

An Exposition to the Understanding of Liberalism

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Abstract: What is liberalism? In what ways does liberalism differ from conservatism? These are important and interesting questions, worthy of further discussions. This paper addressed the first question; it described liberalism as a secular worldview in two sections. Section one delineated the meaning, history and objective of liberalism. Section two provided an elucidation of the values or principles of liberalism, namely, moral worth of individuals, private property and limited government. Both liberalism and conservatism aim to promote a good life for individuals but they differ in their conceptions of a good life. The earmark of liberalism is that individual autonomy is the basis of a good life. Moreover, conservatives believe that social authority is key to a good life. Much of this study has focused on autonomy. It is made clear that autonomy is a condition of being legislated by reason. Opposed to autonomy is heteronomy, i.e. a condition of being legislated by God. The study has contended that liberalism is a secular worldview because: (1) it detaches individuals from the Holy Scriptures or spiritual sources, and (2) it places man over God and reason over revelation. This work is intended to serve as a basis for evaluating liberal Islam which will be undertaken in my next work entitled *Understanding the Islamic Worldview*. It is hoped that this study will deepen the understanding of liberalism as a secular worldview.

Keywords: Autonomy, heteronomy, good life, secularism, worldview.

INTRODUCTION

Liberalism is a secular conception of the world/life founded on four principles; namely, the equal moral worth of individuals, individual liberties and rights, limited government and private property [1]. A worldview is secular when man is the ultimate authority in the determination of the truth and values. As a worldview, liberalism is focused on individual autonomy/freedom. It sees the world as “a single collection of individuals, all free and equal in dignity and rights” and it is defended by two schools of thought: classical or laissez-faire liberalism and social-democracy or egalitarian liberalism. The former school is a branch of liberalism which advocates “individual rights of non-interference” and “insists on a minimal or highly restricted role for government [1].” Thinkers who belong to this school include, among others, John Locke (1632 – 1704), Adam Smith (1723 – 1790), Friedrich Hayek (1899 – 1992) and Robert Nozick (1938 – 2002). They are anti-authoritarianism and pro-individual liberty (See <http://www.libertarians.net/> Retrieved on December 30, 2016). The latter school of liberalism “seeks to combine the values of equality, personal freedom, and personal responsibility.” They connect “personal autonomy with redistribution and consequently with a more interventionist role for government [1]”. Thinkers who belong to this school

include, among others, Thomas Hill Green (1836 – 1882), Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse (1864 – 1929), John Rawls (1921 – 2002) and Ronald Dworkin (1931 – 2013). They attempt to reconcile between the communitarian and collectivist values that lie at the heart of socialism and the individual’s liberty that lies at the heart of capitalism. In the name of equality, social democrats have been amongst the strongest advocates of state intervention in the form of a welfare state and economic management [2].

The subject of this paper is description of liberalism as a secular worldview. It is divided into two sections. Section one delineates the meaning, history and objective of liberalism. Section two provides an elucidation of the main values or principles of liberalism, namely: (1) protection of individuals and respect of their autonomy (2) respect of private property, and (3) a limited government.

MEANING, CLASSIFICATION, HISTORY AND OBJECTIVE OF LIBERALISM

Liberalism, conservatism and socialism are terms describing people’s political beliefs and ideological preferences. Scholars differ in defining and describing these terms. Consequently, there are several different versions of these ideologies. In what follows,

we shall delineate the meaning of liberalism, its history and objective based on selected literature.

MEANING OF LIBERALISM

A discussion of any concept ought to begin with its definition or description. Definitions are intrinsically important to understanding concepts and words. Additionally, they “are boundary guards to keep out objects that are not under scrutiny and to mark unmistakably the objects that are [3].”

Etymologically, liberalism is derived from the Latin word *liber* which means “free”. Freedom is, therefore, the pivot of liberalism. It opposes the use of coercion unless it is “to prevent acts that constrain other people’s ability to act on their equal right to liberty [4]”.

