

Liberty

TYPES OF LIBERTY

NATURAL LIBERTY: It means total and complete freedom; it means lack of any restraints. This notion was put forward by Rousseau who said that “man is born free but everywhere he is in chains”. However, this notion of freedom is illusory and myth in nature (Collin Bird, 2006).

PERSONAL LIBERTY: Individual freedom is the central element in western liberal political thought and has become part of the political discourse in most nations. This aspect of freedom includes freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to travel. This notion suggests that every human being desires to exercise his faculties and determine the general condition of his life.

CIVIL LIBERTY: This exists in civil society; it means liberty in social life. This includes liberty to free action and immunity from interference. It composes rights and privileges that the state creates and enforces. Civil liberty also includes freedom of the person, physical freedom from injury or threat to life, health and movement of the body, security of private property, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of conscience. According to Harold Laski (2004) civil liberty is the sum total of the rights, recognized in various degrees in different states.

POLITICAL LIBERTY: This refers to the individuals roles, participation and share in the administration of the state. It connotes the opportunity of taking part in the process of government, and of having a say in the future development of the community. It is a liberty not of curbing; constituting it by a general of choice or election in which we all freely share on the basis of universal suffrage; controlling it by a general and continuous process of discussion, in which we all freely share according to our capabilities.

ECONOMIC LIBERTY: This implies economic freedom where in a labour is assured of a just reward. Economic freedom is the right of individuals and businesses to pursue their economic objectives in competition without undue state regulation and interference in the workings both of businesses and the free market.

NATIONAL LIBERTY: This implies achievement of complete independence and subsequent sovereignty of the nation from the dominance of foreign nation. Freedom from the bondage of other states is essential for realization of liberty in its fullest sense. This is the foundation of all liberties. National freedom is connected with the concepts of Nation-state. The doctrine of 'national self-determination', first enshrined in the Versailles Treaty (1919) as a fundamental principle of international society and international law, is the political manifestation of national freedom. According to this doctrine all nations have a right to govern themselves, and for national freedom to have a political reality a nation must be able to govern itself without being dominated or controlled by another nation. This concept of exclusive self-government is the key characteristic of 'sovereignty', the most important attributes of a state.

Such unrestricted freedom is ultimately denial of equality along with freedom of others. Therefore, certain safeguards are necessary devised to check freedom. That is laws are very vital condition of freedom, although laws can destroy and upheld condition of liberties.

A democratic government is meaningful only if people enjoy liberty within the purview of laws. This is because love of liberty teaches individual to oppose injustice. It is only liberty that can bring about all-round development of human personality.

John Stuart Mill On liberty

Mill was the first to realize that the working class were deprived of their due share in the capitalist economy. Hence he sought to discover an area where state intervention can be justified. He drew a distinction between two types of action. Self-regarding action was confined to the individual and other regarding actions which are affected others. Mill advocated complete freedom in the self-regarding sphere, however in case of the other regarding actions mill stated that the society has the right to interfere in the individual actions if the individuals concerns were detrimental to the welfare of the society.

In On Liberty (1859) Mill argued that, "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (Heywood, 1992). This explains that Mill's position is Libertarian in nature in

that it accept only the most minimal restrictions on individual freedom and then in order to prevent harm to others. He distinguished clearly between actions that are self-regarding, over which individuals should exercise. In fact, Mill is of the opinion that liberty means much more than simply being free from outside constraints; it involved the capacity of human beings to develop and ultimately active in self-realization.

In the chapter entitled “Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion,” Mill argues in favour of freedom of speech in the vast majority of situations, barring a few key exceptions such as when an individual incites immediate violence.

Mill discusses when state-sanctioned coercion is legitimate. The state provides a degree of security and stability. Therefore Mill concludes we have reciprocal obligations to the state and society at large such as respecting others rights and paying our fair share in taxes to uphold justice. But the relationship between the individual and the state is not a one-way street; in return for their cooperation and services, the state ought to acknowledge certain limits which it ought not cross as a general rule.

While members of a society are justified in interfering with trade, Mill argued that such control was often inexpedient and could be harmful. He concluded that the majority of the time in economic affairs laissez-faire was a preferable system.

Mill was also sceptical about state intervention. As a general rule, individuals understand their own situation and preferences better than a third party. Even benevolent governments interventions could end up being flawed and misguided.

Mill feared the growth of a state in which “everything is done through the bureaucracy.” Mill cited China and Russia as examples of extreme bureaucratic states which curtailed liberty. Mill believed that bureaucracy would naturally lead to stagnation and eventual decline due to the power of vested interests which cripple creativity.

To sum up his idea on freedom, Mill sees freedom as chief end of the state (in democratic society as an intrinsic good itself) and this explains that his notion is the very “heart of liberalism”. Mill supported individuality, for great advances in society were made possible only by creative individuals because creativity could be effective only if allowed to function freely.

Again, Mill strongly believed that individual liberty should be, and to be protected from society; this include the liberty of conscience, thought and feeling, the liberty of tastes and pursuit and freedom to unite; no society in which these liberties are not; on the whole respected, is free and none is completely free even in the liberal democracies where free society is premised.

Mill further believed that individuality and spontaneity created progress. Thus, the governing body of society must mirror this by cultivating independent associations and cooperatives which provide alternative solutions. Charities, cooperatives, and voluntary organizations develop individual’s sense of duty and empathy for others.

Mill not only called for legal defenses of free speech but also for the promotion of individuality and widespread tolerance on a societal level. Mill’s ‘On Liberty,’ hence became massively popular following its publication in 1858. To this day, it is still hailed as one of the best defenses of free speech.