



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

On April 7, 2022, the justice system made history. In an elaborative interrogation conducted by the Senate Judiciary Committee, Congress officials united to fire questions at Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson for two days (The White House 2022). I tuned in on the radio, shuffled through news anchors, and received a barrage of emails regarding the arduous, twenty-four-hour trial. The questioning was extensive and unrelenting, encompassing everything from personal affairs to law-related insights. However, I found that the most compelling point of discussion occurred not during the formal trial but in the written records answered after the hearing. Senator Cruz asked Jackson: “Do you hold a position on whether individuals possess natural rights, yes or no,” to which the justice-to-be responded, “I do not” (PBS 2022). For the first and only time during her hearing, I paused the news to analyze and assess the gravity of her words – the concept of natural rights has become muddled, a subjective matter. Jackson’s answer puzzled me and challenged my beliefs. Natural rights, as I understood, were concrete, rooted in science and shared belief. Yet, it was becoming a matter of personal faith in a courtroom of the highest powers. I asked myself, what has enabled natural rights to be interpretative?

While organic, natural rights have often surfaced from a great deal of suffering, a demeaning of humanity; they emerge from a desire to equalize the fight among all individuals for prosperity. Imposing a universal code of ethics, an all-applicable moral compass, instills validation in human desires, creating a rules handbook for social complexities. During the Enlightenment, Locke championed “life, liberty, and property” as unalienable and non-negotiable (UNESCO 2018). He also argued that these rights would be surrendered to the government under dire circumstances. However, in the face of political social vagaries, it has become difficult to assert when these rights must be championed. As citizens of a progressing society, it is critical to render these rights non-negotiable in all cases.

Respect must serve as the bridge between recognizing these natural rights and achieving a free society. While people of differing classes default on the same human entitlements, the enactment of their rights is ruled by the respect they receive.

Jefferson, in drafting the Declaration of Independence, similarly declared “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” to be “self-evident” rights of human existence. Contrastingly, a dearth of respect led to him engaging in the systems he condemned, and Jefferson acted on policies heinous by modern standards. Today, it is critical to acknowledge that respect works in tandem with the staple of natural rights. As the scope of natural rights remains temperamental, principles of respect must stand firm to create clarity. When natural rights provide only a spiritual system, respect can truly breathe life into our liberties. For instance, common sets of law dictate that all individuals are entitled to life, whether it be achieved through healthcare, sustenance, or expression. However, there is a massive gap in the accessibility of medical care, education, and entertainment between different demographics. Likewise, past governments, while championing human rights, have often found their demise due to a lack of respect. Rebellion and uprising are a given under an absence of respect between the government and the governed. Only with a mutually cultivated sense of respect among participants of society will freedom be guaranteed.

A free society and respect are deeply intertwined. While arguments for free societies being independent have reason, liberty can be established only under a regime of respect. Successful free societies cannot function without a respectful government and amiable citizen-to-citizen relationships. Societies of this classification drive with the fuel of spontaneity, built on the basis of equal action (Cato Institute 2020). Establishments and their subordinates are incentivized to collaborate without looming pressure from outside perpetrators. In a free society, a government is permitted to maintain its authority without the concern of overthrow and negative citizen reactions. This is because respect is garnered both ways by sponsoring justice instead of forcefully imposing mandates. Natural rights are placed in the spotlight, fostering a radiant and free-flowing society.

Institutions of natural rights are not a one-way path to a free society. Without observing the often neglected factor of respect in social interactions, a free society will cease to fruition. Without the honoring of respect, these natural rights and their passages to obtaining liberty stand in jeopardy.

All humans possess rights, but respect determines the extent to which they may be exercised – therefore, variations in an individual’s capacity to respect have rendered Jefferson and Locke’s words subjective. Attaining a peaceful reach for prosperity among all members of society requires an in-depth comprehension of naturally-granted rights and their catalyst. When wielded by the skilled hands of respect, natural rights ignite harmonic and compassionate societal relationships, a world radiant in equity.

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