Liberalism is a secular worldview because it “places human authority where divine authority was” [5] such as the authority to legislate and revise the law. In the liberal perspective, law is “both subject to the people (thus revisable by them) and a check on the actions of the people [5]”. This means: first, law limits people’s freedom and the actions of the government; and second, law isn’t considered legitimate unless it is enacted by people’s representatives in the legislature. In case of disagreement with the law, people have a right to question and challenge it in the court, which means, the legislature cannot simply decide on matters that are not consented upon by the people.

Liberalism is defined as “a belief that progress, leading to final perfection, could be achieved by means of free institutions” [6] such as “separation of church and state, independent judiciaries, freedom of speech, free press,” [6] and free market in the economic sphere (freedom of trade in labor, skill, goods, services, etc.), among others. Liberalism is a philosophy, creed, political theory and programme. It is also one of the forces shaping the mind of the people and influencing their perceiving, knowing and doing.

Liberals regard freedom as vital to a good life but they differ with regard to the degree of freedom that should be allowed for the realization of good life. Isaiah Berlin [7], the British thinker, classified freedom into two: negative and positive freedom. The former is defined as pursuing one’s own good in one’s own way [7]; that is, without interference or obstruction by others. It is absence of “obstacles, barriers, constraints or interference from others” – the absence of law [7]. This kind of freedom, also known as ‘natural freedom,’ writes Berlin, “would lead to social chaos in which men’s minimum needs would not be satisfied; or else the liberties of the weak would be suppressed by the strong” [7]. Positive freedom is defined as, “doing what you want, as long as you don’t infringe on someone else’s freedom (or as long as you don’t get caught) [8]”. It is presence of law or “obstacles, barriers, constraints or interference from others [7]. Positive freedom isn’t related to satisfying one’s desires or acting according to

one’s preferences or “the ability to break with natural laws [9].” It is “to be able to envision and reflect on different alternatives, and to choose which one to bring about [9].” It is also to act “within a framework set by natural laws” [9]. Berlin describes the origin of this kind of freedom as follows:

“The ‘positive’ sense of the word ‘liberty’ derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role – that is, of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realizing them. This is at least part of what I mean when I say that I am rational, and that it is my reason that distinguishes me as a human being from the rest of the world. I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for his choices and able to explain them by reference to his own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not [7].”

Freedom or liberty is a contested concept; it is a concept with multiple meanings. In his *Spirit of Laws*, Montesquieu wrote, no word has many different meanings as does the word ‘freedom’ [9]. Liberals use liberty or freedom to refer to different things. In addition to what has been stated above, some define it as “the opportunity to pursue (one’s) natural rights” [8], i.e. the right to life, liberty and property. Natural Rights are also known as ‘individual rights’. They are part of Natural Law and, therefore, granted by God. They exist independently of government or society. In this regard, they do not “require any act of consent or authorization by others to exist” [4]. Contrasted to the natural rights are the “civil rights” which are part of human law and, therefore, created by man under the terms of the Social

Contract.¹ Natural Rights are restraints to civil rights. This means, any civil right that breaches a Natural Right is unacceptable. Civil rights or civil liberties are “a check against governmental action and are tied to the more general liberal expedient commonly called “the rule of law [5].”

The following are examples of freedom advocated in liberalism: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of will or freedom of action, i.e. “having the ability to make decisions, to act on the grounds of one’s practical reason, to establish goals and evaluate different courses of action as being better or worse for reaching those goals” [9], freedom from arbitrary arrest and free markets. Freedom of religion requires establishment of a secular state; that is, a state that is neutral in the matters of religion. It supports neither religion nor irreligion. Freedom of press requires democracy. What makes democracy a better system than any other is that “its members are autonomous and the obligations they recognize self-imposed” [10]. Hence, “democracy comes to be grounded in respect for individuals’ autonomy [11].” In his *Social Justice in the Liberal State*, Bruce Ackerman writes that “respect for the autonomy of persons is one of the [...] main highways to the liberal state. [...] It is, in short, not necessary for autonomy to be the only good thing; it suffices for it to be the best thing that there is [12]. The term ‘autonomy’ will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, but suffice to say that autonomy is an individual’s capacity to pursue “her own chosen ends; ends not determined by others [11].”

