**Ideas We Act On: LIBERTY, EQUALITY, AND JUSTICE**

**The Sovereignty of Justice, The Freedom to Do as One Please, The Liberties to Which We Are Entitled**

**The Sovereignty of Justice**

**IN TREATING THE IDEAS OF TRUTH, goodness, and beauty, I dealt with each in itself and for its own sake before considering its relation to the other two. Turning now to the remaining three of the six great ideas—liberty, equality, and justice—I will proceed somewhat differently. Though I will examine each of these ideas in and for itself, I will be primarily interested in those aspects of them in which they are closely interrelated. It is in those aspects that this triad of ideas are the ideas we act on in governing our social, political, and economic affairs.**

**In the case of the first three ideas, we observed the sovereignty of truth in the way it regulates our thinking about goodness and beauty. So here, in dealing with the second set of ideas, we must note the sovereignty of justice. It regulates our thinking about liberty and equality. Without its guidance, certain errors are unavoidable and certain problems insoluble. It should also be pointed out that all three of these ideas fall in the domain of the idea of goodness. We rightly regard liberty and equality as highly desirable goods, real goods that we need to lead decent human lives in the pursuit of happiness. Just action with respect to others, as we saw in an earlier chapter, is the good of doing. To act rightly or justly is to do**

**good.**

**It is necessary to explain the sovereignty of justice with regard to liberty and equality before we embark, in subsequent chapters, on elucidating these ideas as well as exploring in detail the idea of justice itself. Readers will appreciate, I trust, that their understanding of what is said briefly here will be increased**

**by the light that subsequent chapters will throw on the subject.**

**In the popular mind, and even in the opinions of the learned, either liberty, or equality, or both together, is accorded the highest honor as the prime value or values to be sought, secured, and preserved. Much more inflamed rhetoric, as well as much more reasoned argument, has called for liberty above all else, or for equality above all else, or for both together, than there have been appeals for justice first and foremost.**

**The maxim of the French Revolution still echoes in our ears: *liberte, egalite, fraternite*. Justice is not even mentioned in the company of the other two. That might have been justified had the authors of that maxim written it on the basis of Aristotle’s insight that if all human beings who are associated in a community were friends with one another, there would be no need for justice. It is doubtful that they had this in mind.**

**Against the weight of both popular and scholarly opinion, I will try to explain why justice is the supreme value, a greater good than either liberty or equality, and one that must be appealed to for the rectification of errors with regard to liberty and equality.**

**As I observed a moment ago, all three of these values are real, not apparent, goods—goods that human beings need for the conduct of their lives in the pursuit of happiness. However, all real goods are not of equal standing. Wealth and health, for example, are inferior to wisdom and friendship. Some real goods are truly good only when limited. Pleasure is a real good, but we can want more pleasure than we need or**

**more than is good for us to seek or obtain. The same is true of wealth. These are limited real goods. In contrast, knowledge is an unlimited real good. We can never seek or obtain more than is good for us.**

**Only justice is an unlimited good, as we shall presently see. One can want too much liberty and too much equality—more than it is good for us to have in relation to our fellowmen, and more than we have any right to. Not so with justice. No society can be too just; no individual can act more justly than is good for him or for his fellowmen.**

**The failure to observe and understand the need for limitations upon liberty and equality leads to serious errors about them and to an irresolvable conflict between them.**

**On the one hand, there are the libertarians, who not only place the highest value on liberty but also seek to maximize it at the expense of equality. They not only want an unlimited amount of freedom, but they are also willing to try to achieve it even if achieving it results in an irremediable inequality of conditions, under which some portion of a society, usually a majority, suffer serious deprivations.**

**The only equality they are for is equality of opportunity, because this encourages and facilitates freedom of enterprise on the part of those who, favored by superior endowments or attainments, can make the best use of their freedom of opportunity to beat their fellowmen in the race of life—the devil take the hindmost! That a vast inequality of conditions will result does not deter them, for in their view trying to achieve an equality of conditions can only result in the loss of individual liberty, which is for them the higher of the two values.**

**On the other hand, there are the egalitarians, who not only regard an equality of conditions as the supreme value, but also are set upon trying to achieve it even if that infringes in many ways on individual liberty, and especially upon freedom of enterprise, exercised with the help of equality of opportunity. In their view equality of opportunity, if that alone exists and if individual freedom in taking advantage of it is unrestrained, will necessarily result in an inequality of conditions. This they deplore. They seek to maximize an equality of conditions, even if to do so requires many infringements upon individual liberty, which is the lesser value in their view.**

