



HANDOUT



FREEDOM TO, FREEDOM FROM: THE *GRAFTON*

The idea of freedom seems simple. To be free is to be able to do what you want. However, we don't live alone in a state of nature. We live together in societies. Because we all need to co-exist in society, we cannot be completely free to do whatever we want.

If each of us was free to do whatever we want, life would be messy and dangerous. In fact, unlimited freedom would make life not very free at all.

To illustrate why there cannot be unlimited freedom, consider this extreme example. What would happen if every person was free to kill others as they pleased? In this situation, nobody would be free. Your freedom to live could be taken away at any moment, because somebody else is free to kill you.

Because absolute freedom is an impossibility, societies create rules and laws to shape our freedom. Underlying this logic is a belief that we should be free to do what we want, so long as our freedom does not unduly harm others.

As an everyday example of this—something less dramatic than murder—let's think about the laws and regulations that govern public sanitation.

You are not free to throw your garbage into the street. Littering is banned by most governments. This means that your freedom to litter is restricted by laws.

However, by restricting freedom to litter, we are creating freedom from disease. After all, history has shown that streets filled with litter gave rise to pollution-borne illness.

In fact, our desire to keep the environment clean has led to a complex system of laws and regulations governing waste disposal. In Saskatchewan, most urban municipalities have a public system of waste disposal. We toss our trash in a dumpster, and every week or two a truck takes it away for us, either to be recycled or to be placed in a landfill.

Because these laws and regulations free us from the task of waste disposal, a whole new world of freedoms is opened up. When the municipal government takes control of waste disposal, we have more freedom to read books, to meet friends, or to work at jobs. Without laws governing public sanitation, our time would otherwise be spent finding ways to deal with our trash.

Now, what happens if we are unhappy with waste disposal? Laws grant us many freedoms to resolve the problem. Freedom of expression gives us the right to voice our complaints. Freedom of association lets us form community associations to examine and demand better waste disposal. Democratic freedoms give us the right to vote for a new government to do a better job of collecting garbage. For that matter, democratic freedoms give us the right to run for government ourselves, if we think we can create a better system of waste disposal.

When we think about freedom this way, we can understand that our freedom is a complex mix of “freedom to” and “freedom from.” Laws grant us many “freedoms to,” the idea that we can intentionally pursue what we please. Laws

also ensure we have many “freedoms from,” the idea that we should be protected from obstacles that limit our lives.

To better-understand “freedom to” and “freedom from”, let’s consider how the castaways of the *Grafton* dealt with the concept of freedom.

BALANCING FREEDOMS: THE *GRAFTON*

The *Grafton* set sail from Sydney, Australia on November 12th, 1863. Aboard the schooner was a crew of five men, each a different nationality. The captain was American, Thomas Musgrave. The first mate was French, former sea captain François Édouard Raynal. One crew member was English, George Harris. The other was Norwegian, Alick McLaren. The cook, Henry Folgee, was Portuguese. For the era, it was a very diverse group of people.

The crew was hired by a group of investors to search New Zealand’s sub-antarctic islands for mining opportunities. The search came up dry, so the crew headed to Auckland Island, a rocky outpost about 450 kilometres south of New Zealand. There they would hunt seals before returning to Australia.

On New Year’s Day, 1864, a fierce storm struck Auckland Island. The *Grafton*, anchored in Carnley Harbour, endured two days of battering before its anchor finally broke loose. The boat smashed into rocks near the shore, and tipped onto its side. All five men made it to the nearby rocky beach.

The ship was damaged beyond repair, but did not break up. The castaways stripped the *Grafton* of all valuables and ferried them to their camp using the ship’s small lifeboat. They had guns, navigational equipment, food, tools, sailcloth, and about two months’ worth of provisions, all while the island had plenty of fresh water, along with birds, seals, and roots to eat. The men had enough resources to survive, and agreed that everything would be shared equally.