The following are evils and restraints to freedom: state religion, absolute monarchy, social authority, traditionalism and the Divine Right of the Kings. Another term for freedom is liberty. The two concepts are used interchangeably by political and social philosophers [7]. Liberty is classified into two: natural and civil liberties. Natural liberty is “the freedom to do whatever a person likes, good or evil”. Civil liberty is “the freedom to do whatever a person wants provided that it does not interfere with the liberties of others”.

Liberalism has a long history. It began during renaissance as a movement against religious orthodoxy [13] and John Locke (1632–1704) is often regarded as its founder [15] because of his defense of individual freedom.

¹ The theory of social contract tells that the state is founded in agreement, not violence. The latter is detrimental to people’s natural right to liberty. The natural right to liberty “requires that states are only justified if consented to, this means that the only way in which the state can be justified is by theoretical consent.” (Reiman, 2012, p.91).

CLASSIFICATION OF LIBERALISM

Liberalism is classified into two: classical or the nineteenth-century liberalism (although based on ideas developed by the end of the eighteenth-century by people such as Adam Smith) and contemporary or twentieth-century liberalism. Both have different versions. Firstly, the former is viewed as a political philosophy that defends individualism while the latter as a political philosophy that defends individualism and collectivism. Secondly, classical liberalism is mostly known for its defense of ‘natural rights’ while contemporary liberalism is mostly known for its defense of civil liberties. Reiman highlights the difference between classical and contemporary liberalism as follows:

“Nineteenth - century liberals defended the idea of a minimal state – sometimes called the “nightwatchman state” – that does little more than protect people from domestic and international threats of violence to their bodies and property. By contrast, twentieth- century liberals have called for a larger and more active state that, in addition to protecting against domestic and international violence, protects people against poverty and unemployment and racism and sexism” [4].

Defense of individualism is interpreted as creation of a community whose members are ‘self-interested’; meaning, they are “competitive, greedy, anxious, self-absorbed, lonely, and fearful individuals who lack kindness, compassion, empathy, care, and respect towards others [16].” In such a community,

“The highest obligation people feel is to concentrate on themselves, to make the most of themselves, and high achievement of one’s personal goals. Consequently, there is a sense of unease about the effect this desire for individual achievement has on the quality of relationships in families (as evidenced in family breakdowns and poor parenting and care for the elderly), in medical practice (the alleged decline in trust in patient-doctor relationships), or within our communities and broader society (the loss of higher purpose, and a self-absorption that makes people less concerned with others or society) [16].”

OBJECTIVE OF LIBERALISM

Pursuit of good life for individuals is the primary objective of liberalism. It holds that a good life can only exist in a free and just society. This means both freedom and justice are crucial to a good life or goodness of the lives of the people and goodness of society. Both the goodness of the lives of the people and the goodness of society are interdependent [13]; they are inextricably connected.

In liberalism, the following are necessary requirements to build a free and just society: (1) protection of individuals and their dignity, freedom and moral worth (2) respect of private property, and (3) limiting the power of government. The following are regarded as evils by the liberals because they endanger good life of individuals: disrespect of individuals' endeavours or restriction of their options, inequalities that are due to discrimination, exploitation, prejudice and other social injustices, dictatorship, lawlessness, et cetera.

MAIN PRINCIPLES OF LIBERALISM

Having discussed the meaning, classification, history and objective of liberalism, let us turn to its principles; i.e. the propositions that serve as the foundation for this philosophy. A discussion of the foundations of liberalism is crucial in having a deeper understanding of liberalism. They are also the standards for evaluating political arrangements. These are: (1) protection of individuals and respect of their autonomy (2) respect of private property, and (3) a limited government. According to liberals, people's lives are made good by these fundamental principles or values, and they are made bad by their lack.

