

### Lecture 3: Natural Rights

“The Founders built this nation on the concept of natural rights. The principle of natural rights can be a little tricky to understand at first. But, once you grasp it, it can dramatically affect your understanding of the role of government.

“To understand natural rights, imagine that there’s no government. We all live as separate individuals. And let’s say someone kills your child because of your child’s hair color. Would you say that what they did was wrong? Of course you would.

“So, even if there is no government, and no laws, there is still right and wrong. There is still fairness and justice. In other words, we still have natural rights. You see, natural rights are God-given and inherent; mankind and governments don’t create them. And though governments cannot create them, the entire role of government is to protect them.”

“Many of you are already familiar with the concept of natural rights. It was well known among the Founders, and one of the greatest articulations we have of natural rights is the Declaration of Independence.”

“‘We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain Unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.’ *Unalienable Rights* are *natural* rights. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are three of them. The next sentence in the Declaration states that ‘to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.’

“Jefferson lists life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as natural rights. Please note that the Founders often used *happiness* and *property* interchangeably. We were born with our *natural rights*. Humans form governments to ‘secure,’ or protect, those rights. The Founders declared that when governments fail to protect natural rights, those governments must be changed or overthrown. This was their justification for rebellion. They argued that the colonial-style government of Great Britain was not honoring the natural rights of the colonists, and was therefore to be overthrown.

“In his landmark essay, *The Proper Role of Government*, Ezra Taft Benson taught about natural rights clearly and powerfully. President Benson explained that without a government, we would all be obligated to defend our own natural rights if we wished to be free. We would have

to play the role of law-enforcement officer, judge, jury, and executioner. But defending our own natural rights costs time and effort. So, to make life better for everyone, we hire a sheriff to defend our natural rights, and government is born.

“So, we all have a right to protect our own natural rights. But it is much easier to hire a government to do it for us rather than to have all of us do it ourselves, separately.

“Government is instituted solely to protect our natural rights. It can only do what the people would have the right to do themselves if there were no government. It eases the cost—in wonderful ways—of enforcing our own natural rights. The authority of government is the sum of the natural rights of the people. *But the government cannot take upon itself powers or rights that are not part of the natural rights of the people.*”

The murmur across the auditorium informed Dr. Isaacson he had better try the point again.

“Think of it this way. If you were to take all the natural rights of the people and bundle them up, that bundle entails the power and duty of the government. If the government fails to protect that bundle of rights, it falls short of its duty. But if the government exercises authority *beyond* what that bundle offers it, it is going too far.

“This is why we identify Hitler as evil. He *was* the German government. Now, just as individuals cannot randomly take life, governments cannot randomly take life either. Hitler was unjust because he used the power of government not to protect natural rights, but rather to violate them. His actions constituted great evil and his overthrow was just.

“Now, we are good at sensing injustice when it comes to the right to life,” Dr. Isaacson paused. “Well, I guess with abortion we have now become callous to the protection of life, too. But generally we have a consensus that governments cannot arbitrarily kill. We sense this because individually we don’t have the right to do so. But what we have let go of the past century—and this leads us back to The Thread and their plan—is the natural right to *property*.

“Let’s go back to the scenario where we have no government. Imagine that Farmer Rich has a lot of cows and a small family. Pretend that Farmer Poor has only one cow and a huge family. Would it be okay for Farmer Rich to donate some of his cows to Farmer Poor?”

A student responded. “Sure. The cows are his. Farmer Rich can do whatever he wants with his own cows.”

“I agree,” said Dr. Isaacson. “But let’s say that *you* notice the unfair situation and go to Farmer Rich’s hut and *take* five of his cows. Then you go and give them to Farmer Poor as a gift from society. What do you think?”

“No way. That would be stealing,” concluded the same student without hesitating.

“But the situation is obviously not fair!” countered Dr. Isaacson. “You might have taken Farmer Rich’s cows, but you used them to do good and make things more equal.”

Waves of understanding swept the auditorium. But the student did not yet see where the professor was leading him, and felt a little defensive.

“If Farmer Rich wants to give his own cows to Farmer Poor, he can! But I can’t just go and take his stuff and give it to someone else!”

“So, if *people* cannot remove your property and give it to another, does the *government* have the right to do so?” That was the golden question.

Dr. Isaacson continued. “When governments fail to protect natural rights by abolishing the right of individuals to own and control property, they go beyond the bounds of their responsibilities. Such is the case with socialism. Socialists argue that although *individuals* should not plunder and take from some to give to others, the collective power of the people—the government—*does* have the power to do so.

Socialism is a system of legalized plunder where the government wields tremendous power through the redistribution of wealth. In such a system, governments perceive economic freedom as a great nuisance, not as a natural and God-given right as the Founders understood it to be. Socialists often hide their plunder under the guise of good intentions, but the core evil is in the violation of the natural right of property—which socialism disregards and destroys. The natural right of private property is another way of stating economic freedom.” Dr. Isaacson picked up the scriptures and read to the students.

“Listen to what the Lord says in Section 134 of the *Doctrine and Covenants* about property as a natural right: ‘We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society. We believe that no government can exist in peace, except—’”

Dr. Isaacson paused. “Notice what governments must uphold in order to exist in peace. ‘No government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure

to each individual the free exercise of conscience, *the right and control of property*, and the protection of life.’

“Up until 100 years ago, America, by and large, honored the right to property as an unalienable right. But now, we think that the government can control and distribute private property as it wishes simply because it is the government. Our government is exercising powers that are unjust. The result is that with many things people used to take responsibility for, they now look to the federal government; and the effect on individuals and families has been devastating.

“Remember that every one of the economic objectives of The Thread is designed to remove economic freedom. That means The Thread is riding on the wave of socialism generated in the past. The Thread is dependent on Americans being dependent. To do that, the government must govern as if property is not a natural right and that they can redistribute property at their discretion. Recently, The Thread has pushed for anything that accelerates the destruction of private property and places it into the hands of the federal government. In the name of compassion and equality, our government has become the greatest thief most Americans have to deal with. And that is exactly what The Thread has exploited on their road to power.”