

FREERANGE LIVING - EXPLORING THE RANGES

Freerange Living ---- A Concept

Cultures – the 'mass' environment in which people live in societies, obviously vary quite a bit in terms how much freedom they afford to individuals, for them to practice their own 'freerange' self-expression. Autocratic cultures could be said to tend to be generally on the repressive side towards self-expression, whereas freeworld cultures have individual rights written into them, although they might still exert considerable cultural pressure and influences on individuals within them.

The recent commercially-orientated consumer culture of the UK, with implicit emphases on profits, wealth, power and fame, might attract more than a few individuals, but then might not particularly suit others, who maybe interested in a more questing approach to life, searching for 'deeper values' and fuller meaning, 'life explorers' who could be described as 'freerange' lifestylers, interested in developing 'being' as well as 'having'.

One recent broadsheet analysis, though, suggested that in recent times, western style cultures have been plagued with attacks of 'affluenza', under which people then become 'over comfortable', stop 'questing/enquiring' and became resistant to other ideas/ways. The same commentator then went on to say that such a materialistically-focused mode came with the price of having lived/living 'beyond means' and accumulated significant 'millstones' in the form of debt – small UK businesses, for instance, according to latest figures carry on average £30K debt mainly of the high cost plastic variety, costly to service and reportedly individuals are often relatively heavily indebted. Such trends may well have worked against individual 'freeranging', along maybe with a general cultural trend towards acceptance of 'consumerism life'.

'Freeranging'

When the notion of 'freerange living' crops up in conversation, people often 'get it' pretty much straight away. That shouldn't perhaps be too surprising, given the frequency with which the 'freerange' concept has occurred in recent years. It is of course more commonly used in relation to animals, and there is general understanding that it refers to animals having 'natural' conditions (to them) in which to live and express themselves, which appears to have arisen from the feeling, amongst some at least, that man should be less their captors and exploiters, and more their facilitators and 'caretakers', which also coincides with the idea that sustainable systems can be more productive over time, over the longer-term, than exploitative systems. David Attenborough, for instance, argued in a recent TV programme about Darwin and his evolution theory, that as therefore all animals, including the 'advanced' human animal, are related, man has no 'automatic' right to dominion over other animals.

It's a cold frosty morning here on the 'eco' micro-holding ('small smallholding') and the birds feeding on the bird feeders just eight feet away from the window of the 'rough' office here in the paddock are giving it some - a good example in itself of 'freeranging' - is this part of the reason why wild birds can be so captivating? - with 'man' in this case offering a supporting hand? Although battery (intensive, indoor large-scale production) of meat and egg-laying chickens versus freerange, outdoor chicken rearing and egg production is the most commonly used example to demonstrate the freerange concept, dairying also provides an interesting example. Back in the 1960's/1970's, in the UK dairy, cows were generally grazed on tight rationing systems, either behind a controlling electric fence ('strip grazing'), or in small parcels of land ('paddock grazing'). Then a quisitive dairy farmer in Buckinghamshire took the bold, and to some, alarming step, of opening up the whole grazing area for the cows to 'roam graze' on, and follow their natural grazing behaviour (a system called 'set stocking').

Keeping cows on a tight, rationed system of grazing had the effect of making grazing competitive, with the older, bigger cows subsequently getting a better deal, i.e. more grub, than the younger, lighter cows, which were generally the newer cows in their first lactation (their first milking period). Not getting sufficient intake of food would then potentially negatively affect them in at least two important ways.

Firstly it could well lower their current lactation milk yield, lowering then overall production, and secondly it could limit their needed continued body growth, then potentially adversely affecting their next (i.e. second) lactation. Given at that time a 25% replacement rate (eg. for a 100 cows, each year 25 'old ones' would go, to be replaced with 25 'young ones'), then the make-up of the herd would consist, at any one time, of 50% first and second lactation cows, so the potential impact of any negative effects from over-competitive grazing could be pretty sizeable. The new 'roam' ('freerange') grazing system noticeably did away with such competition and all the cows appeared considerably less stressed.

Wider application-----?

