

A Society's Freedom

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Throughout all of history empires have risen and fallen. Some have gained great success with their citizens, others have expanded to the edge of the world. No matter what form of government one uses, or how large or small it is, the goal should remain the same. This goal is the welfare of the people. In order to have a strong body of people, certain rights must be given to those participating. Among these are freedom of speech and civil discourse. These two rights are essential in creating an environment suitable for the people.

One of the defining characteristics of a functioning, virtuous, well ordered society is the right of freedom given to the people. A quote from Shahram Jafarzadeh in a journal in ScienceDirect says, "Human development is the most important factor of welfare improvement where the freedom is an essential instrument to achieve it." The most basic human right is the freedom for people to speak without being censored. This freedom is a staple in all successful nations, but is sadly being oppressed more and more throughout time, as seen with countries like China, which censors the citizens from speaking ill about the government and establishment. According to Wencong Fa from the Pacific Legal Foundation, "Free speech is inextricably linked to prosperity. After all, prosperity comes from ideas, and new ideas can thrive only in a society in which they are free from suppression."

Two important elements related to free speech are the right of conscience, and the right to have civil discourse. There are three main reasons why these are instrumental in a well ordered, virtuous society. First, the rights allow for discussion amongst the people, creating bonds and allowing for a mingling. Second, they promote morality and the value of freedom to those who benefit from it. Finally, with these discussions it develops the nation by encouraging qualitative dialogues and critical thinking.

Civil discourse, according to the Oxford dictionary, is defined as: "A long and serious treatment or discussion of a subject in speech or writing." Allowing members of society to debate and learn from each other is extremely important for the long term effects of a society's stability. Without people contesting and challenging each other, the nation could become a massive echo-chamber, that is to say having everyone in the same mind, destroying any thought deemed

harmful. By having everyone converse with each other, the whole society benefits from the exchange of ideas and differentiation between all those inside it. There will be clashing conflicts, which are necessary for a civilization to thrive, as the issues must be worked out. This can be seen with compromises that politicians make, finding ways to help both sides, such as a government stimulus. It is also, in many circumstances, best to allow people to sort out their thoughts and emotions amongst themselves, rather than having an authority force their opinion over both, ending the quarrel.

Another reason it is extremely important to have the rights of civil discourse and rights of conscience is the instillation of morality and freedom set upon the people. When everyone has the right to discuss and affirm their conscience, it helps everyone reinforce each other's same belief. While there will be differing opinions, everyone will be united by the right to speak. This is something that everyone will have in common, and it is only possible if the country allows all speech and discourse.

Possibly the best benefit of allowing rights of conscience is the development of critical thinking and morality to all. Hard moral decisions that arise amongst the population will occur, and when they do, and there is no correct answer according to the law, they will be forced to think critically and examine all sides and options. Benjamin Franklin himself puts his say in the matter, "Without Freedom of Thought, there can be no such thing as Wisdom; and no such thing as public liberty, without Freedom of Speech." This means that freedom and wisdom both enforce each other up, as freedom allows the opportunity for wisdom to increase, and the wise comes to the natural conclusion that freedom is important to further wisdom. This is not a circular argument, but rather shows two virtues building upon each other to grow, just as America was founded with many men building off of each other, rather than one being used as an authority on the matter.

This is extremely beneficial for two reasons. First, it will most often result in a correct answer being unearthed, as it can always be reached through logic and proper reasoning. Second, the skill of critical thinking itself is immensely important. This practice will become more common and will help the community learn and grow by actively participating. Even if a true answer is not concluded, the participants will still have gained much from their examining of all sides.

A society's freedom is one of the most important things it can have. Civil discourse and rights of conscience in particular, contribute a tremendous amount to the culture of humanity. They benefit both society as a whole and the individuals who live under it. For all these reasons, civil discourse and the right of conscience are extremely important to a free and virtuous society.

References:

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