some of my critiques about capitalism and the 1%. After only a few minutes, he conceded that he misunderstood Occupy and, while he may not come down to Liberty Square (as I had suggested), he hoped we could succeed in changing the national discourse.

The fact is that people do not disagree on fundamental issues. In this book, I include quotes from leading political figures,
scholars, social critics, and artists to highlight various beliefs in the mainstream discourse and to show that we do not agree and disagree with others the way we think we do. Of course, we can find things to disagree about and we can fight over them, but if you break any issue down to the roots, there is little disagreement. Unfortunately, we are conditioned not to find common solutions, but to fight. When we have political conversations we look to prove the other wrong rather than seek the depth of that person.

Let me provide an example: if someone wants universal healthcare, they are likely to be ridiculed and called a socialist by opponents of universal healthcare. But even levelheaded conversations will be about how we cannot afford to pay for that and, on the other side, how unethical it is to let people be sick. The common ground is simple. How can we provide healthcare to everyone at an extremely low cost? Now, you might think that is impossible, but I don’t. My belief is that when people come together from different points of view, in honest and open-minded dialogue, they are able to come up with creative solutions for all of our social ailments. Why is it that we believe that people are so creative and innovative that we can fly around space, create the Internet, and transmit messages instantaneously to the other side of the planet, but we cannot organize ourselves to improve our society in a way that meets our needs?

You’ll notice how I sway from the normal discourse: I am not talking about compromise. The best that Washington politicians can do is talk about compromise. To use our healthcare example, they will try to cut other programs, raise some taxes, and water down services, so Republicans can please their base and Democrats can please theirs while both parties cater to the medical, pharmaceutical, and insurance industries. We cannot trust them to solve this problem, nor can we trust the corporations. We need to solve these problems ourselves. How can we dramatically cut medical costs and provide quality services to everyone? If people come together and democratically create their own solutions, it can be done.

Once we begin to approach problem solving by engaging others in productive dialogue for common solutions, we will realize several things: First, freedom is for everyone. If we really believe in freedom, it only makes sense that everyone shares the same freedom. As much as we value individual freedom, we must recognize that it’s
important to limit our own freedom when it unreasonably infringes on others’ freedom.

Now if these restrictions are inflicted on us from some far-off government institutions, we may oppose them and we should challenge them. But if these restrictions derive from collective agreements that we were a part of making (through real democracy), then it is an act of self-determination. This is the importance of a government by the people and for the people as opposed to our current government.

Next, we will realize that freedom is not only a political issue. Economic freedom is fundamental to a free and democratic society. We must engage with our fellow citizens to create a society that fosters economic freedom for everyone. To accomplish that, we must recognize that the world does have some ecological limitations and what one person does affects others’ ability to live freely. We don’t have to allow unlimited plundering of the earth and exploitation of the people to have a free society. Nor do we have to punish small business owners and other people who work hard, so we can provide services for those not working. We can value individual freedom and collective freedom.

Most people recognize the importance of a social contract—that is, people believe it is important to have laws that protect people from the possibility that others will harm them. As much as we don’t like to say it, these laws restrict freedom to protect people and enhance overall freedom. Being that we accept the social contract, it doesn’t make sense to advocate for unchecked perpetual economic individual freedom any more than it would make sense to advocate for removing all of our laws.

Finally, we will realize that the structure of our economy fosters a plundering of our common resources and exploits people. What one person does, affects other people. The global economic structure, based predominantly on individual freedom, outright ignores this fact. Therefore, the economic system oppresses freedom for all of us, and such oppression has led to massive wealth inequalities and people’s sense of disenfranchisement. People suffer largely because of systematic flaws—not because of laziness or personal inadequacies.

The common discourse tells us that the economy fosters freedom and that people don’t all succeed because they are free
to fail. There’s no coddling in this economy and only the strong survive. But those who believe this do not understand the way the economy actually functions.

In this economy, it is not that you are simply free to fail. Rather, most economic factors are far outside the control of the people. When we cannot impact our own situation, we do not have freedom and self-determination. How can we have no quarrels about touting the exceptionalism and importance of American freedom on one hand, and minimizing every sign of oppression against others with a “life isn’t fair” or “it’s better than any other country?” on the other hand?

Now, I never imply that it is impossible for some people to work hard and succeed: it is possible. But that isn’t the whole story. The fact is that the chips are stacked against the people, and even those who work hard their whole life and make good choices are not bound to success—they might not even get by. Meanwhile, our simple and common everyday actions, like shopping at the supermarket, funnel wealth to the wealthy and chip away at our livelihood and environmental stability.

I believe that the government does not represent the people. And I believe that a small group who exploit people and the planet for their own personal profits controls the economy. I also believe in freedom and justice. Finally, I believe in real democracy. I did not write this book because I have the answers to our collective problems. I wrote this book because I believe that if people have access to accurate information and can engage with each other in real dialogue, then people are capable of governing themselves. If you believe this too, then I wrote this book for you.

When we come together in our communities with open dialogue, we are capable of fostering both individual and collective freedom. We are capable of building common solutions that meet the needs of all of us. Of course, this method takes time and work, but we know we cannot trust political, business, and financial elites to govern our lives. If we want freedom, we must govern our own lives together.

