



# Respect: The Bridge Between Natural Rights and a Free Society

People living in repressive states are not only saddled with censorship and a reduction of personal freedom, but they are also held from freedom by dearth of confidence in their “human rights”. It is essential that these rights are maintained, and that citizens of a free society have respect for other’s rights. Thus, a free society is derived from respect, respect for other people’s intrinsic natural rights. Freedom allows a plurality of citizens to do what they believe is just, fair, and right. However, the rights of citizens to do what they believe is just, fair, and right should only extend so far as where the next person’s rights begin. Respect for these boundaries and rights are just as essential for building a free society; a free society is one bound on both ends. Natural rights prevent both anarchy and autocracy by protecting individual autonomy (such as the right of free speech) so long as that person respects another person’s same rights (such as an unbased attack on personal character).

Human rights are extremely abstract concepts, held down only by the belief that you are entitled to human rights and respect no matter what because you are human. Multiple attempts have been made to pin down exactly what natural rights are; perhaps the most successful is the United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, which asserts that everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek and impart information and ideas upon others. The right to openly hold opinions is crucial to a free society. To express yourself is, as Justice Cardozo said: “the matrix, the indispensable condition of nearly every other form of freedom”. He asserts that free speech is the “matrix”, or the right from which freedom originates. Therefore, it is clear that the maintenance of that right to free speech is imperative to building a free society. That right is dependent on a lack of interference; a lack of interference from the state, a lack of interference from business, and from other citizens impinging on natural rights. To achieve freedom from interference there must be respect for the right of free speech. To achieve

any natural rights there must be a respect among other citizens for those rights. If no one adheres to basic law, what use is it? A government can issue edicts all day long but if the very citizens tasked with enforcing them do not follow law, no one will. It is the same with natural rights. Every individual must respect them, respect the rights of their fellow citizens to have those rights. Without this respect rights exist on paper only.

We are seeing the result of a deficit of respect and thus, natural rights, in real time. As Russian troops trample through Ukraine, the respect for common humanity is thrown out the window. Russia destroys property, silences the free press, and commits war crimes with wild abandon. Russia is not a free state, its citizens have no freedom. There is no respect for the rights that most consider so essential. Watching this flagrant abuse as a 14-year-old is terrifying, yet educational. Russia offers a case study of what happens when respect is nonexistent, and no one believes in basic rights. Within Russia itself the free press is locked away to stifle all wisps of free communication; leaving only the heavy grayness of state media left to fill ears with a bland diet of propaganda. Citizens are regularly subjected to “cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment” at the hands of state security services. (UDHR) It is not only essential that natural rights exist, but that they are respected, by those in power, and the ordinary citizen.

Natural rights and respect must work in concert for a free society; however freedom is not anarchy. James Madison wrote in The Federalist no. 51 that “if men were angels, no government would be necessary.” The problem is that humans are not angels. We are fallible beings, reduced to our worst tendencies at times. Thus, government is an absolute necessity to do what respect and natural rights cannot. The job of government is partly to protect and administer justice when rights have been overstepped. No one has the right to slap another across the face for saying something. The right to autonomy of one person ends where the next person’s right to not be

injured begins. Respect is what, in a perfect society, would hold freedom together, by respecting and advocating not only for your rights, but for other's as well. It is thus essential that there are natural rights in a free society, held together by respect.

### Works Cited

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