



Respect: The Bridge Between Natural Rights and a Free Society

Words spoken by Ronald Reagan in 1986 still ring true today: “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help” (“NewsConference”). Since the founding of this nation, American citizens have had a healthy distrust of heavy-handed governmental interference in day-to-day life. For over 200 years America has stood out in the world as a free nation, but what role does the government have in a free society? Simply put, a government builds a free society by respecting the natural rights of its citizens.

Most Americans are familiar with the rights famously listed in the Declaration of Independence: the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But what are natural rights? They are “the rights given to all humans, simply for the sake of being human” (Gunner). Natural rights transcend all cultures, societies, and government laws. Natural rights entitle men and women to such things as the right to have a family, the right to own property, and the right to choose a career. These rights are inherent and inalienable. The fact that we, as humans, have natural rights is what sets us apart from other species. Livestock living on a farm do not have natural rights. They do not get to choose where they live, what they eat, what they do, or even what happens to them. When a farmer locks a cow in a barn, he is not committing a crime, barring any cruelty or abuse. The cow does not have the right to liberty. But if the farmer locks his wife up, he is violating her natural rights. The farmer's wife did not need to earn her right to liberty, she did not have to prove she deserved to be free, and she did not have to reach a certain status to achieve this privilege. She, as a human, possesses this right just by virtue of being born. Natural rights are what make humans remarkable, and a thorough understanding of what these rights are is the key to building a free society.

What does it mean to have a free society? In a free society men and women have free will to make meaningful decisions about their lives. They can choose where they live, work, and shop and what they do for entertainment. In a free society the government does not control its

citizens the way a farmer controls his livestock. This does not mean a free society has no limitations. Of course laws must be in place to prevent injustice. But in a healthy, free society limitations and laws are in place to help people flourish. The ideal free society is one in which “the state does not administer the affairs of men. It administers justice among men who conduct their own affairs” (Lippmann 267). This type of society is the model for every human culture. A society where the citizens are free to innovate and govern themselves should be the end goal.

The best way to build a free society is through respecting the natural rights of every human. In a free society, the government must see its role not as a manager, but as a protector. It is responsible not for dictating people’s actions, but rather for guarding their natural rights and upholding justice. “Government has a very limited role in a free society. It exists to prevent harm being done to its citizens by maintaining and enforcing justice” (Institute of Economic Affairs). Unlike a farmer controlling his property, the state should act as a guardian protecting the natural rights and dignity of its citizens, thereby enabling them to thrive. Over the course of history, many governments have refused to respect the natural rights of their people. China’s decades-long one-child policy violated its citizens’ right to have a family, and also the unborn second child’s right to life. This policy created a restrictive and oppressive system, when the goal should have been a healthy and free society. The government’s respect for natural rights is imperative. If it does not respect natural rights, there is no hope for a free society. In the political climate of the West, with its controversies and hyperbolic rhetoric, it is easy to lose sight of the uniqueness of humans and their natural rights. The gifts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, among others, when not upheld result in the loss of personal freedom and the wilting of society. This is why it is so important to have a strong knowledge of the natural rights of every man, woman, and child. With these rights as the focus, the state’s role becomes “to ‘secure’ these rights, not create or dispense them” (Forbes). The government should be a defender of rights and an enforcer of justice—not a farmer controlling his livestock.

Work Cited

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