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Constrictions of Democracy

Worldwide, and throughout history, people have developed diverse opinions, norms and ideologies. Ideologies satisfy matters of self-interest, purpose of life, survival, interpretation of the past and present, and a goal for the future. They have a strong emotional appeal and provide a simple picture of the world. A community achieves its collective goals, however, through a government which makes laws, interprets them and carries them out. In today's modern society, as average people are sweeping the planet with power and influence, democracy is emerging as a means for control and government to fall to the hands of the masses. For the first time in history more than half of the world exists as democracy. Although this is extremely momentous, democracy is not a new idea. Democracy flourished in fifth century b.c. Athens, when every class of citizens took an active part in political life. In the world of this new millenium, as countries grow continuously more multicultural, citizens look to democracy as the best way to secure unity in diversity. Unity in society is manifested by the acknowledgment of common interests and values, co-operation, participation in government processes, and a general willingness to conform to decisions resulting from the interaction of competing interests and opinions. Unity is preserved because of the knowledge that the democratic process gives opportunities for changes in policy. Democracy is a process of government characterized by freedom of opportunity for all individuals and groups to influence, if they can, the course of governmental action and by organizational arrangements which provide for the making of final policy decisions by officials chosen for limited terms of service, and therefore replaceable from time to time, by an electorate composed of people able to meet liberal voting qualifications. Democracy is supported by four pillars, which are the pre-eminence of law, an informed citizenry, an active, participating citizenry and respect of basic rights and liberties. Governments are instituted to people to protect their inherent and inalienable rights, such as freedoms of speech, expression, press, religion, assembly, association and fair trial. Widespread demands for equality, however, result in intervention in the lives of individuals. Since this inevitably results in a loss of liberty, democratic government may threaten the liberty which it is supposed to protect. Should democracy place limits on basic human rights and liberties? One opinion clearly states that limits must be placed in order to prevent chaos and anarchy. An opposing view states that everyone's freedom must be preserved at all costs. J.S. Mill held the view that democracy is a preventative of excessive intervention in the affairs of individuals. This states that freedoms are created by democracy. Thomas Jefferson believed that, "all men are created equal ... with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." He implied that no limits should be placed on these certain rights within democracy. Some extremists believe that we must fight for our freedoms, because democratic techniques merely conceal the reality of oppressive rule by few, or oligarchy. It can clearly be seen, however, that democracy should place limits on basic human rights and liberties to provide the most freedom and safety for the greatest amount of citizens.

Freedom of speech, expression, and freedom of the press are basic rights that are tainted with controversy, within democracy. Freedom of speech and expression directs any democracy. This freedom is relied on to encourage debate and vote, assembly and protest, worship and justice for all. Before people can govern themselves, they must be free to express themselves. For an open exchange of ideas and opinions, truth will eventually win out over falsehood, other values will be understood, compromise can be viewed, and progress will soon be reached. Democratic governments do not control, dictate or judge the content of written and verbal speech. In cases where the news media or other organizations abuse freedom of speech with information which is false, irresponsible or in bad taste, the government does nothing. Citizens in a democratic society defend this right out of conviction that, in the end, open debate will lead to greater truth and wiser public actions than if speech and dissent are suppressed. Adequate sources of information are necessary in a democracy. Freedom of the press contributes to the conveyance of information to the general public. Dependable sources of information are needed to combat the spread of misinformation. When the mass media becomes money oriented, the public is manipulated by very effective propaganda techniques. For the last four decades, there has been controversy in Canada and the United States over bans on cigarette advertising. While smoking is legal, cigarette advertising is clearly misleading. Smoking is the number one cause of premature, preventable death and disease in our society. The whole purpose of cigarette advertising is to make people forget that central fact, by conveying youth, vitality and fun. It is hard for people to believe that the government would allow unlimited advertising of a product that kills over 450,000 people each year and is more addictive than heroin. Tobacco companies and mass media industries who make profit from cigarette advertising argue against bans because they believe they have the right to free speech. People should be allowed to say what they want, print what they want and read what they want. Opposing groups feel that cigarette advertising should be banned because the society would be a better, healthier place if everyone stopped smoking. Society would have less of a medical burden because less people would die from lung cancer and emphysema if every stopped smoking. This position also sympathizes with Judao-Christian values, which consider life of ultimate importance. This can be seen in laws to protect people from the dangers of themselves such as seatbelt, helmet, and suicide laws. It can be clearly seen, however, that smoking advertisements are an expression of an opinion. The opinion can not be debated properly within the democracy because the opposing statements cannot be heard with an equal voice. The government and anti-smoking activist groups do not have enough money to create an effective antismoking campaign to combat tobacco propaganda in the spirit of open democracy. Therefore a limit must be placed on freedom of speech that allows only the amount of freedom that can be effectively debated. In Canada, James Keegstra, the mayor of Eckville, Alberta, taught his social studies students that the holocaust had never occurred and a Jewish conspiracy had manipulated history for hundreds of years. After twenty years, he was discovered and lost his position as mayor and teacher in 1982. Keegstra argues that freedom of speech is guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. He also argued that his teachings were not slander, since he believed what he said to be true. The government argued that there was a possibility that his statements could promote violence toward a certain group. They were also concerned that he was