**The conflict, not between liberty and equality, but between extremist exponents of these values, cannot be resolved without correcting the errors that lead to the extremisms respectively espoused by the libertarian and by the egalitarian. These errors can be corrected only by understanding that neither liberty nor equality is the prime value, that neither is an unlimited good, and that both can be maximized harmoniously only when the maximization is regulated by justice.**

**Should an individual have unlimited freedom of action or enterprise, or only as much liberty as he can use without injuring others, without depriving them of freedom, and without causing them to suffer the serious deprivations that are consequences of an inequality of conditions? In short, should an individual have more liberty than he can exercise justly?**

**Negative answers to these questions lead to the conclusion that everyone should have only as much liberty as justice allows, and no more than that.**

**Should a society try to achieve an equality of conditions attended by no inequalities in the degree to which individuals enjoy that equality of conditions? Should it seek to maximize such an equality of conditions, even if that results in serious deprivations of individual freedom? Should it ignore the fact that human beings are unequal as well as equal, in both their endowments and attainments, and that they make unequal contributions to the welfare of the community?**

**Negative answers to these questions lead to the conclusion that a society should seek to achieve only as much of an equality of conditions as justice requires, and no more than that. More than that would be unjust, even as more freedom than justice allows would be an unjust exercise of liberty that is license.**

**The reader will have noted that justice stands in a different relation to liberty and to equality.**

**With respect to liberty, it imposes a limitation on the amount of individual freedom that it allows, if the exercise of freedom is to be just rather than unjust.**

**With respect to equality, it imposes a limitation on the kind and degree of the equality, as well as the kind and degree of the inequality, it requires, if a community is to deal justly with all its members.**

**When justice thus regulates the pursuit of liberty and equality, both can be maximized harmoniously within the limits set. The irresolvable conflict between the erroneous extremism of the libertarian and the erroneous extremism of the egalitarian vanishes. The sovereignty of justice has corrected the errors and resolved the conflict.**

**The Freedom to Do as One Pleases**

**LIKE MOST OTHER GREAT IDEAS, liberty is not without its inner complexity. We have found that there are different kinds of truth, different modes of goodness, different senses of beauty. So, too, in the case of liberty or freedom. The two words are completely interchangeable.**

**There are three major forms of freedom. The first is a freedom that is inherent in human nature. We are born with it in our possession. It is distinctive of human beings, just as rational or conceptual thought and syntactical speech are distinctive of human beings. It is, therefore, appropriate to speak of it as a natural freedom, thus referring to the way in which we possess it.**

**The second major kind of liberty is the liberty that is associated with wisdom and moral virtue. It is possessed only by those who, in the course of their personal development, have acquired some measure of virtue and wisdom. Thus possessed, it is appropriately designated as an acquired freedom.**

**The third of the major forms of freedom is completely dependent on favorable external circumstances. An individual’s possession of it may vary from time to time and from place to place, depending on whether external circumstances favorable or unfavorable to its exercise are present. Individuals may possess it or be deprived of it in varying degrees, which is certainly not the case with natural or acquired freedom. The appropriate way to designate this liberty is to speak of it as circumstantial freedom.**

 **Described so far in terms of the way in which we possess them, what do these three forms of freedom or kinds of liberty consist in?**

 **Our natural freedom consists in freedom of the will. It is freedom of choice—the liberty of being able to choose otherwise than as we did. Having such freedom, our actions are not instinctively determined or completely conditioned by the impact of external circumstances on our development, as is the case in the behavior of other animals. With this innate power of free choice, each human being is able to change his**

**own character creatively by deciding for himself what he shall do or shall become. We are free to make ourselves whatever we choose to be.**

 **Our acquired liberty, which is sometimes called “moral freedom,” consists in our having a will that is habitually disposed by virtue to will as it ought. Virtue, as we have already seen, is the habitual disposition to desire aright, which means choosing what one needs—the real goods one ought to desire. The obstacles or impediments to right desire stem from appetites or passions that generate wants in conflict with needs,**

**wants that tempt or solicit us to make the wrong rather than the right choices.**

**Human bondage, according to Spinoza, is our enslavement by such appetites or passions—our lower nature. Human freedom— moral liberty—lies in reason’s control of the passions, made firm by moral virtue, the acquired habitual disposition to make right rather than wrong choices.**

**The freedom to will or choose as one ought could not be acquired by human beings if they did not antecedently possess, as an inherent property of human nature, a free will and the power of free choice. If we cannot choose otherwise, how can we be morally responsible for choosing aright rather than**