The men’s general whereabouts were known, so they believed that a search party would arrive in a few months. To ensure survival while waiting, their

first major task was to build a cabin. In a few weeks, they built a remarkable little home. Just under 400 square feet, it even had two small windows and a stone fireplace.

With shelter created, the men set their sights on fairly organising their day-to-day duties. Importantly, a one-week rotating duty as cook was created. The cook would stay back and maintain the cabin and prepare food, while others explored the island, hunted seals and other game, and set markers in to alert passing ships of their presence. If one man fell sick, the others would care for him and pick up his duties.

After dark, there wasn’t much to do. This prompted the men to create a night school. As Raynal wrote in his memoir:

An idea occurred to me, which I immediately broached: namely, to establish amongst ourselves an evening school, for mutual instruction. Harry and Alick could neither read nor write; we would teach them; they, in return, could teach us their native tongues, of which we were ignorant. George, who had received the elements of education, could pursue the study of mathematics under our direction. I, on my part, would give lessons in French. My proposal was received with so much enthusiasm that it was resolved to put it into immediate execution, and from that evening we were alternately the masters and pupils of one another. These new relations still further united us; by alternately raising and lowering us one above the other, they really kept us on a level, and created a perfect equality amongst us.

The school proved to be a valuable use of time, building camaraderie and helping pass time.

The men even took in two parrots as pets, and befriended a playful domestic cat. The cat likely was a holdout from an abandoned settlement on the other side of Auckland Island.

Overall, the men were getting on well. They shared duties, cared for each other, and helped each other



The Grafton castaways, as illustrated by Alfred de Neuville.

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learn. As Raynal wrote, they “lived together since our shipwreck in peace and harmony—I may even say in true and honest brotherhood”. Yet, there was the odd disagreement. This worried Raynal.

Raynal believed that human nature wasn’t perfect. Small disagreements, if left unchecked, could fester and lead to the breakdown of the castaway’s unity. As Raynal wrote in his memoirs:

It was evident that we had no strength except in union, that discord and division must be our ruin. Yet man is so feeble that reason, and self-respect, and even the considerations of self-interest, do not always suffice to keep him in the path of duty.

In other words, Raynal believed that even the most-tightly bonded people will sometimes act poorly, make mistakes, or act in ways that could harm their collective society.

Raynal came to believe that for the castaways, absolute freedom was not possible. They needed to set up a formal system of rule on the island. As he said,

An external regimen is necessary, a strict and formal discipline, to protect [man] against his own weakness.

And so the men created an “external regimen” to shape their freedom: they wrote a formal constitution.

The constitution was not very long. However, it contained the basic rules of power and responsibility, and provided the castaways with democratic rights.

The constitution’s first five clauses were largely centred on the responsibilities of the “chief of the family”:

1. *To maintain with gentleness, but also with firmness, order and harmony among us.*
2. *By his prudent advice to put aside every subject of discussion which might lead to controversy.*
3. *In case any serious dispute arose in his absence, the parties to it were immediately to bring it before him; then, assisted by the counsel of those who had held aloof, he was to adjudicate upon the matter, stating who was in the right, and reprimanding him who was in error. If the latter, disregarding the sentence pronounced, persisted in his wrong, he would be excluded from the community, and condemned to live alone in another part of the island, for a longer or shorter period, according to the gravity of his fault.*
4. *The chief of the family would direct the hunting expeditions, as well as all other labours; he would set to each man his appointed task, without being himself excused from giving a good example by the strict discharge of his own duty.*
5. *In urgent circumstances, he would not be allowed to give a decision without the assent of all, or, at least, of a majority of his comrades.*

The constitution's sixth clause ensured that the leader did not have absolute power. He could be voted out at any time:

6. *The community reserves to itself the right of deposing the chief of the family, and electing another, if at any time he shall abuse his authority, or employ it for personal and manifestly selfish purposes.*

The men unanimously voted Captain Musgrave as their first leader.