PROTECTION OF INDIVIDUALS AND RESPECT OF THEIR AUTONOMY

All human beings, *regardless of* their gender, ethnic, political or religious beliefs, or any difference in physical or intellectual capacities, possess inherent dignity. They are the only creatures who have the ability to impose law on themselves. They are endowed with moral conscience that distinguishes them from inanimate objects. Other distinguishing features of human beings are "social practices and norms, institutions and implements" [9]. Protection of individuals and respect of their autonomy is one of the central elements in liberal theory. Liberals argue that every individual "possesses a moral value or worth that nothing else has [1]". This means that they are the only creature held morally and legally responsible for their actions. Moral responsibility presupposes freewill, i.e. it requires that humans freely perform the act: "This moral perspective, however," writes Svendsen, "is meaningful only if the being that possesses it can *evaluate action alternatives* in terms of a *normative perspective*, and can then *choose* between these alternatives" [1]. The capacity to decide without external forces or, to put it more simply, to lead one's life according to one's choice, is known as 'autonomy'.

It is another word for liberty and a central value in Kant's moral philosophy and modern political theory. In his *categorical imperative*,² Immanuel Kant [17] contends that every individual human being is autonomous, moral and rational creature, i.e. they possess the capacity to make moral and rational decisions.

Autonomy is the most crucial underpinning of liberalism. Etymologically, it is from Greek words *autos* (oneself) and *nomos* (law). It simply means 'self-determination', 'self-Lawmaking' [1] – "the power to give laws to ourselves and not to obey other rules than those we gave ourselves" [11]– or 'independence from external constraints'. It is synonymous with "self-governing" [18]. That is, control of one's affairs without any interference from outside.

It is necessary to distinguish between collective autonomy and individual autonomy. Collective autonomy belongs to a group of people (nation, tribe or family). A nation is autonomous when it has *the authority to determine and enforce the rules and policies that govern the lives of her citizens*. Collective autonomy was more popular in the ancient world. It played and continues to play a role in nationalistic revolutions and wars of independence (<http://philosophyterms.com/autonomy/>). An individual is autonomous when he/she have the authority to determine their own actions or lifestyles without coercion or being under control of internal or external forces. Consequently, it follows here that the call for individual autonomy is a call for self-determined actions or self-determined lifestyle. Individual autonomy is more popular in the modern world and it is synonymous with secularism. The proponents of individual autonomy believe that individuals do not need to live under the authority of the Church, divine guidance or traditions. They are self-legislating agents. Therefore, they should be governed by their own conscience. A tradition is "a set of customary beliefs, practices, and actions that has endured from the past to the present and attracted the allegiance of people so that they wish to perpetuate it [13]."

Respect of individual autonomy entails. First, to act in accordance with one's human dignity. This is known as "moral autonomy". There is no respect of actions performed according to one's choice without respect of human dignity/consideration of the moral law. This kind of autonomy is known as "personal autonomy".

² It is called *categorical* because it applies to all rational beings, and it is *imperative* because it is the principle on which everyone ought to act (Kant, 1983, p.421, footnote No. 11).

Second, avoidance of interference with a people's freedom "to decide for themselves how they ought to act, in accordance rationally self-imposed ethical constraints [1]." Inferred from this statement is that rationality is a necessary trait of individual autonomy. Therefore, there is no respect of the actions of lunatics and children who have not yet reached the age of maturity. A ban is required on the actions of the vulnerable, i.e. those who are either mentally incompetent, or powerless – incapable of making independent choices, or inadequately informed.

Third, treating individuals as an end in themselves and not as a means to achieve others' ends. According to liberalism, everyone counts as one, no one counts as two or more; no individual is a slave or servant of others: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means." — Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) [19].