**yielding to the seductions of pleasure or lust? And if we cannot be held morally responsible for the choices we make, what justification can there be for the praise or blame we accord an individual for his or her character or conduct?**

**Our circumstantial freedom consists in our being able to do as we please—our ability to carry out in overt action the decisions we have reached, to do as we wish for our individual good as we see it, rightly or wrongly.**

**Such freedom can be possessed and exercised by individuals of good or bad moral character. The individual’s free choice of a line of conduct to pursue, or his decision about a course of action to take, may be morally virtuous or the opposite, but in either case, circumstances either permit him to behave or act as he wishes, or prevent him from doing so. Accordingly, the individual is either circumstantially free or unfree.**

**Our natural or inherent freedom of will confers upon us the power to choose otherwise—to make, on a particular occasion, a choice different from the one we made. Our circumstantial freedom of action, when we possess it in the fullest measure, confers upon us the ability to act otherwise. We are not only left free by favorable circumstances to enact the choice we made; we are also left free to enact a different, or**

**opposite choice, had we made it.**

**An individual in prison or in chains is circumstantially free to remain in his cell or manacled, should that be his choice. But bars or chains prevent him from going elsewhere or doing otherwise if he wishes to. The restraints imposed by imprisonment impair his freedom of action, not his freedom of choice, and not his moral liberty—his freedom to will as he ought.**

**Two extraordinarily wise and virtuous human beings attest to this striking fact. The Roman Stoic philosopher Epictetus regarded himself as a free man, in the sense of having moral liberty, even though he was a slave in chains. So, too, the Christian philosopher Boethius eloquently celebrated his moral freedom in a discourse that he wrote in prison.**

**Subhuman animals can have or be deprived of circumstantial freedom, even though they do not possess either freedom of choice or moral freedom. Penned up in cages or enclosures, their scope of action is severely limited. They are prevented from carrying out their instinctive impulses or acting in accordance**

**with tendencies that have been acquired through conditioning. Freedom of choice and the freedom to will as one ought are, therefore, not antecedent factors indispensable to freedom of action.**

**Of these three major forms of freedom or liberty, the only one that needs to be regulated by justice is the third—the circumstantial freedom to do as one pleases. What one wishes to do may be injurious to someone else. It may be an action in violation of a just law. It may be contrary to the best interests**

**of the community of which the individual is a member.**

**Using the word “license” to designate an illegitimate, unlawful, or unjust exercise of one’s circumstantially conferred ability to do as one pleases, doing as one pleases, when so doing is illegitimate, unlawful, or unjust, is not liberty, but license. To think otherwise, or to demand that the scope of one’s circumstantial freedom shall be unlimited by such considerations, is to ask for an anarchic liberty, not a freedom that is consonant with living in society cooperatively with other human beings.**

**Instead of using the word “freedom” for such anarchic liberty—the liberty of an individual in a state of nature rather than of society—let us refer to it as autonomy. Autonomy, as the etymology of that word plainly indicates, consists in being a law unto oneself.**

**Only an absolute sovereign has autonomy—obeys himself alone, submits to no law made by others, recognizes no authority to regulate his conduct. Autonomy can be possessed only by individuals living completely solitary lives, not by them as members of organized societies that cannot endure or prosper without effective government or coercively enforceable laws.**

**Since individual human beings do not lead completely solitary lives, since they have never existed, at least not for long, in the so-called state of nature that is more accurately referred to as a state of anarchy, the only autonomy to be found in the world is that possessed by sovereign princes or states. The consequences of such autonomy, as we so well know to our distress, is a state of war—the cold war that is the opposite of**

**peaceful coexistence even when it does not issue in military action.**

**Living in organized societies under effective government and enforceable laws, as they must in order to survive and prosper, human beings neither have autonomy nor are they entitled to unlimited liberty of action. Autonomy is incompatible with organized society. Unlimited liberty is destructive of it.**

**It is for this reason that the distinction between liberty and license cannot be dismissed or disregarded. When that distinction is understood and accepted, it follows that the individual who is prevented from doing what he pleases by just restraints suffers no loss of liberty.**

**The distinction between liberty and license, together with the distinction between anarchic autonomy and freedom in organized society under law and government, leads us to a fourth kind of liberty that is a special variety of circumstantial freedom.**

**Political liberty, though it is conferred upon the individual by favorable circumstances, is not, like the main form of circumstantial freedom, a freedom to do as one pleases within the constraints of justice. It is instead the liberty that individuals possess when, as fully fledged, enfranchised citizens of a republic, living under constitutional government, their suffrage gives them a voice in the making of the laws under which they live. They are not subject to the arbitrary will of a despot.**

