



Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms Are from 1941: We Need New Freedoms in the 21st Century

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1. The Old Four Freedoms

In his 1941 State of the Union address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated his vision of the American social contract, which became known as the "Four Freedoms." These were, "freedom of speech," "freedom of worship," "freedom from want," and "freedom from fear." Those big ideas have defined much of the 20th century—and not just in America.

Yet today, 75 years later, we might contemplate important new freedoms to strive for, even as we must struggle to preserve our old freedoms. And as we think about new freedoms, it helps to think practically. As they say, politics is the art of the possible.

So perhaps it's best to take a closer look at Roosevelt's Four Freedoms; after that, we will be better prepared to think about a New Four Freedoms.

Let's start by taking note of the context of FDR's speech of January 6, 1941. In that year—the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor would not come until December 7—America was finally recovering from the Depression, and so the public appetite for a radical domestic political solution, from either the right or the left, seemed to be receding, and yet nobody could be sure. So Roosevelt charted a centrist middle course; his articulation of freedom might have horrified libertarians on the right and communists on the left, but most Americans were thrilled.

In the meantime, of course, America was under siege from around the world. On the right, the fascist Germans and Italians, and the imperialist Japanese, posed a direct military threat, as well as something of an ideological threat; some prominent Americans claimed that fascism was The Wave of the Future. And on the left, the communist Russians also posed an ideological threat, as well as an internal-security threat; many Soviet sympathizers, even spies, had burrowed their way into the U.S. government.

And so as Roosevelt stood before Congress and the American people to deliver his assessment of the state of the union, the 32nd president knew that he had an intricate task. On the one hand, he

had an obligation to preserve the essential freedoms of the Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. And on the other hand, he had a duty to advance the strongest possible case for Americanism to a skeptical, even hostile, world that had mostly turned to dictatorship to escape from depression and danger. Hence the Four Freedoms, as a statement of timeless American values, stood out as a bright beacon in a darkened world.

FDR's four-fold vision—political liberty, religious tolerance, social compassion, and national security—was an immediate success, resonating deeply with the American public. In 1943, in the pages *The Saturday Evening Post*, the brilliant illustrator Norman Rockwell immortalized the Four Freedoms in a quartet of memorable paintings. In fact, during World War Two, the actual artworks themselves went on a nationwide tour to sell victory bonds.

Moreover, FDR's larger message punched through around the planet, and ultimately, 26 countries joined the Allied side in the war. To be sure, many of those countries made only token contributions to the war effort, and yet still, their contribution was valuable, adding to the international perception that the nations of the world were uniting to oppose fascism.

As they say, "Ideas have consequences," and in this instance, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms had big consequences. By highlighting America as the champion of justice and tolerance, they helped the U.S. gain moral and diplomatic support, and thus helped to win the great war.

Moreover, in the seven decades since, enshrined as national policy, the Four Freedoms have helped America to win (mostly) the peace here at home.

To be sure, the Four Freedoms, like all our freedoms, are constantly under threat. As we all know, freedom of speech is under insidious challenge here in the U.S.; on college campuses, in particular, the proto-totalitarian forces of political correctness seem to have gained the upper hand. And freedom of worship, too, is under fire, as Christians have learned to their dismay. In addition, we all know that freedom from fear is bitter joke to many Americans, because of domestic crime and unrest, or because of foolish foreign wars, or because of the surging threat from domestic terrorism—even as our own government insists on importing, at taxpayer expense, more possible terrorists.

And the fourth of FDR's freedoms, "freedom from want," also still raises hackles. Many libertarians, for example, inveigh against freedom from want as not a freedom at all, but rather as a threat—the threat of coercive taxation. One such is Edward L. Hudgins, writing for the Cato Institute; he has decreed the imputed evil of statism in Roosevelt's speech. Such "positive freedom," he wrote, could mean "that government must provide a house to those who can't afford one."

Indeed, Hudgins offers a forthright restatement of the libertarian stance against any government action to eliminate want:

In such a case either government agents must march you out at gunpoint and force you to build the house or do a kinder, gentler version of the same thing: tax you to pay to have one built. Someone's right to a house means you are deprived of your money.

And he closed with,

Freedom from want implies eternal satisfaction with all desires met. That is a utopia. And that is impossible. Just ask the Russians.

As Hudgins brings up the supposed threat of communism—that is, the idea that a government program equals Bolshevism—one is reminded of the danger of the *reductio ad absurdum*; that is, taking things to a ridiculous extreme. Or, to put the matter another way, we can recall this witticism: The four most important words in the English language are, “Up to a point.” Once again: not every government action takes us down the slippery slope to Soviet communism.