Individual autonomy is best understood in contrast to heteronomy and social authority. Heteronomy is subjection to a rule or law to which one has not consented. It also refers to a condition of being legislated by God. Social authority denotes "a society's power to enforce its political arrangements...the authority a society has over the individuals who live in it" [13].

RESPECT OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

Private property is liberals' primary focus of attention. Why is property so critically important in the liberal theory? Property is important to liberals because individual freedom pivots on property. It is seen as "an important manifestation of individual freedom, because property is regarded as the result of the utilization of one's own talents, labor, and intellectual ability, just as inheritance is seen as the result of the sacrifice and efforts of ancestors"[15]. According to John Locke every man is entitled to the product of his labour on the basis that he is the owner of his own person. The purpose of setting up of civil society or establishment of government, according to classical liberals or social contractarians, is to secure the protection of citizens' private property and other basic liberties [20]. This form of argument is traced back to John Locke. All classical liberals or social-contractarians agree that without the consent of the owner, no one is allowed to encroach upon anybody's property. To do so is to violate a right one has to his property. The following are the reasons why private property is so important:

First, Locke considers it to be the main reason for leaving the state of nature and that it is upon its protection that the civil society attains greater security:

"The Supreme Power cannot take
from any Man any part of his
Property without his own consent.

For the preservation of Property being the end of Government, and that for which Men enter into Society, it necessarily supposes and requires, that the people should *have property*, without which they must be suppos'd to lose that by entering into Society, which was the end for which they entered into it, too gross an absurdity for any Man to own"[21].

In Locke's view, a sovereign forfeits his title to govern when he violates people's right to property:

"Whenever the *Legislators endeavor to take away, and destroy the Property of the People*, or to reduce them to Slavery under Arbitrary Power", a state of war is in effect. The power which people gave to the legislators has then been forfeited. The people, then, "have a Right to resume their original Liberty."³

Second, according to Rousseau, "...the right to property is the most sacred of all the rights of citizenship, and even more important in some respects than liberty itself... Property is the true foundation of civil society" [22]. The reason why a right to property is considered the most sacred of all rights of citizenship is either because, says Rousseau, "property is more intimately linked with the preservation of life, or because, easier to usurp and more difficult to defend than one's person, or because property is the true foundation of civil society and the true guarantee of the citizens' commitments" [22].

Third, property is a right upon which the foundation and survival of civil rights are based. For all civil rights being founded on the right to property, says Rousseau, as soon as the right to property is abolished it is impossible for any other civil right to survive [22].

³ In Locke's view, the original or "*natural* liberty of man is to be free from any superior, ...the liberty of man in *society* is to be under no other legislative power but that established by consents, ... but freedom of man *under government* is to have [i] a standing rule to live by [ii] common to everyone of that society and [iii] made by the legislative power erected in it." For this explanation see Murray Greensmith Forsyth and Keens-Soper, *A Guide to the Political Classics: Plato to Rousseau*. Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1988

He argues that “justice would be no more than a delusion and the government no more than a tyranny, and public authority having no legitimate foundation, no one would be obliged to acknowledge it except insofar as he would be constrained to do so by force [23]”. To violate one’s right to property by for example, using it without the owner’s consent is regarded as an injury inflicted upon the owner [24].

Fourth, in Kant’s view private property promotes the liberty of the owner on one hand; it “enables a man to bring others under his power; for reasons of self-interest they will labour for him and do his bidding. By dependence upon others man loses in worth, and so a man of independent means is an object of respect [17]”. On the other hand, it limits the liberty of nonowners; it “puts (them) under obligations to which they would not otherwise be subject [4].” Eric Freyfogle illustrates this as follows:

Consider what happens when a person becomes the first owner of a tract of land and puts up no -trespassing signs around the perimeter. Before then, any person could wander onto the land and use it; the landscape was a commons for all to enjoy, collecting wood and berries, bringing their livestock, and looking for game. Now, with no -trespassing signs up, these people can no longer make use of this particular land. Only the owner can do so, and those who have gained permission to enter. . . . The landowner, to be sure, has gained greater freedom over this exclusive piece of land. The owner’s liberty has gone up. At the same time, everyone else’s liberty has gone down Freyfogle [25]⁴.