Once a week, the men pledged loyalty to their constitution. Indicating how well the men worked together, the harshly punitive aspects of the constitution never were exercised. For example, the banishment clause for "persisting in wrongs" was never used, and the men never removed Captain Musgrave from his leadership position.

Of course, some conflict still remained. Perhaps the biggest risk to the men's solidarity came about from game sets that they built: a chess set, a dominoes set, and a deck of cards. Captain Musgrave, they discovered was a very poor loser when it came to card games. If the Captain lost, his temper would spark up, leading to sore feelings amongst the castaways. For the sake of solidarity, the cards were destroyed.

After a full year had passed, the men grew worried. It was clear that a rescue was not coming and the seals—their primary source of food—were moving on to new grounds. They either had to leave the island or starve.

The castaways created a plan to modify their lifeboat and sail to New Zealand. It took almost half a year, but they managed to build up the boat's sides, add a keel, and deck over much of the top. The boat was completed almost 19 months after being wrecked.

The modified boat could only fit three men. The most-experienced sailors—Musgrave, Raynal, and McLaren—were chosen to make the dangerous 450-kilometre trip northwards.

The three set sail on July 19th, 1865. Five sea-soaked days later, they arrived at Stewart Island, on

the south end of New Zealand. The men set to work organising a rescue mission, and a month later, on August 24th, Raynal was back on Auckland Island to pluck Harris and Folgee from its rocky beach.

WHY SOCIETY SHAPES FREEDOM

Many factors help explain why the *Grafton* castaways survived: the ship overturned close to shore and did not sink, there were natural resources on Auckland Island, and the castaways had a sense of camaraderie and acted with mutual responsibility. These factors understood, we should not lose sight of a fourth factor: the men understood that there could not be absolute freedom on Auckland Island.

The *Grafton* castaways ruled themselves through a mixture of "freedom to" and "freedom from". Instead of absolute freedom, they wrote a constitution that outlined their rights and responsibilities. And in their day-to-day behaviour, they judiciously restricted their own freedoms, from prohibiting the teasing of seals to banning cards to organising a night school to constructively pass what would otherwise have been idle hours.

The wreck of the *Grafton* reminds us that successful societies will find ways to navigate the scope of their freedoms. Just as importantly, it also shows us that rules alone will not lead to success: rules can only work if the members of a society act with cooperation, camaraderie, and mutual trust.

DISCUSS

1. Each *Grafton* castaway came from a unique background. Yet, they bound themselves together under a constitution. The constitution was something of a civil religion: a set of values they respected. They even pledged allegiance to their constitution once a week, alongside their weekly prayers. As Raynal said:

"It was no mere empty ceremony. Each of us felt there was a certain solemnity in this voluntary engagement of our conscience."

- a) Can a diverse society succeed if its members do not share some basic beliefs?
- b) Do we share a civil religion as Canadians? If so, what is it?

- a) What kinds of “freedoms from” are created by mandatory schooling?
- b) Should young people have the freedom to decline a formal education?

2. Captain Musgrave’s logbook included this observation about health and exercise:

“The men continue quite healthy, which is well, for I have not even a dose of salts to give them or take myself, whatever happens. The only medicine we have is plenty of exercise, which is not only conducive to health, but dispels gloom, and makes people really cheerful.”

- a) Why is it that healthy people create a healthy society?
- b) What ways can the state help create healthy people?

3. According to both Musgrave and Raynal, everyone enjoyed the night school. Musgrave’s logbook added his thoughts on how the school worked as a form of social control:

“I have adopted a measure for keeping them in order and subjection, which I find to work admirably, and it also acts beneficially in my own mind.”

The Captain’s thoughts on the school raise several questions.

- a) Do we provide public education for the benefit of the individual? Or do we provide public education for the benefit of society?
- b) Is there some truth to both of those positions above?

4. Schooling for young people is mandatory in Saskatchewan.