And so we can just say it: For the American government to establish a floor under people’s existence, such that they don’t starve or end up on the streets—well, that’s common sense, not communism. It’s enlightened and realistic leadership, taking into account the vagaries of modern life and the need to avoid domestic discord—to say nothing of simple human compassion.

To be sure, compassion comes in better and worse forms. Notably, we can admire the work-not-welfare programs—such as the Civilian Conservation Corps—that were championed by FDR in the 1930s. In addition, we can further admire the tough-love welfare reform spearheaded, more recently, by former Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson. And from those no-nonsense relief programs, one can draw inspiration about the controversies of today: Specifically, we don’t want a welfare system that encourages and subsidizes multi-generational dependency, and all the pathologies that go with it.

So today, it’s easy to criticize governmental foolishness; there’s plenty of that. Yet it’s hard, at least for elected officials if they wish to be re-elected, to take the libertarian argument to its full extreme. That is, it’s politically dangerous, often fatal, to pivot from a critique of governmental excess to a critique of basic earned-entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare—and yet that’s exactly what Hudgins does.

To be sure, Hudgins has plenty of fellow believers on his side. One can read, for example, the manifestos of Ayn Rand, Ludwig von Mises, or Murray Rothbard and learn the maximum case against even a minimum government safety net.

Yet there’s still one big problem with all these libertarian critiques: The American people don’t agree.

Let’s start with the program that both friends and foes would agree is the archstone of the mixed-economy welfare state: Social Security. When the program was enacted in 1935, the vote in the House was 372-33, and in the Senate, 77-6. So we can see, the program was extremely popular even before any retiree received a penny. And that’s not really surprising: Back then, the idea of guaranteeing dignity for the elderly was in the air; such programs had existed in Europe for decades, and in the decades since, the idea has spread around the world.

Yet even so, many libertarians, and even, at times, some Republican politicians, have chosen to make opposition to Social Security their signature issue—even if it never ends well. Here’s how the same Cato Institute recalled two failed Republican efforts in two different decades, the 1960s and the 1980s:

Barry Goldwater’s early support for privatizing Social Security in the 1964 presidential campaign is widely credited with having destroyed whatever slim hopes he may have had of

winning that race. And one of Ronald Reagan's worst political missteps was a short-lived effort to cap the benefits of Social Security.

Despite this dismal record, some GOPers have chosen to keep trying: In 2005, President George W. Bush, freshly re-elected, proposed the partial privatization of Social Security. Bush's plan was heavily hedged and safeguarded, and yet even so, the thought of messing with Social Security was anathema to most Americans, and so the bill never even came to a vote in either the Republican-controlled House or Senate. (Even so, in part because of the pro-Social Security backlash, the GOP lost control of both chambers in the 2006 midterms.)

Thus we can see that the core of "freedom from want" is well-protected—protected by the impermeable carapace of staunch public support.

So perhaps most of us can agree that all four of FDR's four freedoms—of speech, of worship, from fear, and yes, from want—aren't such a bad idea. Needless to say, some on the right, in their heart of hearts, may still wish to bury the idea of freedom from want, but perhaps the better angels of practicality will persuade them to find something more productive to worry about in public.

2. The Curious Case of the Inspiring Edward Conard

Thus as we make our peace with FDR's Four Freedoms—all the while, trying to perfect them, even as the simultaneous evils of oppression and anarchy are trying to subvert them—it's perfectly reasonable for liberty lovers to ponder new ways by which to advance liberty.

So now we might ask: What comes next? In particular, libertarians might ask themselves: What's the next frontier for freedom? And, hopefully, could there be more than one?

We can start by realizing that in the political realm—and it's hard to think of anything that happens in the real world without the interplay of politics—there will always be tradeoffs. That is, if libertarians want something, they must figure out how to get it done, and what it takes. As noted, *politics is the art of the possible*.

And here, I will freely confess, even proclaim, that I have been influenced by [Edward Conard](#), a former partner of Mitt Romney's at Bain Capital and, most recently, the author of [The Upside of Inequality: How Good Intentions Undermine the Middle Class](#). In this book, Conard wrestles with that key aspect of politics—*the art of the possible*.

Conrad himself is an unabashed free-market capitalist who first burst into prominence in 2012, declaring his full-throated support for Romney, Bain, and the capitalist system. Yet as we all remember, in 2012, that didn't work out so well. Not only did Romney lose, but since then, the rise of Bernie Sanders and his socialism tells us that neither private equity funds nor capitalism itself are popular.

