

## Abstract

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The topic I've been asked to address, "Freedom, Virtue and Self-Interest," combines three of the largest concepts in the human language. Each of these terms has centuries of scholarship behind it. Each has called politicians, theologians, and philosophers to contemplate the impact of these ideas on everything from the austere corridors of power to the intimate relationships of family. Each has filled entire libraries. And I've kindly been given 30 minutes to address them-which by my calculations means that each gets ten minutes. Actually, as a journalist, that doesn't bother me. I'm accustomed to the enforced discipline of rhetorical compression, requiring one to say all that must be said in a few hundred words. Journalism is at its best not when it explains issues in great detail-that's what research and scholarship are for-but when it translates those explanations into the language of civil discourse. Journalism also sets agendas. Let me try, then, to translate these three great ideas-especially the second, "virtue"-into everyday language. And let me try to explain why one of these ideas-virtue-belongs at the very top of the global agenda for the 21st century. Now, in posing the issue this way, I don't mean to slight freedom and

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>self-interest. To speak of these two ideas is to speak of human rights.  
 >This year is, as you know, the 50th anniversary of the Universal  
 >Declaration of Human Rights. And these two ideas are central to that  
 >declaration. In the past half-century, it has become remarkably clear that  
 >humanity has a core, inherent right to freedom-usually understood as the  
 >political right of unrestricted movement, unfettered access to information,  
 >and democratic choice. It has also become clear that humanity has a right  
 >to express an enlightened self-interest-typically understood as an economic  
 >capacity for self-determination, free enterprise, and open-market  
 >entrepreneurialism. In the last fifty years, these twin ideas-often  
 >reduced to their shorthand phrases "democracy" and "capitalism"-have become  
 >the dominant drivers of social reform throughout the world.  
 >But there are two sides to this coin. If "rights" appears on one side, what  
 >shows up on the other side is "responsibilities." Rights is all about what  
 >I am owed. Responsibilities is all about what I owe others. Rights  
 >typically involves claims, assertions, regulations, and ultimate  
 >enforcement. Responsibilities typically involves commitments, promises,  
 >obligations, reciprocity-what a 19th century British parliamentarian, Lord  
 >Moulton of Bank, called "obedience to the unenforceable."  
 >Lord Moulton used that phrase to define ethics. And he drew a sharp  
 >distinction between ethics and law. Law, he said, was obedience to the  
 >enforceable. For our purposes, we might put it this way: Rights tend to  
 >depend upon regulations and organized authority, while responsibilities  
 >tend to depend upon virtues and values. We have had fifty years of  
 >insisting on the language of rights-and we have made, as a result, some  
 >extraordinary steps forward. It is time, now, to spend the next fifty  
 >years paying equal attention to our responsibilities. In fact, let me wind  
 >this assertion one notch tighter. Unless in the next half-century, we put  
 >the same energy into responsibilities and values that we have given to  
 >rights and requirements in the last half-century, the danger is that we  
 >will not survive the 21st century with the ethics of the 20th century.  
 >That's a strong statement. So let me build the case to support it.

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 >[I will here use the case of Chernobyl, which I was one of the first  
 >western journalists ever to visit, to make the case for the global  
 >disasters than arise when ethics is disregarded. Chernobyl, I will point  
 >out, did not arise from a mechanical failure or a human error, but from a  
 >moral meltdown. I'll also use the case of the Exxon Valdez, where the  
 >captain was fully within his rights to do what he did, but where his  
 >actions evinced a profound lack of responsibility.]  
 >[I will also speak of my participation in a high-level working group  
 >convened in January in Valencia, Spain, by Federico Mayor, Director General  
 >of UNESCO, and chaired by Justice Goldstone of South Africa. Our purpose:  
 >Draft a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities to parallel the  
 >Declaration of Human Rights. The task, in fact, was to produce a global  
 >code of ethics for the 21st century.]  
 >[I'll then make the point that such a code requires that there be a  
 >universal set of moral values upon which to base it. Is there such a set?  
 >Our research at the Institute for Global Ethics suggests that there is. In  
 >global interviews published in my book "Shared Values for a Troubled  
 >World," in focus groups around the world, and in a pilot survey conducted  
 >at Mikhail Gorbachev's State of the World Forum in 1996, we found profound  
 >similarities in values underlying the obvious differences of cultures.





>Overall, we find five values to be universally held: compassion, honesty,  
 >fairness, responsibility, and respect. These values appear unaffected by  
 >gender, nationality, or degree of religiosity.]  
 >[I'll talk about our next steps, which involve a three-part survey in  
 >Mexico, Canada, and the United States (the three nations of the North  
 >American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA) that we are planning in  
 >conjunction with George Gallup, Jr. and the Gallup Institute, and where we  
 >expect we'll find the same values.]  
 >[Finally, I'll make the case for a global values survey to be conducted  
 >simultaneously around the world, in as many countries as possible, in the  
 >early months of the 21st century. Our work so far suggests, as an  
 >hypothesis, that such a survey would find strong similarities of moral  
 >values underlying and uniting the different cultures-going far deeper than  
 >the overlays of race, economic system, political structure, religion, and  
 >ethnic expression. We expect, in fact, to find people everywhere affirming  
 >the five core values. And we expect that they will define them in very  
 >much the same ways. There will differences in the ways they put them into  
 >practice, the moral boundaries within which they exercise them, and the  
 >priorities they assign to them. But that will not obscure the fact that,  
 >at bottom, we all hold to the same core values. Using some insights from  
 >an interview I did with Jane Goodall, I'll make the case that the essence  
 >of our humanness-the thing that most distinguishes us from chimps and other  
 >forms of life-is our moral sense, rooted in these core values.]  
 >[I'll conclude by calling for a new effort to articulate and affirm these  
 >global values in our next fifty years as a means of providing the basis for  
 >conflict resolution on a world scale. The most important message we can  
 >send forth at the dawn of the new millennium is that "We are one world."  
 >That message need be neither naive nor superficial, but can-it we actually  
 >do the work and assemble the information-be rooted in proof so persuasive  
 >that it will itself help set the agenda for the new millennium.]

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