misusing his position of power. It can be clearly seen that, although Keegstra was justified in speaking what he believed, it was uncalled for in an environment in which it could not be properly debated. In the classroom, he was the ultimate authority and therefore his opinion was not democratically challenged. The government removed him from his positions using the law instead of their right to free speech. The problem could have been solved through open debate, during which the clear evidence and facts that support the holocaust would have crumbled Keegstra's position, leading to a more progressive truth and a better understanding of the world and each other. Freedom of speech should be limited to situations and environments in which opinions can be democratically debated to establish an acceptable truth.

The right to privacy is a highly unpublicized basic liberty that is taken for granted in most of the Criminal Code of Canada. Section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states that "Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure". The Privacy Act of Canada states that "the purpose of this Act is to extend the present laws of Canada that protect the privacy of individuals with respect to personal information about themselves held by a government institution and not provide individuals with a tight of access to that information." The importance of the right of the public to private communications is one which has been consistently recognized by both the courts and the parliaments. Privacy is essential for the well being of the individual. The restraints imposed on police to pry into the lives of citizens goes to the essence of democracy. Any invasion of the right to privacy in violation of the charter is serious. A right to privacy cannot always defeat the effective enforcement of laws designed for the public good. Conversely, a right to privacy cannot unduly be sacrificed to advance the prosecution of a crime. All challenges must begin by recognizing the larger context framed by seeking a balance between these vital interests in democracy. When two hijacked planed crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001, the democratic right to privacy was threatened in all the democracies of North America. The aim of the terrorists, in fact, may have been to cause the freedoms of democracy to be restricted, threatening the very theology of democracy. This is probable since the "Attack on Democracy" was directed by democracy's ideological extremist enemy. As predicted, security in North American airports has been dramatically increased. If this personal search reaches the point where it is deemed unreasonable, the democracy has limited the basic right to privacy. The government also monitors phone calls and flags key words, that might point to terrorist activity. There have been expulsions from America On Line internet chat rooms for joking mentions of bombs in private sessions. Some citizens are outraged by this limit of privacy as well as speech. There are mentions in government of national identification cards, video surveillance and facial recognition. Many democratic citizens find these measures to be a blatant limit of the basic right to privacy. Others are pushing for more measures to be taken, since they are scared of chemical and biological weapons, cyber-terrorism, nuclear devices, vehicles of terror, such as aircraft, and eco-terrorism. It is obvious that a balance must be reached within the democracy. The government must protect the safety of its citizens, without vandalizing their basic democratic right to privacy. The government must increase the security of the state, and make sure not to unreasonable seize citizens,

or extract personal information. These measures would threaten the idea of democracy and edge society towards dictatorship.

The right to freedom of religion is a very heated issue within democracy. Freedom of religion, or of conscience, means that no person should be required to profess any religion or other belief against his or her desires. Additionally, no one should be punished or penalized in any way when one chooses one religion over another or decided against religion. The democratic state recognizes that a person's religious faith is a profoundly personal matter. The government must step in, however, when the religious beliefs or rituals of a certain group threaten the safety of other citizens. In 1962, in British Columbia, 68 members of the Dukabor sect known as the "Sons of Freedom" which included "Bill the Mad Bomber" found themselves confined to the federal prison near Agassis in the Municipality of Kent for bombing, arson and similar sins of commission. They believed that God had empowered them to do such things, but unfortunately, more secular powers had not received the same message and decided to have them confined. The rest of the members of the sect moved to the outside of the prison and caused panic. The Government passed a bylaw banning the sect from Kent on the grounds that these people were "addicted to nudism, arson and the illegal use of dynamite and explosive devices". The Dukabors opposed this on the grounds of freedom to practice their religion, which required these acts. The government felt that the sect's activities created danger and uneasiness and threatened the safety of the majority of citizens. It can be seen that the government must limit and regulate the activities defined by religion, in order to promote the safety and well being of the majority.

Democracy must place limits on basic rights and liberties to provide the most freedom and safety for the greatest amount of citizens. Freedom of speech and freedom of press must be limited to environments and situations in which the information can be debated to establish a higher truth. The right to privacy must also be restricted to and extent to provide safety during times of paranoia, and to ensure the continuation of a democratic nation. Freedom of religion must also be limited to activities that promote the safety of others. In nations all over the globe, the citizens have the terrible power to make these extravagant decisions to better societies and humanity. They must make these decisions in order to uphold their incredible ability to make their own choices and shape their world.