In his new book, Conard shows that he has moved with the times. He puts forth an interesting and original argument: The real cause of the slow-growing economy of today is the shortage of human capital—that is, smart and skilled people who can apply the arts of innovation and entrepreneurship to existing problems.

Conard makes a good point: The economy has changed. In the past, what economists call the “factors of production” were typically defined as land, natural resources, and capital. It was these tangible inputs that, when combined together by brainy and hard-working people, created new kinds of output. Yet today, much of the economy has been virtualized, and so the old tangibles have been supplanted by new intangibles; indeed, one could even say that the most important factors of production today are highly intangible: IQ, adrenalin, and caffeine.

Of course, no advance in productivity happens automatically. Thus, as Conard argues, it’s vitally important to allow the processes of innovation and entrepreneurship to continue—and, indeed, for the sake of economic growth, to accelerate them. Which is to say, incentives matter. As Conard writes, “Taxation . . . appears to have large detrimental effects on risk-taking, innovation, productivity, and growth over the long run.”

Okay, so that’s Conard’s ultimate view, which will get no argument from me: We need low tax rates to encourage productive risk-taking. And without a doubt, Conard’s assertions, so far at least, are music to the ears of all freedom-lovers. Ayn Rand, for example, was all about the power of individual genius, and von Mises wrote a book called, simply, Human Action.

Of course, Romney thought the same thing, and we know what happened to him. And Donald Trump, too, thinks tax rates should be reduced—and at the moment, he’s behind in most polls.

And yet here’s where Conard gets interesting: He is far more than just a libertarian pamphleteer; while his own ideology is clear enough, he has also thought deeply about the art-of-the-possible point. And so he has some fresh suggestions as to winning over a skeptical public to his point of view.

In particular, Conard is willing to concede two big points to the populist-nationalists: Namely, that globalized trade, as well as immigration, has cost jobs and hurt ordinary workers’ incomes. And so Conard endorses Trumpian measures to close the border and limit trade deficits.

As Conard explained in a tweet, “Enough middle ground btwn @realDonaldTrump voters & free-marketers 2 ↑ working-class wages w/compromise.”

The point is that Conard is making a political-economic offer to the Trump voters, as well as blue-collar Sanders voters: *We will protect you against the gale winds of globalization, even as capitalists create more jobs here in the U.S. And in return, you must protect us against anticompetitive and unproductive confiscation. In other words, we need each other to fight the real enemy: the socialists, as well as the anti-growth greens and the anti-American multiculturalists.*

Thus we can see the outlines of an attractive political platform: jobs for workers, profits for owners. Why, one could even say that it looks a lot like America at its zenith, in the middle of the last century, when we not only won World War Two, but also drove the unemployment rate down to one percent—only this time, with much lower tax rates!

Thus in the person of Edward Conard, we can see a little bit of that FDR spirit—the spirit of charting a practical course that could generate a critical mass of support that will in turn stave off the crazies.

Conard's heterodox views have raised eyebrows on the right. That is, conservatives and libertarians who were with him on tax-rate reductions found themselves pulling back when they got to his prescriptions on immigration and trade. Indeed, Conard's platform is downright hateful to orthodox libertarians who want the "whole enchilada"—that is, all the policy prescriptions to be found at, say, the Cato website.

And yet in the real world, down below the ivory tower, most Americans, whether or not they support Trump, have already embraced such views. For example, according to a new poll from Harvard University, 54 percent of Democrats believe that free trade has lost more U.S. jobs than it has created, as well as 66 percent of independents and 85 percent of Republicans. Indeed, the same poll found that only eight percent of Republicans, 11 percent of independents, and 19 percent of Democrats think free trade has led to higher wages for American workers. We can sum up those findings: *A huge majority opposes the free-trade status quo, judging it to be harmful to American workers and their incomes.* (As an aside, we can marvel at all the billions that have been spent on behalf of favored libertarian causes, and how little effect such expenditures have had.)

It remains to be seen how Conard's policy prescription will fare in the ongoing battle of ideas: To his fans on the right, he's a champion of practical policies that might enable the prime goal, the preservation of incentives, to survive. And yet to his foes on the right, he's a squish and a sellout. And of course, to the resurgent left, he's just another rich fat-cat who should be soaked.

Still, most Americans, were they to hear of Conard's pragmatic synthesis, would probably respond favorably.