The remedy to restraint on freedom is the expression of freedom. Individuals can maximize freedom in a society through open dialogue, mutual respect, and participatory democracy, which
have historically been exhibited in many communities. Individuals may, and should, live freely, but not to the extent that they hinder other’s freedom. This book lays out steps people can take to implement true democracy in their own communities at the local, national, and global levels.

To many people, creating a new society of humanness sounds impossible. It is difficult to engage someone that we so strongly disagree with, and it seems impossible to find common solutions. But people do not disagree with each other the way they think they do. While reading this book, you may disagree with some of my points or what you infer I am trying to say in my writing, but I strongly believe that you and I do not disagree on most issues, no matter what your position is. At the root of our beliefs we would find enough common ground to stand on and we could build common solutions.

All I ask is that while reading this book you understand that nothing written here is intended as an attack on any person or beliefs. I ask that you proceed without prejudging my intentions or what you think my agenda is and read through the content with an open mind. Try to interpret what points I am making—not assume what points I am making based on the standard public discourse. The actual purpose of this book is to move beyond the regular, polarized discussions and find the roots of our commonalities. I believe that the only way to solve our collective problems is to engage with each other and work together to build a new way of living. I believe this course of action requires everyone to collaborate rather than mobilize one side to defeat the other. I believe another world really is possible and I believe that we can create one if we work together. That’s what this book is about.
Part 1: Liberty and Freedom in Human Society

The first part of this book is based on the idea that freedom is essential to the human experience. By using humanness as the foundation for analyzing freedom, it follows that all forms of societal organization must correlate with the complex notion of free humans living together in a society. Chapter 1 explores the idea of freedom for all in a society as it relates to government and other social institutions, specifically corporations. It then considers true democracy as a method of social organization conducive to freedom, which should extend beyond government institutions. Chapter 2 argues that we do not have a system of true democracy in the United States and that elements of our society that do have democratic tendencies are manipulated by leadership through various means of controlling information—information that is essential to real democracy. Finally, Chapter 3 examines the notion of humanness and all its complexities to highlight that while we may not have true freedom and democracy, if we consider humanness when organizing our society, we can and will have both.
Chapter 1: Freedom for All in a Society

“Freedom and justice cannot be parcelled out in pieces to suit political convenience. I don’t believe you can stand for freedom for one group of people and deny it to others.” —Coretta Scott King

“We allow our ignorance to prevail upon us and make us think we can survive alone, alone in patches, alone in groups, alone in races, even alone in genders.” —Maya Angelou

Notions of Freedom and Government

“Civilization has been a continuous struggle of the individual or of groups of individuals against the State and even against ‘society,’ that is, against the majority subdued and hypnotized by the State and State worship.” —Emma Goldman

“A government is the most dangerous threat to man’s rights: it holds a legal monopoly on the use of physical force against legally disarmed victims.” —Ayn Rand

“If [the government] be the agent of the people, then the people alone can control it, restrain it, modify, or reform it. … It is, Sir, the people’s Constitution, the people’s government, made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people.” —Daniel Webster

Liberty and freedom, these words are very familiar to the American ear. They are part of our everyday life, history, and culture. The great welcoming monument of our nation is the Statue of Liberty. We have a Liberty Bell. America is the “land of the free.” Americans have “liberty and justice for all,” in fact; we demand that we are given liberty or death. The list of symbols and phrases goes on and on. We know, as Americans we enjoy certain freedoms on a daily basis, simply because we were born in the United States of America. Politicians stir patriotic notions of Americanism and emotions of pride, honor, and love by shouting words of freedom from the hilltops … Capitol Hill that is. Pundits and scholars alike drum up feverish support for their own opinions by highlighting the rich history of the struggle of Americans for freedom and equality. Since we are undoubtedly immersed in freedom and liberty in everything that we do, these terms should be easy to define.

The American Heritage Dictionary’s definition of freedom yields the following: (1) The condition of being free from restraint (2) Political independence (3) Possession of civil rights, immunity of arbitrary exercise of authority and (4) The capacity to exercise free choice, free will.
Freedom from restraint? Immunity from arbitrary authority? Free choice? These definitions probably encompass most Americans’ ideas of freedom and what we feel freedom is. Therefore, it is difficult to disagree with these definitions. They make sense because these definitions are ambiguous. Who would disagree that freedom includes “political independence?” However, freedom is much more than political independence (which can mean different things to different people).

While we might not disagree with these definitions, we could all debate and argue the deeper meaning within them. If we were to extrapolate on these definitions, and apply them to specific issues, we would have many different interpretations of their meanings and how they should apply. Consider how two politicians always use the same rhetoric around freedom even if one is arguing for a bill and the other against it. Scholars, professionals, artists, and people from all walks of life tackle the concepts of freedom. There are endless amounts of books, poems, paintings, songs, emotional diatribes, and all types of expressions that attempt to explain and interpret freedom. Freedom is an idea: it is a concept.

More importantly, freedom is a feeling. It is not concrete, and it is not black and white. We know when we feel free and when we don’t, but no one feels completely free all the time, unless they are ignoring the obvious—life has restrictions. Whether they are natural, physical, mental, societal, governmental, or individual, there are always forces restricting our freedom, no matter how little we feel the effects.