Conceivably, such a 'freerange' concept could apply to the human animal too, in that given the right 'natural' conditions, there could then be the outcome of fuller, productive 'natural' human expression, which is presumably one of the key purposes of individual freedoms – the right to self-expression without fear of come-back. Whilst this condition could be said to exist in the UK, reservationists have questioned the seemingly strong degree to which the current 'commercialised' culture exerts pressure on people to conform to its implicit objectives. One of these appears to have been that people should entrepreneurially 'chase the dollar' and seek to become wealthy, presumably working on the notion that wealth equates to human well-being. Such a notion, taken 'automatically', is probably at least questionable and some have commented that such a generalised objective could seek to work to the culture's benefit rather than that of the individual, supported by the charge that the culture has promoted a 'live to work' ethic, rather than that of 'working to live'.

In the age of 'bio-diversity', it could be reasonable to assume that people are by nature to some extent bio-diverse, and that therefore need the capacity and space to determine for themselves what factors are key to their own well-being. Such self-determination could well vary between individuals, and of course will be affected by the degree to which the prevailing culture seeks to influence and/or control people; 'freerangers' are perhaps likely to be amongst those who wish to exercise their 'freedom of the individual' rights to decide for themselves in life.

Current cultural 'pressures'

In the current (UK) culture the strong degree of focus on self-gain, together with the 'laissez-faire' conditions of the 'free market', appears to have had the effect, though, of releasing people from moral and social ties, with the effect of giving a green light more to the 'exploitative' route rather than the 'caring and facilitating' approach, which seems to be supported by the findings of a recent large UK survey of employees, which indicated that a largish majority felt 'uncared for' and 'under recognised'. Presumably then, exercising care and having 'care' values become less 'valid' and 'problematical' in such a 'narrowly dimensioned' culture, which might present limitations to freerangers who might seek to operate over a multi-dimensioned range, including social needs.

The two factors that a super-competitive, self-orientated culture appears to major on is that of 'dollar chasing' and money accumulation, and the pursuit of 'size' - 'big is best'. The latter could, of course, also presumably be a reaction to any heightened insecurity that such a competitivised, free-market type of culture engenders, i.e. in the 'free-for-all' jungle, it pays to be one of the bigger beasts.

Not that the adoption in the UK of the American free-market model was necessarily meant to turn out like that - the original notion of 'free market' was no doubt based on the economists' 'perfect market' concept, in which there exist both many buyers and sellers to then give, via both 'perfect' demand and supply, a 'perfect' outcome i.e. a 'true' price level and a 'perfect' market reflecting true levels of demand and supply, unable to transmute into anything more sinister, (such as a 'big beast' jungle) - fine in theory but 'utopian' in practice maybe, particularly without the existence of effective measures to ensure the 'level playing field' of 'many buyers and sellers'.

Anyone who's worked in an environment in which money outcomes feature prominently, will probably attest to its 'cloying influence' and focus-narrowing ability. Another (liberating-?) take on money is that it in reality is just a medium with which to facilitate the exchange of goods and services, and also it's 'mist-ifying' propensities have been known for sometime, referred to as the 'money veil', for which there's a need to search behind to get in touch with reality. In the past, people have recognised the potential 'over' power of money, as witnessed by common sayings such as '*money is a good servant but a bad master*' and '*money is the root of evil*'.

Culture countering-----?

Given that a culture tends to be established by its 'drivers' – government and big players eg. business-- and a minority may well have voted for the former, and no-one for the latter, there's then no guarantee that the culture is going to be in line with everyone's values and wishes; there could well be a considerable number for whom it's not particularly suited. If it doesn't 'suit', then in a 'free' society the individual then has the option to, within legal and social limits, to choose their own options i.e. to become, to some extent or other, 'freerangers', as many do:

S had a 'high-powered', very well paid job in computers. His employers, though, wanted a very full pound of flesh wanting him to work long and hard for his money, leaving him little time, opportunity or energy to explore other areas he was interested in. One of these was nature and the environment, which he used to satisfy by spending his leave volunteering for an 'eco-living' group.

During one of these sojourns he suddenly decided to 'drop out' for awhile to spend time leading a fairly solitary existence in a hut in a wood at the 'eco centre' to 'sort things out', as he said. In time, he did go back into the computer field, but this time setting up with a couple of like-minded ex-colleagues, a bespoke trouble-shooting and special projects outfit, working sometimes 'crazy hours' but now with the opportunity to take downtime to cater more fully for their needs.

