



Respect: The Bridge Between Natural Rights and a Free Society

No one can deny that America is remarkably diverse: it's how it got its "melting pot" moniker. No two Americans are alike: everyone possesses different personalities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, upbringings, beliefs, and opinions. And because America is a free society, each individual can openly express their opinions whenever they want. As Americans, we must recognize the two main components of our ideal society, which are our natural rights and respect. When we fully understand what these elements mean, we can deeply appreciate the privilege we have to be living in a free country.

The idea of Natural Rights originates from English philosopher John Locke, who served as a vital figure in the Enlightenment period during the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1669, Locke wrote an essay titled *Second Treatise of Government*, which states that individuals are born with universal "inalienable" rights, which means that these rights are permanent and can never be taken away. According to Locke, these rights include "life, liberty, and property." Locke's political ideas had a considerable amount of influence on the Founding Fathers and the creation of the Declaration of Independence. In fact, the Declaration of Independence included the phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," which derived from Locke's concept of rights.

In our free society, people hold many different opinions on important matters such as politics and religion. Because of this, it is natural for people to get into heated debates when discussing these subjects, particularly if they feel strongly about their beliefs. For example, I would always witness such bickering whenever my father would flip through cable news channels such as FOX, CNN, and MSNBC. On these stations, two individuals from each side of the political spectrum would share their thoughts on a particular subject. Eventually, they would disagree to the point of talking over and interrupting each other, hardly bothering to give the other person a chance to express their opinions. The participants' unprofessional behavior resulted in cluttered mishmashes of

people attempting to seem intellectually and morally superior instead of merely wanting to debate each other politely and civilly.

This is where respect comes into play: while everyone is entitled to their own opinion, there is a mature way to express them. More often than not, the right to free speech is often misused to attack other people's viewpoints. It's imperative to hold such discussions calmly and rationally and realize that not everyone shares the same viewpoints as yourself. Take turns listening to each other and then explain why you disagree and what your two cents on the matter are.

One of my best friends holds a few political views that I disagree with. Instead of wasting time arguing about what is right and wrong, we heard what the other had to say, and then agreed to disagree. We mutually understood that we did not see eye to eye on a lot of issues, and there is nothing wrong with that! Our differing viewpoints don't affect our friendship in the slightest! As long as we respect each other's opinions and realize that they are just as valid and authentic as our own, our relationship will be sound. Opinions, when respectfully discussed, make a conversation interesting. They give us insight as to what someone else thinks about a topic. Even if I didn't agree with what my friend believed, I could not deny that it was intriguing to converse with someone who did not share my views. Wouldn't it be tedious if everyone acted and thought the same way?

Overall, John Locke's natural rights and a sense of respect go a long way in maintaining a free society. Every individual has rights that will always remain with them, and everyone can respectfully see two sides to an argument. It's because of these two aspects that we can march to the beat of our own drum and live free, fulfilling lives.