There is a misconception that government provides freedom; it does not. Freedom is inherent to all people. Many people fear government control and the risk of its infringement on freedom and thus create ways to mitigate it, as they should. Governments, by nature, restrict freedom. This is true even in a democracy. All government action is inherently coercive. At the least, government action requires taxes, which are not optional. If we consider government and the people as the two components of society, then an increase in the size and strength of government would certainly consist of an affront on personal freedom. However, society is not just made up of two exclusive and opposing sides of the people and government.
Freedom is not only freedom from government. Society includes other institutions, like corporations and banks. While people make up every institution, including government, corporations and banks do not act like people: They are large institutions whose only purpose is to make profits. Furthermore, people within these institutions often have opposing interests. CEOs of large corporations do not have the same concerns as most Americans, like feeding their family and earning enough to make rent. But their actions impact us all, and often restrict our freedom. So people have to worry about more than just the government creating restrictions on freedom. Freedom is the absence of coercion whether it is by government, private institutions, or individual people. Government ensures that some inherent freedoms of people are protected from other elements in society, like other individuals and institutions.

Citizens accept a certain amount of government restriction on freedom because they want it to protect other freedoms. For example, most people are willing to stop their cars when the government’s traffic lights tell them to because they know that it benefits all of society and helps protect people.

We call codified freedoms that are protected by the government, rights. However, government control over us can go too far. When it does, citizens will resist the infringement on their freedom. For example, the continuous growth of the size and reach of the federal government provoked an anti-big government movement in the form of the Tea Party movement that took the 2010 mid-term elections by storm. While the press only focused on outrageous tactics of a small number of people in the movement, and even though the Republican Party co-opted and minimized the impact of the movement, it showed that there are a lot of Americans fed up with the inefficient, over-spending of American tax dollars. Many feel that governments are inefficient, and inadequate to provide social services. Many also feel that our government spends too much money, creates too many restrictions, and kills too many innocent people in the name of providing security.

With people holding such concerns, they must always check the government (or any system of power) to ensure that their restrictions on freedom are justified. Our nation was founded on
this basis. The founding fathers and mothers worked to create an alternative form of government to break away from the tyranny of the British government, but also to prevent another tyrannical government from developing in the new land. We still need to be vigilant and constantly active about getting and keeping the government in check to prevent such tyranny. However, we must also be cautious of infringement on freedom from other sources, especially ones that we as people, have little or no control over.

Consider two things. First, total freedom for everyone is not only impossible: it is undesirable. If everyone had total freedom, I am not certain that a Hobbesian state of nature would emerge where life of man would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” because everyone’s distrust for one another would cause constant preemptive attacks on individuals. However, if everyone were completely free, without restriction, then maybe something closer to a Lockean scenario would ensue where people without a strong conscience could exploit and hurt others for their own gain and without consequence.

For Hobbes and Locke, people enter into a social contract to mitigate or prevent this type of behavior. They argue that this is why people consent to having a government. (I would argue that there might be other methods to accomplish protection and justice without a government body, but that’s beside the point.)

Second, achieving desirable freedom, whatever that may include, necessitates a balance of forces. Therefore, a check on ALL sources of illegitimate power is necessary, not just on government power. But before we know what freedom we have (or don’t have), we still have to know what freedom is, right? Through the rest of this chapter we will explore freedom with the purpose of redefining it to include a system of balance, thinking about how to process information to pursue this balance, and considering how to account for the human element—what freedom is to human beings.
Structured societies condition people to believe certain things automatically. In the United States, most citizens believe communism, for example, is a very specific thing: It is bad. They believe democracy is communism’s opposite and, therefore, good. People are told the American government projects “American ideals.” Government leaders put American soldiers in harm’s way to protect freedoms. The American government, which we are told is a democracy, therefore, should somehow coincide with terms like freedom and liberty, which are ingrained in our national history. We are likewise taught to believe that capitalism is our economic system and it is the only system that coincides with freedom. This is how we are indoctrinated.

Freedom is such an ambiguous term and idea that it does not align with any form of government or economic structure more than another. To clarify, true democracy promotes freedom in a societal context. However, when we speak of freedom, as in rights, or as in individual freedom, it could exist in any system to some degree (and depending on how one defines freedom). People could live freely and feel untouched by their king in a monarchy, that is, if the king chose to implement policies that allowed it.

Joseph II, the Holy Roman Emperor from 1765 to 1790, instituted policies that spread education, reduced the power of the church, protected freedom of worship, removed class and ethnic requirements for government positions, and he ended serfdom. Joseph II issued over 6,000 edicts and over 11,000 new laws aimed at increasing the happiness and freedom of his people, but his empire was not a democracy.

Many monarchs have instituted polices that increased people’s freedom or brought prosperity to them. The problem is that there are no guarantees that such freedom will last. Even the greatest, benevolent monarchs will eventually pass on and be succeeded. With a benevolent monarch, people may have the freedom to work,
eat, and live happily and freely, but may have no say in their political structures whatsoever. They may even be persecuted for speaking out against the ruler. In a democracy, people can starve to death on the street but can verbally lash out at the President on their deathbed. So, who is more free?

Looking at communist or socialist regimes (which Americans are conditioned to despise) with some objectivity reveals that these systems are not inherently opposed to freedom. Instead, historically, it was leaders within these regimes that instituted policies that hindered freedom. For example, during the Cultural Revolution in China, Mao Zedong expected the arts in China to reflect the ideals of a socialist society. As a result, artists that were considered bourgeoisie or anti-socialist were prevented from working and persecuted under Mao. This is the opposite of what Americans consider freedom; however, authoritarian policies like these are the result of authoritarian leadership, rather than inherent to a social theory (especially those that are economic systems like socialism and communism).