**While not autonomous, they are self-governing to the extent that they are participants in government. The citizens of a republic are not sovereigns, but each has, in the words of Rousseau, a share in the sovereignty. Constitutional government, said Aristotle, is that form of government in which the citizens are free men and equals, ruling and being ruled in rum.**

**Slaves do not have political liberty. They are ruled tyrannically in the interest of their masters, not for their own good. The subjects of an absolute monarch do not have political liberty. Even when the absolute despotism under which they live is benevolent, and they are ruled to some extent for their own good, they are ruled as very young children are governed in the household—without a voice in their own government**

**and without participation in the making of the decisions that govern their lives. In a republic, living under constitutional government, those who are deprived of suffrage, for whatever reason, are subjects rather than citizens. They, too, are deprived of political liberty by being disfranchised members of the society in which they live.**

**Being granted and being denied suffrage constitute the favorable and unfavorable circumstances that confer political liberty upon individuals or deprive them of it. With regard to the main form of circumstantial freedom, which consists in being able, within limits, to do as one pleases, the favorable**

**and unfavorable circumstantial factors are of a different sort.**

**The unfavorable factors are coercion, constraint, and duress. An individual is not free to do as he pleases when he is constrained by the application of physical force, nor is he free to do as he pleases when he is physically coerced into doing the opposite.**

**Duress consists in the threat of physical constraint or coercion. The individual who acts contrary to his wishes under a pointed gun is responding to a threat, but the effect is the same as physical coercion. Duress may take other forms. The individual who does the opposite of what he wishes in order to avoid the undesirable consequences of the desired action suffers a loss of freedom from duress.**

**Circumstances that confer enabling means upon individuals also give them the freedom to do what they wish. Sufficient wealth enables me to dine at the Ritz if I wish to. Deprived of such enabling means, the poor man is not free to dine at the Ritz if he wishes. Without the enabling means provided by scholarships or public funds, the poor in prior centuries were not free to go to colleges or universities if they wished to.**

**The circumstantial freedom to do as one pleases, within limits, is thus seen to be a freedom *from* coercion, constraint, and duress and a freedom *to* act as one wishes that is provided by enabling means. It is not, however, a freedom *from* having one’s conduct regulated by the prescriptions and proscriptions of law.**

**The sphere of circumstantial liberty is not, as John Stuart Mill wrongly supposed, the sphere of conduct unregulated by law, with the consequence, in Mill’s view, that the more our conduct is regulated by law, the less freedom we have. Nor is it true, as Thomas Jefferson said, that the less government the better, because the less government, the freer we are.**

**An earlier English philosopher, John Locke, provides us with a sounder view of the matter. In the first place, much of our conduct is not and cannot be regulated by law, no matter how massive such regulation may be. This is true not only of the civil law, the positive law of the state, but also of the moral law; for much of our conduct is morally indifferent, neither prescribed nor proscribed by moral rules. In this area where, in Locke’s words, “the law prescribes not,” we are quite free to do as we please.**

**Where our conduct does fall under the commands or prohibitions of law, either the civil or the moral law, the virtuous man is still able to do as he pleases, since he pleases to do what he ought. A right rule of conduct and a just civil law command actions that ought to be performed and prohibit acts that ought not to be done.**

**The morally virtuous individual is one who, having the moral freedom of being able to will and choose as he ought, does voluntarily and freely what the law commands and refrains voluntarily and freely from doing what the law prohibits. He does not suffer restraint from the coercive force of law; he does not act under duress from the threat of coercion.**

**As Aristotle said, the virtuous man does freely what the criminal does only from fear of the law—fear of its coercive force and of the punishment that may result from violating the law. The criminal, however, does not suffer any loss of liberty when he refrains from breaking the law, for what he wishes to do, being unlawful and unjust, is something he ought not to do anyway, even if he were not constrained by law. His**

**license to do as he wishes, not his liberty, has been taken away.**

**This leads us to a further point about the relation of law to liberty. Not only is it the case that we are not deprived of liberty by just laws or morally sound rules of conduct. It is also the case that the laws of the state, when they are just, apply coercive force and constraints to secure us from infringements upon our freedom by other individuals who would use illegitimate or unlawful force to interfere with it. Where just laws do not exist or where they are not effectively enforced, individuals are subject to all sorts of depredations and invasions that diminish their freedom.**

