

## FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

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With “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the Declaration of Independence powerfully encapsulates the ultimate aspirations of human civilizations. From ancient Greece to Enlightenment Europe, from the American Revolution to Gandhi's independence movement, we have been striving for these valued notions. However, rampant state censorship in Iran, recurrent political persecution in Afghanistan, and mass protests in the MENA region constantly remind us that humanity's dream for liberty is far from realized. Turning a blind eye to instances of oppression, however, some of us have stopped longing for freedom, for they perceive themselves as already free. Unfortunately, in light of literary works and historical events, those who feel free are, paradoxically, the most hopelessly enslaved.

The allegorical wisdom of dystopian novels reminds readers of the danger of satisfaction. In Orwell's *Animal Farm*, for freedom and equality did the animals – led by pigs – rebel against their human owner, yet for ignorance and innocence did they – ruled by pigs – see themselves freed under the pigs' dictatorship. The pigs have inculcated in other animals that revolution precedes liberty, to the extent that they never doubted the policy and politics of the pigs until “it was impossible to say which was” pig and which was human.

Fortunately, when presented with this alluring road to satisfaction and serfdom, we have historically averted enslavement by demanding more freedom. During the French Revolution, Marquis de La Fayette envisioned a nation of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* in issuing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, proclaiming dedication towards the “maintenance of the Constitution and the happiness of all.” The leaders of the French Revolution had indeed abolished their *Ancien Régime* and provided the French citizens with more personal and political freedom. At that time, their plan did appear

convincing. However, only two years later, feminists led by Olympe de Gouges, the author of the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Female Citizen, would go on to criticize the original Declaration of Man by exposing its disregard for women's rights and freedom, while abolitionists such as Jacques Pierre Brissot, active advocator of a “new Convention,” continued championing the prohibition of slavery after the Revolution had already succeeded, pointing out how both Declarations failed to adequately address this issue. The Declaration, initially regarded as a sound and cogent pronouncement of freedom, was later found to be incomplete and ineffective. Only after French citizens and intellectuals discovered dissatisfaction with the degree of liberty they received, did the French state and society improve, with the masses truly freed from oppression by today's standards.

“None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who believe they are free.” Given that freedom is based on subjective interpretation and is difficult to evaluate by objective standards, there hasn't been and will never be a consensus on the ever-evolving definition of freedom. Hence, those who believe they are free have been, is, and will continue to be enslaved, for they have stopped striving for freedom when no one is absolutely free.