To put this into perspective a bit, consider that in the U.S., Black Americans are less than fifteen percent of the population. After the abolition of slavery, state and local governments began to institute Jim Crow laws, designed to make Black Americans second-class citizens. This happened democratically, according to the U.S. system. Throughout the 20th century, the U.S. Supreme Court began overturning Jim Crow laws (against the majority of voters). However, if U.S. law functioned based solely on majority rule, the country could have permanently implemented Jim Crow laws even if there had been equal voting for people of color. According to some definitions of democracy, that would have been democratic, but not freedom. This gets to the core of the freedom discussion.

Americans think of freedom, in the context of a democracy, as the right of every person to express themselves socially and religiously as they choose, pursue economic security and expansion, and participate equally and purposefully in the government process of decision-making. To boil it down, freedom is self-determination. Freedom (and justice) for all requires that these conditions occur
without directly hindering the same conditions for others. This is where it gets tricky.

For example, most people want to enjoy the benefits of their labor. Certainly the harder a person works the more comfortably they can live, but not relative to the amount of labor they put in. Most middle and lower class folks understand that people can excel at their jobs, work extra hours, even work a second job, and still not get ahead because wages are low, expenses continuously rise, jobs are outsourced, and owners and executives keep profits from businesses. Does that make sense?

People cannot advance relative to their labor. Of course some people will get ahead in life when they work hard, but the majority of jobs pay so low, wage increases are so small, and prices of total goods and services rise so fast that over a lifetime most people who work long, hard hours, year in, year out, will never get ahead. Therefore, self-determination is not easily accessible in the economic sense, and government is not the only institution that gets in the way.

Beyond the restraints of employment and wages, and economic forces outside an individual’s control, self-determination is also limited by others who use or damage things that belong to everyone. Those plundering the limited resources of the earth that affect every global citizen, to increase personal profits and shareholder profits, restrict self-determination of others to some extent. One person’s pursuit of self-determination should not include destroying things for other people.

For example, the British Petroleum oil spill in 2010 saw 4.9 million barrels of oil flood out of the ocean floor into the waters of the Gulf Coast. Additionally, 1.9 million gallons of Corexit dispersants were used to sink the oil. No one will ever know the full damage of the oil spill, but some effects are obvious. Fishermen from the Gulf regularly find mutated fish in their catches including eyeless shrimp, clawless crabs, and fish covered in lesions. Local fishers have lost up to 75 percent of their income.

Freedom to pursue profit and freedom to plunder the earth to pursue profit are two different things. Destroying the earth, wasting resources, and other practices that hinder the freedom of
others cannot be justified by the value of one individual’s freedom to pursue profits. However, it has become ingrained in American culture, and thus, industrialized countries’ cultures, that capitalism is the economic system of democracy and that both capitalism and democracy align with freedom—people have the freedom to plunder the earth for personal profit. Furthermore, over the last century, this style of corporate capitalism has become the way a capitalist system is “meant to be” and that system is called freedom, even if at the expense of others. In reality, this is all a lie.

The basis for the idea behind capitalism, both in method and purpose, is individual freedom—the noblest of capitalists’ causes. Many advocates of capitalism hold individual freedom as the highest virtue. Milton Friedman, a leading proponent of capitalism wrote, “we take freedom of the individual, or perhaps the family, as our ultimate goal in judging social arrangements. Freedom as a value in this sense has to do with the interrelations among people.” However, upon further analysis of the notion of freedom, we realize that unchecked individual freedom naturally hinders freedom of other sorts, including individual freedom of others.

A free market system means that individuals function in markets free from the restraints of their governments. People and corporations are able to function as they choose—buy, produce, sell, etc.—without government interference. It does not mean that businesses competing in those markets are free from each other. Actually, it’s the opposite. In a free market system, businesses are at the mercy of one another and the hope is that the free market system functions to allow the best—most productive and efficient—businesses to thrive, while the others collapse. Furthermore, a free market system does not mean that individual people are free from the restraint of others. The free market system functions on competition so people are subject to the restraints of the dominating forces. Whether you believe that to be good or bad is a different story, but it is the reality.

People generally prefer and accept the government’s control over our society (albeit, to varying degrees) rather than being unpredictably controlled by whoever finds a method of power
over us (whether it be corporations at home or foreign powers abroad). Americans accept this because citizens are supposed to have some say in the government. However, the point remains that any government exists to control the people that it governs. Once this is understood, it easily follows that absolute freedom is impossible. Ironically, freedom in a society requires restrictions. There must be restrictions if people are to coexist. And with that knowledge, we can work to live in a free society that acknowledges all people and allows self-determination.