Aiming to limit the extent to which work can rule life can be a key 'freerange' move: from limiting work hours by opting for, say, fractional appointments (less money but more 'life balance'), to organising own lifestyle enterprises (doing what brings enjoyment, working hard now but less in future etc.) to 'opting/semi-opting out' (eg. group organised around a 'community' farm to satisfy basic living needs and then give four days a week 'individual' time). Whilst a common theme maybe that of restricting 'dollar chasing' to then fulfill other life needs, in a money economy a certain amount of 'dollar chasing' is necessary and probably inevitable: the question for the 'freeranger' might be whether there's a too strong emphasis on it, which can then conflict with other needs satisfaction-?

The 'needs array'-----

A fairly common cultural notion along the lines of '*people work for money – it's all about money*' appears to have become prevalent in recent times and it could be said that modern culture to some extent has followed such lines. Whilst such no doubt can be a truism, in that the more 'money conditioning' that exists, the more it's likely to happen, motivation theorists have long queried money's longer-term sustainable motivational powers. (see *Freeranging : Freerange Approaches to Work* – e-book available from this site).

These theorists argued that work efforts induced by money rewards weren't *motivated* work efforts at all – they didn't stem from peoples' internal desire to make such efforts. Rather they'd been *moved* to make work efforts by an *external* inducement- and as such it was *movement* not *motivation*. Motivation – peoples' internal desire to make effective efforts - came from impulses to meet their needs, some of which, but not necessarily all, could be met by money.

A large survey of 'smaller' farmers in the USA concluded that independence was a common strong need for them, and that there was evidence that they were willing to forego a certain amount of financial gain in favour of independence.

Abraham Maslow, allegedly the first psychologist who actively researched what were 'healthy human needs', came up with his 'Hierarchy of needs' theory. He found that needs 'ascended' from basic survival levels (eg. needs for food, shelter etc.), to security needs, then to a set of differing social needs, to then a 'summit' level of 'full personal development' needs (sometimes called 'self-actualisation' needs).

This last level of needs indicates the possible limitations of money as a total instrument of people management or individual self-management, in that 'full personal development' needs tend to be 'being' needs rather than 'having' needs. The availability of money might influence the ability to reach and satisfy such need levels, but mightn't necessarily guarantee the same, for instance..

In the past, economists have, for instance, referred to the 'money veil', again as a reference to the fact that money can be an 'incomplete formula' in terms of describing human behaviour. 'Freerangers', then, might for instance see

money as a limiting medium in their quest to 'live and learn', and particularly to reaching the 'higher' need levels and their satisfactions. The degree to which money importance is ascribed in a modern materialistic-type culture could then be a barrier to fuller personal development, again a potential problem for freerangers, for whom it might then be useful to have/develop an awareness of such potential pitfalls.

Certain classicly 'freerange'-type values and traits may then have to be self-nourished by freerangers themselves, such as independence itself, the trait of enquiry/discovery, the development of non-pecuniary values such as generosity, compassion and caring and the low-fear, low 'competitive' outlook of 'live and let live', for instance. One key area could well be that of 'care', in that the modern 'free market' (or 'free-for-all' market -?) has been said to be characterised by high degrees of competitiveness, strong drives for high profits then resulting in high short-term profit focus, a concentration on self-gain, with by default a less than necessary degree of social focus and people respect.

Care and respect, it's said, have then been casualties of such a 'limited-dimensioned' culture, resulting in unconducive conditions for all those with longer-term 'caring' predispositions (eg. maybe a 'real' answer to getting the caring professions 'caring' more, is to show them more care in the first place-?) Longer-term operators such as growers and farmers, tend to be aware of, for instance, the longer-term health of the soil, and the need to 'husband' such important resources for their continued longer-term health and productivity; 'care' and longer-term 'husbandry' may well be 'freeranger'-type traits ---- ?

'H---a-----p----p----y' ---?

'To be happy' may well not be a too uncommon goal, and not just for freerangers, but exactly what might it mean? Does it mean, for instance, to experience the 'immediate' sensation of 'happiness', or could it mean to gain a longer-term satisfaction of 'fulfillment', which presumably might be then be also more long lasting - ? Could money, in fact, even be more of a 'pitfall' factor than a 'human happiness' factor, as the psychologist Erich Fromm concluded from his researches amongst materially well-off Americans-? Assuming 'freerangers' are likely to be people maybe not over prone to 'enculturation' and want to seek their own answers, the prospect, if it's so, of fulfillment providing a more abiding form of satisfaction, than say, 'instant happiness', may be more appealing - ?