**When just laws are enforced, they enlarge the liberty of the individual. Quite contrary is the condition of persons living under the tyranny of unjust laws, the rule of might rather than of right. Compelled by coercive force or by duress to act neither as they please nor as they ought, their freedom is severely limited. What they have lost by such limitation is true liberty, not license.**

**The maximization of our circumstantial freedom to do as we please is the great and real good conferred upon human beings by just laws, effectively enforced. That good is further enhanced by just government, which confers political liberty upon all who are entitled to be enfranchised and to become self-governing through exercising their suffrage.**

**We have seen why it can be truly said that the virtuous man suffers no loss of freedom when he obeys just laws. It can also be truly said that the citizen who, exercising his suffrage, finds himself in the minority on an important political issue has not ceased to be self-governing and politically free.**

**The constitution to which the citizen has given consent by exercising his suffrage provides for a decision by the vote of the majority. He has accepted the principle of majority rule and, having done so, the citizen has also accepted, in advance, the result of majority rule, whether or not the voting places him in the majority or in an adversely affected minority.**

**He may not like the law or policy that the majority has instituted or adopted. Conforming to it may be contrary to his wishes, but when members of a minority do conform to it, they do so without any loss of political liberty. If the law or policy is just, however contrary to their individual interest or judgment it may be, their compliance with it does not deprive them of any freedom at all.**

**The Liberties to Which We Are Entitled**

**THERE WOULD BE NO SENSE AT ALL in saying that we are entitled to have a free will or freedom of choice. That is a good conferred on us by nature—or by God. The lower animals are deprived of it, but we cannot say that they are deprived of something they are entitled to.**

**It would be equally devoid of sense to say that we are entitled to the moral freedom that consists in being able to will as we ought and to refrain from willing as we ought not. We either acquire or fail to acquire such freedom through choices we have ourselves freely made. It is entirely within our power t o**

**form or fail to form the virtuous disposition to will as one ought that constitutes an individual’s moral freedom. No other human being, and certainly no organized society, can confer such liberty on us or withhold it from us.**

**According to Christian dogmas concerning man’s original sin and man’s redemption through Christ’s saving grace, fallen man cannot, without God’s help, acquire the moral virtue required for moral liberty. That is why Christian theologians refer to moral freedom as the God-given liberty enjoyed only by those whom God has elected for salvation.**

**On the secular plane of our social lives, it remains the case that we can make no rightful claim upon others or upon society to grant us a freedom that is entirely within our power to possess or lack.**

**The only liberties to which we can make a claim upon society are the freedom to do as we please within the limits imposed by justice and that variant of circumstantial freedom that is the political liberty enjoyed by enfranchised citizens of a republic.**

**Whether we have political liberty or not and the extent t o which we have a limited freedom to do as we please depend largely, if not entirely, on the society in which we live—its institutions and arrangements, its form of government and its laws.**

**This being the case, two questions confront us. The first is, Why are we entitled to a limited freedom to do as we wish? Why do we have a right to it? The second question is. Why are we entitled to political liberty? Who has a right to it—every human being or only some?**

**Answering these questions requires us to discover the basis of entitlements that take the form of natural rights—rights we can demand that a just society should secure for us because they are rights inherent in our human nature, unalienable in the sense that a legal deprivation of them must be justified by special considerations.**

**Our understanding of the things that are really good for a human being because they fulfill needs that are inherent in human nature provides us with the basis we are looking for.**

**We are under the moral obligation to pursue happiness, which means trying to make good human lives for ourselves by seeking whatever, corresponding to our natural needs, is really good for us. We have a right to whatever we need t o lead good human lives.**

**Our natural needs provide the basis not only for distinguishing between real and merely apparent goods, but also for distinguishing between the real goods to which we have a natural right and the apparent goods to which we do not have a natural right, but to the acquirement of which we may be privileged on condition that our seeking them does not interfere with anyone else’s acquirement of real goods.**

**Real goods are those to which we have a natural right, not merely a privileged possession. We cannot fulfill our moral obligation to pursue happiness by making a good life for ourselves unless we can make a rightful claim upon society to confer on us the real goods that we need for a good life. Some of these are not entirely within our own power to acquire, because they are, in part at least, goods of fortune, bestowed by**

**beneficent external circumstances.**

**Thomas Jefferson’s too brief and, therefore, too elliptical statement of this truth in the Declaration of Independence yields its full significance only when rephrased and expanded. We are endowed with certain unalienable rights, he wrote, and we are all equally endowed with them because we are by nature equal. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, which are secured only by just governments and just laws.**