Okay, so now, in that same spirit of pragmatism, let's consider some other possibilities. Specifically, let's think about some new freedoms that are worth fighting for and that, indeed, might attract support for the center-right position from across the ideological spectrum.

Yet before we can proceed, let's first get something out of the way: Let's resolve to give up on the no-win war against Social Security and similar programs, especially earned entitlements, including Medicare. As we have seen, the national decision has already been made—we will be our brother's keeper. And as the last 80 years demonstrate, the ideological right can huff and puff all it wants, and still, the House of FDR still stands.

So let's stipulate that we accept FDR's Four Freedoms—all four of them. Let's say to those who wish to fight losing battles: *Do it on your own time, away from the center-right mainstream that seeks to win elections, enact reforms, and, yes, advance freedom in the future.*

So now let's consider prospects for freedom in the future.

3. The New Four Freedoms

Suppose a U.S. president, in some future state of the union address, were to outline this quartet of new freedoms:

1. The Freedom to Create
2. The Freedom to Be a Sovereign and Secure Individual

3. The Freedom to Enjoy a Long and Productive Life
4. The Freedom to Explore the Universe

So let's look at each in turn:

First, the Freedom to Create. It's true what they say: The power to tax is the power to destroy. So it follows, then, that freedom from oppressive taxation is the power to create. We can all think of clever, wonderful, even transformative products that emerged from the brow of some inventor and from the sweat-equity of some entrepreneur. We never want to lose that magic, and the prospect of more of it.

To be sure, to say "systematized creativity" is just another way of saying "free enterprise." Okay, so be it; free-marketeers have always expounded on the virtues of incentives—and they've always been right.

And yet as everyone in politics knows, being right isn't good enough—one has to be smart, and realistic. In this mistrustful climate—where so much creativity and productivity has been hied off to China, the public is no mood to hear arguments about the long-term benefits of free trade. Indeed, to be blunt about it, the American people are not going to provide safe harbor for innovators and entrepreneurs—that is, the legal protection against bandits and pirates, as well as national protection against foreign attackers—unless some benefit accrues to them.

Thus we come to the need for a revised social contract—that is, the terms by which we all agree to live with each other in this country. It seems safe to say that a system in which the jobs go overseas and the wealth accumulates to the one percent—that's not a system that's going to last for much longer. That is, if the political system can't hammer out a compromise in which everyone shares in the benefits of productivity growth, then, as a result, we'll get a new new political system, in which the Constitution, for example, could well be shredded. Or, as another possibility over the long run, if present trends continue, we'll suffer an erosion of national morale such that we are easy pickings for foreign invasion, even conquest.

Since neither of those are attractive options, let's focus on preserving our system—a system that has, in the past, found a way to provide for the interests of both capital and labor. And yet at the same time, let's not hide from changes that need to be made. We must heed the great voice of history that is counseling us, "Reform, that you may preserve."

Second, the Freedom to Be a Sovereign and Secure Individual. Do you remember the old days—that is, the 1990s—when the Internet was thought to be a tool of personal empowerment? Or even, some dared to say, of liberation? Today, we can probably all agree that the Net is a marvelous tool, but that the empowering, liberating vision has gone sadly haywire.

Specifically, we are coming to realize that the same tool that empowers us also exposes us. When Yahoo admits that 500 million customer accounts have been hacked in one fell swoop, we all get a wakeup call: The Internet, which was built, originally, for individual survivability, has now become a thing of collective vulnerability. That is, every day we wake up and wonder if we've been hacked, or otherwise violated.

And at the same time, every day we wake up and realize that big companies, as well as governments, now know exactly what we're doing, with a precision and granularity vastly exceeding anything that George Orwell ever dreamed of in *1984*. Our data—which is to say, our lives—are now both a target for enemies and a product for profit.

To be sure, a few tech savants might be able to encrypt their way out of this pervasive surveillance, and it's hard not to sympathize with them. And yet at the same time, we are reminded that terrorists, too, can “go dark.” So for the sake of our country, some judicious compromise will have to be found, protecting both privacy and security. The current status quo—in which hackers, corporations, and governments, including foreign governments, each get a piece of us—should not, and will not, stand.

So a president who offers a path to securing personal freedom and autonomy in cyberspace, while still securing legitimate property rights, and while also securing the nation against crime and terrorism, will be offering the American people, in effect, a new deal. And that proffered deal will, among other considerations, be a political winner.

Third, the Freedom to Enjoy a Long and Productive Life. If you want freedom, you must first be alive to enjoy it. That's an obvious enough point, but it seems to have escaped policy-makers in the last quarter-century.