In a nutshell, to have a right to property is to have a right that others refrain from interfering with. That is, ‘the right to use it as one wishes (so long as one does not thereby harm others in ways that violate their rights)’ and to transfer the right of ownership to another person.

Fifth, Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C) argued that; first, private property contributes to efficiency and order

in the use of resources; second, it promotes peace, harmony and unity in the state [26]. Aristotle was quite confident that the community, which has the greatest degree of unity, is the one which accepts private property ownership and not the one in which all men refer to the same thing as “mine” and “not mine” at the same instant of time (Ibid). Third, that it prevents quarrels among the individual members of the state, which arise more frequently where there is no division of the things possessed [26].

Aristotle contended that property is a part of the household and the art of acquiring it is a part of the art of managing the household; for no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he is provided with necessaries [26]. Necessaries are things that are required for human survival and we have already mentioned them in the first chapter.

Sixth, in both Greek and Roman societies private property ownership of the fixed things like house(s) and land, and of unfixed things like domestic animals and tools, was regarded as an entry-permit into the arena of legitimate political activity,⁵ most fundamentally because it either made a citizen economically stable and therefore politically active, or it provided the required free time for the citizen to engage in politics. To quote Aristotle, “citizens must have a supply of property in order to have leisure’ to devote to public concerns”[27]. In the Roman Empire, political participation was entirely restricted to members of the hierarchies of state officials, whether in central government or in the local government of the cities [28]. In both the Greek and Roman societies, political participation was restricted to free male citizens. They were the only ones were allowed to own property. Both women and slaves had no legal right to property ownership whether fixed or unfixed. Instead, they were treated as property to be traded, sold, or otherwise disposed of [29]. Women and slaves in pre-Islamic Arabia faced the same treatment.

Seventh, T.H. Marshall is of the opinion that, (private) property “is or may be the certificate of membership of society.” This is because, he contends, “It establishes useful contacts and relationships with other persons. It creates rights and obligations [30].” That is, a person’s right to retain, consume, or alienate what he or she owns, and others’ duty to respect what one owns. In Marshall’s view, “a property-less man is an outcast, a parasite, a tramp [30]”.

Eighth, behavioral scientists--psychologists and ethologists--see possession of property as the first aim of man and animals, and have interpreted nature as a scheme of conquest and arrogation [29]. They argue

⁴ For this reference I am indebted to Jeffrey Reiman, *As Free and as Just as Possible: The Theory of Marxian Liberalism*. First Edition. The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2012, pp. 99-100.

⁵ In the Roman Empire property ownership of the fixed and unfixed things continued to be regarded as an entry-permit into political activities until the fifth century A.D.

that, “long before Descartes shaped his proof of existence by way of the mind, the first principle of man’s dawning consciousness would seem to have been ‘I own, therefore I am’ [29]”. This means that the very existence of man is reflected in possession and ownership of things, which are necessary for his survival, so that, one who owns nothing has no real existence.

Ninth, writes Crowder, “Property may be an instrument and expression of autonomy both as a positive resource for the pursuit by individuals of their various plans of life and, consequently, as a check on the power of government [1].”

Tenth, according to the utilitarians, property is necessary as a means to an end, which is human happiness [31]⁶. There is difference of opinion among utilitarians concerning the definition of happiness. Traditional utilitarians define it very broadly, so as to include the whole range of human satisfactions. The so-called ‘economic utilitarians’ narrowly confine happiness to those satisfactions, which can be sought by economic transactions and measured by ‘dollar votes’ [31] “each portion of wealth” writes Bentham, “has a corresponding portion of happiness” [32]⁷.

It worth noting that private property is commonly associated with capitalism; that is “an economic system in which competition for profit is the primary aim of the owners of productive resources, and in which workers can be laid off or fired if economic conditions warrant” [4].