Aiming for the more durable form of 'fulfillment satisfaction fits in then with the Maslovian pattern of human needs, and in particular with the 'higher' self-actualisation level need, which then implies the need for the individual to progress through all the need levels, individual and social, to arrive at the self-actualisation stage which offers then the prospect of ('the fullest') fulfillment. Maslow then reported to have found amongst the 'self-actualisers' he identified, reasonably frequent instances of 'peak' experiences: heightened experiences of intense joy, heightened awarenesses and human empathy (he went on to write a further book entitled '*The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*' about this area) . Such 'peak' type fulfillment experiences might then tie in with eastern spiritual concepts such as *satori* and *samhedi*, forms of expanded consciousness said to deliver 'bliss' states to their experiencers, and to be gained by a process such as:

person (i.e. the individual experiencing many sides to their persona) > *individual* (the person now gaining the inner strength to 'be themselves' with others) > '*supra-person*' (now progressed via awareness to beyond the 'self-confines', to the universal).

The last stage may then tie in with the Maslow-reported 'peak experiences', which might in themselves offer indication/support that such 'higher' fulfillment levels, whilst maybe rare, can exist in practice, and that 'freeranging', in the sense of gaining strength by the process Charles Handy, the Uk business guru, has called 'honourable individualism', can play an important role in the process.

'Big is best-----?'

'Small', it seems, may no longer be too 'beautiful', as against Fritz Schumacher's assertions in his classic book. Has, though, the stable door been too easily opened and the horse bolted? If so, the world, run and organised as it is by people, could be said to be heading down a 'big is best' route, which may well not be the best news for the 'micro' organism that is the individual, and individual rights - ? There appears to be pressures, direct and indirect, for people to fit the 'largist' system, which presumably then work against Charles Handy's concept of 'honourable individualism', and of course the practice of independent-minded, self reliant and responsible freeranging.

In the UK rural sector, for instance, a concern exists that small independent dairy producers will be and are being 'squeezed out' by large concerns with their mantra of 'big is best', to be replaced by very large, factory-ised indoor milk production units, justified on the single-dimensioned financial 'economies of scale' argument.

In a recent UK TV programme, Monty Halls highlighted how small fishermen under livelihood threat on the east coast of America had taken 'freeranger' initiative to sell direct to customers, freerangers themselves looking for fresh, taste-full, environmentally-friendly produce , whilst also enjoying supporting local smaller-scale freeranging endeavour.

Freerange spirit-----?

People over time have, for instance, taken on their own individual 'freerange' quests and challenges, from sailing solo around the world, say, to climbing mountains, to scientific discovery, to operating rescue services, to successful family and community living, for instance. All practising their own unique 'freerange' self-expression and often involving exploration, challenge and discovery, whilst at the same time experiencing self-discovery and self-development, for which maybe more single-minded focus on wealth creation maybe more limited - ?

Thinking and deciding for oneself would seem to be a common denominator for freerangers, moving away from 'paternalistic' influences but then presumably with the 'cost' of having to accept 'self-responsibility', similar to the creeds of zen religion which has it that there is no such thing as total freedom, in that it comes with the price of having to then accept responsibility, which undoubtedly many freerangers likely take on board along with self-discipline and self-integrity.

The 'freeranger' approach could also be said to often centre around what internally interests an individual, what arouses their passion and engages their 'human spirit', which is seemingly an unidentifiable entity said to be 'unquenchable'. 'Freerangers' could also be said to be those seeking 'big' world living, rather than any 'small' world life limited to just within their own self-generated desires and thoughts. And even in a modern culture often so seemingly geared towards 'large', therefore at the potential detriment of 'small', individuals can find ways of nurturing their independent soul and spirit - look at Nelson Mandela incarcerated all those years and yet still keeping his flame flickering.

The range of '*Freerange*' booklets/books available from this website in 'e' form, seeks to try to support by exploring the 'freerange' territory further, using analyses of current culture, actual 'freeranger' case-studies, examining ideas and strategies for 'freerange' living and offering some tools (eg. *Freerange Lifestyle Enterprise Planning* e-book from this site). Nevertheless, the analyses, ideas and descriptions come from the outlook of one interested, semi-qualified individual, and therefore by definition will be limited; prescriptive admonitions are surely beyond the scope of any work dedicated to 'honourable individualism' and offering encouragement for self-determination and responsibility.

Good freerangin' -----