Coexisting and the Impossibility of Freedom

“Liberty may be endangered by the abuses of liberty as well as by the abuses of power.” —James Madison

“Political freedom means the absence of coercion of a man by his fellow men. The fundamental threat to freedom is power to coerce, be it in the hands of a monarch, a dictator, an oligarchy, or a momentary majority. The preservation of freedom requires the elimination of such concentration of power to the fullest possible extent and the dispersal and distribution of whatever power cannot be eliminated—a system of checks and balances.” —Milton Friedman

“Capitalism today commands the towering heights, and has displaced politics and politicians as the new high priests, and reigning oligarchs of our system. So capitalism and its principle protagonists and players, corporate CEOs, have been accorded unusual power and access. … These are the new high priests.” —Ira Jackson

Freedom means you can do as you please. You can act, think, and believe how you want and you are able to express thoughts and beliefs, as you want. Freedom on an individual basis is rather easy to conceptualize. We can think of it as the limitlessness of the individual. Especially as Americans, most of us feel free in some sense of the word. Most Americans probably feel as though they can pretty much do as they wish and live as they choose without other people getting in their way. At least those with good paying jobs may feel unrestricted. Do some people feel as if no forces hinder them from living their lives as they choose? Or maybe they don’t feel free but blame their jobs for their restrictions? What are the impediments to their freedom? Taxes? Of course, freedom is also more than just being able to act however we want.

What about those of us who are working and cannot seem to make ends meet? I would bet that some feel as though they are unable to live as they wish. Maybe they think it’s outside forces preventing them or maybe just circumstances. Many Americans
struggle more than others. People are marginalized and oppressed; those living in poverty have a more difficult time elevating their quality of life than those who are not. Perhaps even low-income people feel that they are able to live as they choose, but probably not to the same degree as the American middle class and elite. Furthermore, there is an inherent disconnect between the labor one pursues and their own self-determination. This contributes to an underlying feeling of discontent among workers even if most people can ignore it or put up with it. Karl Marx wrote of the impacts of laboring for someone else’s profit:

*Labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor ... It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.*

Conversely, freedom for all as a general condition is almost impossible to conceptualize, and to think we have freedom for all is ridiculous. For two or more people, limitless freedom is impossible because what each person does, will impact the others. In the U.S., freedom means access for everyone to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Conflict arises when acting on beliefs and pursuing happiness infringes on someone else’s ability to do the same. Because society is made up of more than one person, we have to accept that one’s capability to act freely must be limited to the extent that those actions do not hinder someone else’s freedom. Society should work to allow everyone to equally act freely.

It seems that many prosperous people, who consider themselves free, try to disconnect themselves from people who are not. There is, however, a connection between them. People of extreme wealth maintain and increase power by controlling and exploiting the people without it. Sometimes this exploitation is intentional and
conscious; sometimes it is the result of functioning in the system that necessitates it. The American people are included in this condition. Some wealthy Americans invest and own businesses that exploit the environment and the people. There are many poor and exploited citizens who are oppressed in work. We are coerced into contributing to the destruction of the environment to earn a living. This is not to say we do not have freedoms in America, as we do have many. But we do not have freedom equivalent to what we feel the word freedom means.

Government plays an interesting role in the concept of freedom. On one hand, it seems that government provides freedom by instituting laws that grant freedom. On the other hand, government cannot provide what is inherent to humans. Humans are inherently free; therefore, government can only protect what already exists in people. Now, on the third hand, another way to look at the relationship is that government hinders freedom. The truth is, the government both protects and hinders freedom. While government hinders freedom by placing restrictions on people, it also protects freedom by restricting other people from hindering it. If the government controls our freedom, then we are not totally free. But the core purpose of government is to maintain order among the people it governs. It is a created institution with the sole purpose of providing and enforcing rules that regulate the masses of people.

The very existence of government assumes that if it were not there then some people would unjustly dominate over others. Ironically, to protect people from controlling each other in society, the government itself has to have a certain amount of control over the people. This is the idea of the social contract propelled by the works of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke who had significant influence on the foundations of American government and society.

People consent to a certain amount of governing power over them, to ensure that the government protects against other hindrances to freedom by other individuals. It’s not necessarily a bad deal, especially if America was a true democracy where the people had control over the government (or even better, if they were the government). That would mean the people govern themselves.
Opinions vary on how much freedom the government should restrict in order to protect overall freedom. Some politicians even argue that government cannot regulate institutions like banks and corporations because that would be an infringement on their freedom.

In America, we enjoy many freedoms. Some of the notable ones are freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press. Even with these, it is somewhat of a fallacy to believe we are a free society. The government, private corporations, and banking institutions determine a great deal of our existence. If everyone had total freedom, with no governmental control, then the more powerful people in society would be free to exploit others and the environment without repercussions (even more than they currently do).

The government obstructs the people’s freedom, but it should also protect it. Sure, people should be free to conduct their businesses as they choose, but that allows power to accumulate in unaccountable hands that obstruct other people’s freedom. The result is that the government ends up protecting the freedom of a few individuals, whose actions hinder the freedom of the rest. And now the situation is out of control because the worst elements of both sectors, government and private, seem to be working together all the time! So what do we do?

This conundrum has brought our society to a critical point where we, as people, need to make some choices. Those choices need to be conscious and specific. Somewhere along the line, through the guise of rhetoric, freedom became defined as the ability to gather as much unnecessary wealth as possible by exploiting the planet and its people while the government cuts you a break on your taxes. We need to take back control of the terminology. We need to understand what freedom really means to us, and not allow our politicians to abuse and exploit the meaning and create policies of oppression in the name of freedom.

I still believe in the real thing. I still believe that freedom is the ability to find happiness and self-determination, which does not come from a gross abundance of wealth, but from family, people, community, and one’s ability to participate meaningfully in the decisions that impact one’s life and social structures. I just
have to ask, why not? Why can’t we have it? The answer is simple: we can.