That is, while Washington has been wrangling over the fine points of national health insurance, veritable epidemics of deadly disease have erupted in our midst.

We all know about Alzheimer's Disease, which exacts such a terrible toll on the personal health of many, as well as the fiscal health of all of us. And just in the last few years, new threats, such as the Zika and Ebola viruses, have emerged. Indeed, thanks to unchecked immigration, we are importing a raft of additional maladies, from dengue fever to extreme new forms of tuberculosis.

So we need a new commitment to curing disease itself, as opposed to simply to financing the care for its ravages. Fortunately, our own history is rich with examples of the successful, or at least mostly successful, combating of disease. Over the last two centuries, we have beaten back malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis, smallpox, polio, and AIDS. In some of these instances, such as smallpox, our victory has been complete; the dreaded virus was officially declared “eradicated” back in 1980. Yet at the same time, in regard to other plagues, such as TB, we are actually losing ground, as foolish and neglectful policies hold sway.

Meanwhile, other maladies, such as cancer, take some 600,000 lives a year—it killed even a multi-billionaire, Steve Jobs, at 56. It was nice that Vice President Joe Biden announced a “moon shot” against cancer earlier this year; it would have been nicer if the Obama administration had put real muscle behind the effort. The Obama-Biden administration could have drawn inspiration from the way that Franklin D. Roosevelt shouldered the vast public-private effort known as the March of Dimes in the 30s and 40s. That campaign, of course, led to the Salk Vaccine in 1955. Instead, this administration chose the way of the press release—and not much else.

Fortunately, even as this government flounders, philanthropy is stepping up. It's heartening that one Silicon Valley mogul, Sean Parker, recently committed \$250 million to curing disease, and that another mogul, Mark Zuckerberg, has committed \$3 billion. The rest of us can only hope that such big giving on behalf of cures—surely, the ultimate form of enlightened self-interest—

will continue, and that a new kind of virtuous one-upmanship will take hold among the one percent.

Yet in the meantime, we might further hope that the political system, too, can provide help. We can dream that a future president will see the value in establishing the right regulatory climate, as well as the right tax incentives, so that America, and humanity, can make more progress against common medical enemies. And also, critically, so that we can take steps to make sure that the health benefits of new medicines are widely shared. We can add: That's the way that we'll make federal healthcare programs, such as Medicare, more affordable: Healthier people, living and working longer, don't cost so much.

Fourth, the Freedom to Explore the Universe. It's startling to think that the the first American walked on the moon in 1969, nearly five decades ago, and that the last American to walk on the moon did so in 1972. We might look back at that epic achievement—and the subsequent abandonment of that achievement—and ask ourselves: *What have we been doing? What have we been thinking?*

No one doubts that space travel is expensive, even dangerous. And yet here again, a new generation of visionary billionaires—including Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Eric Schmidt—have charted out a new and better destiny for mankind in the stars. (In the meantime, it's not necessary to admire their terrestrial politics.) We don't yet know what will prove viable and what won't; we only know that it's important.

And why is that? We can trot out the usual arguments about the spirit of adventure and discovery—those are perfectly valid. And yet we can also cite a more gut argument: Eventually—and that “eventually” could come any time—this lonely planet will prove too small, and too fragile, to hold all of us. That is, one day, a great war, or a great epidemic, or a great something, will engulf us. And so with that dreadful fate in mind, it's best to compartmentalize humanity—to have, as it were, a lifeboat. As a Chinese proverb tells us, “The wise rabbit has three holes to hide in.” Today, it's little wonder that China has an advanced space program, full of military, as well as exploratory, potential. And so we, too, had better get cracking.

Moreover, once again, we can take note of political realities that our shaping the context of our time: In an era when the political system of this nation, and most of the nations of the world, is gathering in anger against the perceived abuses of the plutocracy, those same plutocrats are well advised to show that they are doing something beneficial with their money. Curing disease is one such benefit, traveling to space is another. (And sharing with workers, we might add, is a third.)

So there we have it: a New Four Freedoms. As noted, these new freedoms are only possible if we build them atop the platform of the original Four Freedoms, as well as, of course, the original freedoms delineated in the Constitution.

And yet as a nation, we can never sit still, either because of smugness or fatalism. The Founders intended for our freedom, and our country, to be dynamic.

Indeed, it seems fair to say that the New Four Freedoms would strengthen all the freedoms that we have already established.

And that should be enough to gladden the heart of every true patriot.