A LIMITED GOVERNMENT

Government is fundamental to people’s existence. However, not all government are supported. Less government intervention and more individual freedom, not the freedom of the state or the people, is another principle of liberalism. All liberals argue that the state’s domain should be limited. They view a large government as “the by-product of the denial of the inherent rights and freedoms of the individual” [33]. A government with limited power is known as ‘the minimal state’ or the ‘Night-watchman state’ in the classical liberal theory. It is forbidden from exceeding its only legitimate function of providing protective services [34]. Nozick believes that the minimal state is “the most extensive state that can be justified. Any state more extensive violates people’s rights.” [35]. He contends that:

“The minimal state treats us as inviolate individuals, who may not be used in certain ways by others as means or tools or instruments or resources; it treats us as persons having individual rights with the dignity this constitutes. Treating us with respect by respecting our rights, it allows us, individually or with whom we choose, to choose our life and to realize our ends and our conception of ourselves, insofar as we can, aided by the voluntary cooperation of other individuals possessing the same dignity. How *dare* any state or group of individuals do more Or less” [35].

In the view of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Immanuel Kant, the night-watchman state is formed purposely to provide security to life, property, liberty, and other so-called natural rights of man; i.e. rights that cannot be separated from a person because they are granted by God. They are “inalienable” which means they are “no one else’s” so that they can be taken away. It is a duty of the night-watchman state to ensure the safety of such rights from internal and external threats. Without security of property and natural rights of man, the classical liberals contended that justice is unattainable and civilization is impossible.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the foregone that: first, liberalism is an outlook of man as a subject of moral worth and autonomous being, and the world as a place of “free men, equal under the rule of law, bound together by no common purpose but sharing a respect for each other’s rights.” This is John Locke’s conception of *civil society* [36]. Second, a liberal society is one in which individuals exercise their autonomy, i.e. freedom or liberty and a good life is one that is autonomous. There are two conceptions of freedom; positive and negative. The positive conception of freedom is that individuals are free “to act as they choose and to determine the shape of their own lives” just as long as they don’t violate ‘human dignity’ and ‘sanctity of life’ and impinge upon another’s identical freedom. As Kenneth Seeskin describes, “Autonomy is intimately connected with reason and means obedience to the moral law” [18]. Third, the aim of liberalism is to preserve the equal moral worth of individuals. As a worldview, liberalism regards individuals as autonomous agents, which means, they must be treated equally without discrimination. They are to be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to achieve someone’s or one’s end. Fourth, protection of individuals and respect of their autonomy, respect of private property and limited government are the essential values on which good lives depend. Fifth, the

⁶ As a theory whose major object is to promote human welfare, utility has its origins in the works of the eighteenth-century philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham and his nineteenth-century successor John Stuart Mill.

functions of the government are: “to enable people to live as they please, rather than to force them to live in a particular way” [13]; to preserve individual liberties and rights especially a right to property and to impose limits on the freedom of individuals which interfere with the liberty and rights of others. Sixth, a liberal society is one in which “information flows freely”, and individuals live according to their conception of a good life. Seven, the liberal perception of morality is that reason serves as a template for what is good and bad. Eighth, the rights of individuals are the barrier to government’s power. This means, where the government’s power ends, the rights of individuals begin. The primary duty of government is to protect the inalienable rights of individuals; namely, the right to life, property, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Rights granted by state or society are alienable, in other words, they are privileges. They are protected when necessary. Last, but not least, the purpose of life, in liberalism, is to do what is autonomous; i.e. what is decided by intellect or whatever is in accordance with morality. This interpretation is based on Kant’s “Categorical Imperative”, the principle every person is required to follow. Immoral actions violate this principle and therefore, unacceptable. In a nutshell, one does not act autonomously when one performs actions that are irrational/immoral and to punish a wrongdoer or to stop him or her committing a crime is not a violation of individual autonomy, but merely to act in accordance with the natural law or justice.

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