While unlimited freedom for everyone may be impossible, knowing that means we can consciously find a balance and collectively protect our freedoms. This is what it means to coexist. We only need to further our understanding of freedom and include the notion of balance in our new definition of it.

Redefining Freedom

“Don’t regard yourself as a guardian of freedom unless you respect and preserve the rights of people you disagree with.” — Gerard K. O’Neill

“This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in.” — Theodore Roosevelt

Think for a moment about the word “freedom.” What an ambiguous term. Freedom is one of those words like “love.” When you say the word love, you may feel like you know exactly what you mean. But love, like freedom, can translate to very different feelings to different people and can be easily misconstrued in the language. You may not even realize it until you dig deep into the details of specific examples. When you hear people talking about freedom, or that we live in a free society, we are all using the same words, but we are thinking and feeling different things. Furthermore, because of the impossibility of unlimited freedom we must figure out what balance of freedom and restrictions is right.

Hopefully, we will conclude that when a freedom is right for one, then it is right for all. We must consider our own freedom as something inherently tied to the freedoms of others. This can be tremendously difficult because freedom is an emotional topic. We often identify the nation with freedom and we want only to protect that ideal. But part of what makes the U.S. an amazing country is that we are able to challenge the government and societal institutions. When we challenge the notion of freedom in our society, if we do not get defensive and actually hear other ideas, and dig deep within our own belief systems, we will find more similarities than differences about what freedom means to us.
Definitions of freedom include the absence of things like fear and want. It also means the absence of physical force or any other form of coercion. However, in a social context, definitions of freedom may vary based on individuals’ interactions with others. Freedom is not one universal concept.

Because we live in a society where a person’s actions affect others, total freedom is impossible for everyone to have, and there must be limitations. Therefore, we must redefine our understanding of freedom to include a system of balance between allowances (rights) and restrictions (regulations). Restrictions protect individuals from other citizens or institutions that could hinder freedoms. Once this mindset is established, people can start to analyze the trade-offs that must be made to maximize everyone’s freedom in an equitable way. Most likely this is not actually a redefinition, rather a combination of getting to the root of what people believe freedom really is and expanding that concept so it applies to everyone. This is the critical first step toward progress.

Over time, Americans have learned and are still learning, that if we allow our government to put restrictions on others, then, because it is only fair, we must accept those same restrictions on ourselves. Similarly, if we are allowed a certain freedom, then other people should have that same freedom, whether we agree or disagree with what they do with it. This is the prerequisite for a discussion on freedom in society. What is true for one person should be true for all people. If we cannot accept this one simple truth, then we are hypocrites and don’t really believe in freedom for all.

For example, if we support freedom of speech, we must support it even when we do not like what another person says. We may wish to condemn the words but we cannot condemn the act of using them. Dictators support free speech as long as the speaker agrees with their view, but that is not free speech. Supporting freedom of speech means everyone is free to say what they choose and the government, institutions, or other people cannot prevent it. The challenge is to find the balance of allowance and restrictions as it best serves all people. Freedom of speech may therefore be limited in the event that the speech infringes on someone else’s freedom. But how do we collectively find this balance?
Government or some other body of the people must regulate freedoms as well as restrictions to ensure the success of such freedoms. There must be a way to allow people to freely pursue self-determination while ensuring that people are not also restricting other individuals’ ability to do the same. Since we, the American people are supposed to be the government (of course through our elected representatives) we must use our political power to control our balance of freedoms and restrictions. That is the purpose of government, and that is what our duty is as the people that are the government.

The difficulty is, since the bulk of Americans do not actively participate in government, representatives are free to act as they choose and do not acknowledge different views regarding what freedom actually is. This is perpetuated by the fact that government officials hide information from us and skew the information they provide so we are largely uninformed. Furthermore, the dominating corporate media misinforms, manipulates, and polarizes the people, which misdirects focus to concern for political parties and hinders effective participation. If we, the masses, inform ourselves and become actively involved in the process of self-governance, we can easily find and implement the tradeoffs between rights and restrictions.

Rights and Restrictions: The Freedom Trade-Offs

“My freedom to move my fist must be limited by the proximity of your chin.” —Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas

Each freedom we have restricts other freedoms at the same time. So when we consider freedom, we have to be able to accept, or deal with, the limitations put onto us by others having that same freedom. On one side, democratic “liberals” press for a certain amount of services like housing, medical care, food, and other basic needs for all. By doing this, government coerces other people in society who have more property to pay for those services through taxes, thereby infringing on their freedom. We have watched this debate go back and forth throughout the history of our nation.
Currently, the debate is that the wealthy should pay taxes because it is fair that everyone pay their fair share. Furthermore, the wealthy earn profit by exploiting people and the earth so they need to contribute more taxes to make up for the damage they do. However, the wealthy make society better by creating more jobs for everyone. If you let them work, unhindered by taxes, society will improve. Any monetary contributions to society should be a voluntary choice for charity, not coercion by taxing. But the jobs they create are few, low paying, and going to people in other countries.

So freedom of the most vulnerable, we are told, comes at the expense of freedom of those with more wealth. Some people argue that healthcare is a human right and, therefore, access to basic medical needs is an essential component of freedom. On the flip side, others might argue that because healthcare costs money, and those that cannot afford it would have to rely on others to pay for it, that the payers’ freedom is jeopardized. Furthermore, they argue that by providing free services we are removing the incentive for people to advance themselves.

