

Order, Liberty, and the Three Realms of Equality: Interdependencies and Trade-Offs

Order, Liberty, and Equality

The three values in this triad have a complex relationship. Each depends to some extent on the other two. Each can also conflict with the others.

Interdependencies. Order generally comes first. Anarchy characterizes a society with no order; everyone has license, so the strong can prey on the weak. Thus, there is no equality and no real liberty as well. The right amount and type of order provides the opportunity for liberty and equality to flourish. A large part of equality, as a norm, is high-level order.

Liberty and equality strongly reinforce each other. “If we abandon equality [as an ideal towards which we constantly strive], we lose the single bond that makes us a community, that makes us a people with the capacity to be free collectively and individually in the first place.”¹ But, equality can have no impact if a high degree of liberty does not also exist.

Liberty requires a high degree of political and social equality. There is no liberty without political equality: if I can dominate someone politically or socially, he is not free.

Tradeoffs and Conflicts. Many have argued that there is a fundamental conflict between liberty and equality. Libertarian Robert Nozick, for example, famously charged that a concern with equality is a concern with a particular pattern of wealth distribution, which can be maintained only by interfering with the liberty of individuals to make choices, take risks, and enter into contracts that would deviate from that pattern.

Others have argued that to gain the safety that order can provide upon entering into society, people must give up a large part of their liberties. John Locke argued, to the contrary, that to go from the state of nature to life in society, one must give up only two rights:

- The right to punish someone who hurts you; and
- The right to make your own laws and be the judge in your own case.

These are the only two rights, Locke argued, that you must surrender. Any others you give up, you do so voluntarily, and are not necessary just to live in society.²

Social, Financial, and Political Equality and Inequality

These and other forms of equality are interconnected, and achieving one tends to contribute to the realization of others. For example, political equality can support the advancement of social and economic equality by shaping policies that promote inclusivity and fairness.

The same is true in reverse: people who have disproportionate economic power are likely to seek disproportionate political power in order to maintain their greater wealth and influence.

¹ Allen, Danielle, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality*, 2014, p. 275.

² Locke, John, *Second Treatise on Government*, 1690, Sections 129 and 130.