**The unalienable and natural right to life consists in our entitlement to all the economic goods that we need to sustain life, for without life we cannot live well. Beyond the economic goods indispensable to sustaining life itself are economic goods that we need to live well, above the level of mere subsistence, such as ample time for the pursuits of leisure.**

**Other things that we need to live well, not mentioned in the Declaration, are health and knowledge. We need them as much as we need a moderate possession of wealth in the form of economic goods, not just to live but to live well. To some extent these goods are within our power to obtain for ourselves; but to the extent that they are not entirely within our power to obtain, we have a right to the help that organized**

**society can provide for obtaining them. That help comes in the form of whatever may be instrumental in obtaining them, such as schooling in the case of knowledge and a healthful environment in the case of health.**

**How about the right to liberty, a good that is mentioned in the Declaration as one of the principal goods to which we have a right because it is indispensable to our pursuit of happiness— to our living well?**

**To answer this question, let us first consider liberty of action— the freedom, within limits, to do as we wish. Our natural right to such freedom flows from our natural possession of a free will and a power of free choice, which we exercise in making the decisions that we must make, either rightly or wrongly, in our pursuit of happiness.**

**What good would it do us to make decisions that we cannot carry out? Without liberty of action, our freedom of choice would be rendered totally ineffective. We would be exercising it without achieving the ultimate good we are under an obligation to seek, if our freedom of choice is thwarted by unjust limitations on our liberty of action, or is nullified by the deprivation of such freedom. Lacking free will and freedom of choice, the lower animals have no rightful claim on liberty of action. Zoos do not exist in violation of rights.**

**However much we may sympathize with caged or confined animals, we are not moved by a sense of injustice done to them.**

**We feel differently about Epictetus in chains and Boethius in prison. They could exercise their freedom of choice to will as they ought and so they enjoyed the moral freedom that is the prize of virtuous human beings. But virtuous human beings are not always able to lead good human lives. Moral virtue alone is not sufficient. Good fortune, in the form of beneficent external circumstances, is also indispensable to the successful pursuit of happiness.**

**Man’s natural freedom of choice and his obligation t o make a good life for himself by making right choices is the basis of his entitlement by natural right to liberty of action. What about his entitlement to that variant of circumstantial freedom that is political liberty?**

**The reasoning here runs parallel to that in which we have just engaged. Again, human nature provides the answer. But here, in place of man’s natural freedom of choice as the basis of the entitlement to liberty of action, is man’s nature as a political animal.**

**To be a political animal involves more than being the kind of social animal that bees, ants, wasps, wolves, and other gregarious organisms are. Social or gregarious animals need to live in association with others of their kind. Man, too, is a social or gregarious animal in this sense. He naturally needs to live in association with other human beings in organized societies.**

**Unlike the organized societies of the social insects, which are entirely determined by the instincts of the species, human societies are voluntarily formed and conventionally instituted. They are natural societies only in the sense that man, being gregarious, needs to live in association with other human beings. They are at the same time conventional in the sense that the shape they take—the forms of government, the laws,**

**the institutions, and other arrangements that constitute their organization—are products of rational and free, not instinctive, determination.**

**A political community is a society that is thus constituted. To say that man is by nature a political as well as a social animal is to say that he is by nature inclined to live in political communities and to participate in political activity—to be a self-governing citizen in a republic.**

**In short, being political by nature means that man by nature needs political liberty—the freedom of an enfranchised citizen—in order to live humanly well. This is the basis of man’s entitlement, by natural right, to political liberty.**

**Deprived of political liberty, as slaves are or as are the subjects of a despot no matter how benevolent, human beings cannot fulfill all their natural propensities and lead fully human lives. They are deprived of a real good to which they are by nature entitled. The same is true of those who, living under constitutional governments or in republics, are nevertheless disfranchised and thus deprived of political liberty.**

**Are there any grounds to justify the disfranchisement of human beings who are by nature political animals? Only two: infancy and pathological disablement by amentia or dementia— by a degree of feeblemindedness or of insanity that calls for hospitalization and medical care.**

**In addition, criminal behavior justifies a deprivation of political liberty, as well as liberty of action, either for a period of time or for life. The criminal, by his own behavior, has himself forfeited the exercise of a right that is unalienably his as a human being. The exercise of that right, temporarily in abeyance, is restored in full measure when he has served his term, if that is anything short of life.**

* Mortimer J Adler, Six Great Ideas Part Three Ideas We Act On – Liberty, Equality and Justice