When it comes to social safety nets, perhaps the trade-off would be diminished if we implemented them with a long-term strategy to minimize them. Currently we use social safety nets to maintain capitalism and mitigate its natural effects on society. However, if society actually allowed people to flourish, these would only be necessary for people with severe medical needs. Regardless, in our current system, we must choose between paying taxes or giving up social programs and choosing one means giving up the other.

The right to bear arms offers a stark example of freedom trade-offs. The Constitution of the United States sets the foundation for our government, but before agreeing to ratify it, some of the nation’s founders decided it was necessary to codify some rights (freedoms) so no one, in theory, could restrict these particular freedoms. They wrote up the Bill of Rights.

The right to bear arms means we all have the right to unlimited access to have any guns, right? Maybe that is exactly what it means, maybe not. None of us can be sure, which is why people can turn it into a controversial issue. The rights to protect one’s
property and one’s family are extremely important. However, the freedom to do so restricts other people’s freedoms. I know that we would all protect our families at any cost, but let’s just acknowledge that this freedom impacts other people’s freedom. Whatever your stance on this issue, exercising this freedom necessitates a balance as to not restrict other freedoms.

With this great freedom of bearing arms, the bearer exercises the right to feel protected because they have a gun, which makes them feel safe. This is considered a freedom from fear because having a gun is a way to protect us from harm. However, when one person has a gun, other people around that person are restricted on their freedom from fear, because now they are likely to be fearful of the person with the gun. Even if others get guns too, it doesn’t remove fear of the original gun carrier, it only helps to level the fear.

I’m not trying to defend or condemn this right. My only point is that with rights come natural restrictions. Even if you are willing to accept them, the point is that they exist. Some restrictions are more obvious than others because, like with guns, they threaten our physical safety directly. People may debate whether guns are necessary or they may believe that the second amendment is the end of the discussion, but we all know guns are weapons that can be used to hurt others.

The freedom of speech, codified in the first amendment, offers another example. There are some obvious examples when freedom of speech can put our safety at risk; therefore we accept some restrictions on it. For example, yelling, “fire!” in a theater is against the law if there is not a fire because people could hurt others trying to escape.

If we allow everyone to have freedom of speech, then we have to allow people to say things that we might think are unacceptable and can make our society worse. This applies especially to people on television and radio because they are in positions to reach a large amount of people and possibly affect their opinions. Depending on one’s opinion, it is possible that these people are corrupting our society. Thus, the freedom to
speak freely hinders everyone else’s freedom from the resulting consequences of speech that we do not like or think may harm society.

For example, we may get upset that certain programs are allowed on television in the name of free speech because we do not want our children seeing sexual or violent scenes. Many people would love to shut up Jon Stewart or Rush Limbaugh, but to do so we have to restrict freedom of speech and press. It is a hard line to draw no matter what right you consider.

This, however, does not mean that having certain freedoms is not worth the trade-offs; rather, trade-offs are inherent to freedom in a society. These are just some examples that highlight the conundrum of the notion of freedom. Remember, what is true for one must be true for all, so we need to find what trade-offs maximize freedom for everyone, how we can overcome restrictions, and find a balance.

**Balance Rights and Restrictions to Achieve Freedom for All**

“For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” —Nelson Mandela

While some may be content with government restrictions, many of us are adamantly opposed to them depending on the reason for them. Questioning, challenging, and opposing government restrictions are things every American should constantly engage in. However, such engagement should not depend on which party is in power. We must question the legitimacy of all forms of authority. We all benefit from our government, but to balance rights and restrictions it is crucial that all people have a meaningful voice in what the government does.

There is considerable distrust of government in America, but by not allowing government to restrict others, our freedom may be in more jeopardy than if we allowed the actual restrictions. BIGGGGGGGG GOVERNMENT! Wow. Read that out loud a couple of times, it even sounds bad. It sounds horrible, but how horrible is it? Some of us think big government is awful and that government should stay out of the way and let society flow as much
as possible. Is big government in and of itself bad, or is it simply
that our current big government is bad?

Let us forget for a moment what we are always told: that big
government cannot work. Just because something is not working,
does not mean it cannot work. What if it could; then would big
government be so bad? And what is it about big government that
we should oppose? Social programs? The military? All of it?

We often hear that we don’t want the government deciding
how to spend our money. “Damn right I don’t want the government
spending my money. I want to spend my own money!” Then
again, if you lost your job and your healthcare and a family
member got sick, and the government provided your healthcare,
you might feel differently about it. Government healthcare may
not be the solution, but the need for treatment is very real. So the
issue is not how big the government is, but whether it makes society
better. We know that our current government systematically works
against our best interests.

There is a misconception that protesters in the Occupy
Wall Street Movement, and maybe protesters or even liberals in
general, are lazy and want “handouts.” An online blog called We
Are the 99 Percent allows people to post their messages, telling the
stories of their struggles. One message that received a lot of attention
was from a man who had cancer and could not get treatment:

I am an American. I pay taxes. I worked. I was the guy who worked in
his field for 20 years until the economy collapsed. Then I was the
guy who brought you your pizza. You know, a job? Not unemployment?
Then I got cancer. Minimum wage and part-time insurance meant I
needed Arizona’s welfare, AHCCS (Access), or I needed to gather
my affairs. Minimum wage meant I made too much money, according
to Access, and I was denied Access. Cancer solved the problem and
removed my ability to work. Access approved. Despite what you’ve
been told, the hospital will turn you away if you’re broke. Despite
what you’ve been told, churches and private institutions will not pay
your medical expenses. I was diagnosed April 1st, 2011 and had major
surgery on May 12th. I am still recovering from radiation and chemo
treatments ended in August. I am alive because I’m unemployed.
Does any of this make sense? I am the 99%.
His question is one we should all consider: does any of this make sense? Our government is not of the people or by the people. If it were, we would not have so much disdain for the government or politicians. If the government were truly of and by the people, we would be having a very different conversation with and amongst ourselves. We would be looking in the mirror and toward our communities to find change, not bickering about how much we hate the Republicans or Democrats.

What if a network of community based governments spanned across the country and provided similar services in healthcare, education, and social security as the federal government provides? What if our government could be by the people and for the people; then why would anyone oppose it whether it was big or small? If we had the power to make decisions together, then maybe we wouldn’t have a problem helping people like the man who posted the story above.

Most people know that the government is NOT by or for the people, but the beauty of the American government—the one thing that does make this country the greatest country in the world—and why people should all love living in America, is that ultimately the people do have a say. But political games in Washington and in the corporate media polarize every message and practically force people to choose sides so there is never a reconciling of differences. You either win, and get what you want, or you lose and your voice is ignored. Just under half of the population’s desires are ignored at any given time. We cannot find balance this way.

Additionally, we are force-fed so much misinformation that it is almost impossible to figure out if what we believe or value is really in line with what we think is right. People are not being represented in the government and if the people are not being represented, I know whose fault it is. We love to blame the Congress, and the President, and the corporations, and the liberals, and the conservatives, and whoever else we can point the finger at. And they are ALL guilty.

But the truth is that if we are not represented, we have to demand it. It is our responsibility to fight through all the propaganda
and nonsense on TV. It is our responsibility to be heard. Maybe big government is only bad when the people are left out of it. It is a great misconception in our society that what we say doesn’t matter. But we have to do more than just vote in the national elections. We actually have to do something!

Many of us have been convinced that we do not have a say, we cannot change things, our vote does not count, and we do not have a voice. If that’s how you feel, you may have been fooled. Do not give up. Albeit, it has been getting increasingly more difficult to make our voices heard. We have little choice but to spend most of our time just getting through the day-to-day struggle, trying to make ends meet, and care for our children. But we can mobilize and we can participate and we can find the balance we need to make this country what we want it to be.

I’m not saying everyone needs to march on Washington (although that does help) but it is crucial that we come together to figure out what we believe in, our similarities and differences, and how this country should function—what’s important, what’s not important, what freedoms we want citizens to have, and what restrictions we can accept.

All the back and forth bantering can, and must, stop. Instead of picking sides against each other, we must create some new solutions to achieve balance. Balancing does not mean we have to find compromises and meet in the middle; it means we can combine ideas and construct new solutions that meet the needs and beliefs of all of us. Furthermore, we all need to consider what we are willing to contribute to make this happen.

Forget what the 1% wants you to believe: society cannot function if everyone is only pursuing their own best interests all the time—that’s chaotic. We have to be willing to help each other and find mutually beneficial agreements that may not involve money, but have significant value. Once we figure all that out, we need to do something about it. We need to create a balance between rights and restrictions by freely and collectively contributing to society. This way, we will be our own government and we will need the current government institutions less and less.
I bet most of us don’t differ in opinion on a lot of issues, but just disagree on the versions of issues that are plastered all over the mainstream “news.” Some of us or all of us, are not doing our job, our duty as citizens, to let our opinions be known. Don’t be fooled, voting is not enough. How many times will we choose between the lesser of two evils? There must be a better way. You only have essentially two choices when you vote and neither side represents you completely so you need to make your opinions known.

But this is why you and I are here right now. That’s what this book is about: how you can have a say. No matter what your beliefs are, they are valid and important. How can you take control over your own destiny? Let’s find out.

We do not have to figure out what the forefathers thought or wanted on all the specific issues. They were a group of people, with differing opinions so we can be certain they didn’t all want the same things entirely. What we know they agreed on is that the government they created would be accountable to the people and the people would be able to change and adapt it. That is the genius of the U.S. Constitution. What we need to do is decide what kind of country we want to live in, and make that happen. Do we want a society that promotes as much freedom, liberty, and self-determination as possible? Do we want as much participation from citizens as possible?

For government to work in accordance with freedom, and therefore balance rights and restrictions, it matters who has a say in that government and what the process of participation is. If democracy were truly a system of governance where everyone had an equal say and differences were reconciled, maybe the government would be the best way to promote freedom. Part 3 of this book describes how we can govern ourselves and create true democracy in America. True democracy could be the tool to transition government from a body that oppresses freedom and supports others that hinder freedom to one that is the exercise of freedom in a society.

However, democracy is another term that has been hijacked and exploited to the point that when it is used, most people will feel good and agree that it is good, but they may actually have different
definitions of “democracy.” As with freedom, we have to consider what democracy really means to us, what system of government we actually have, and what system we want.

Thank you for reading! For more information or to purchase a copy of “Another World IS Possible: Freedom, Economic Truth, and Creating a Society of Humanness,” please click the link below and visit us at:

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