



Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on June 13, 2012

## Bloomberg's Soda Policy: The End Doesn't Justify the Means

The debate incited by Mayor Bloomberg's plan to outlaw supersized sodas in New York misses an important point. In the mayor's words, "We're not taking away anybody's right to do things. We're simply *forcing* you to understand that you have to make the conscious decision to go from one cup to another cup." (Emphasis added.)

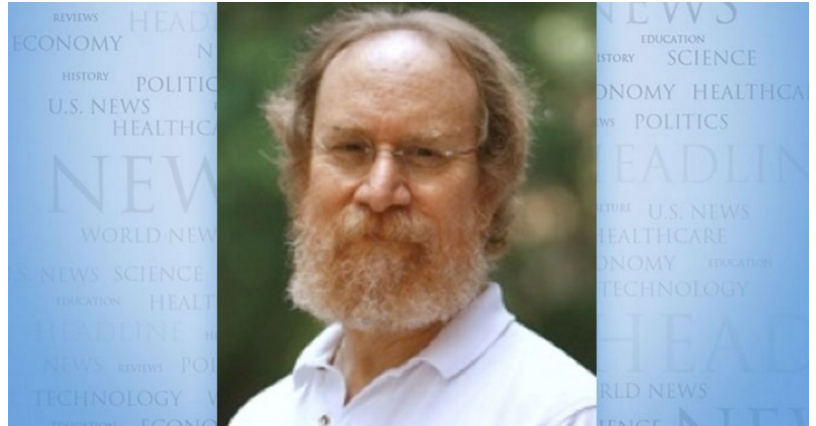
There it is. He wants to forcibly interfere with other people in order to achieve his objective. (Contrary to what he says, however, he wouldn't be forcing New Yorkers to understand something — is that possible? Rather, he'd be forcing them not to buy and sell something.)

In light of this, the ensuing debate has overlooked something we all should have learned as kids: the end doesn't justify the means. Didn't Bloomberg's parents teach him that when he was a child?

Lots of objections are raised against Bloomberg's policy: for example, that it unfairly and arbitrarily singles out one kind of beverage ("milk-based" drinks like cappuccinos are exempt, as are fruit juices — which are loaded with sugar), and that the plan would likely have no measurable effect on obesity. But there's something more fundamental:

How dare the mayor propose to use force against peaceful individuals? *The end doesn't justify the means.*

Let's grant Bloomberg his premise that if customers in restaurants can have sugared sodas in quantities no larger than 16 ounces at a time, requiring them to go to the trouble





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of requesting refills, they will drink less and lose weight. How does that justify using the force of the state against those who want to buy and sell larger quantities?

Let's be clear about what the policy entails. Violators (presumably the eateries) will be fined. What if a restaurateur refuses to pay the fine? Armed officers of the government will attempt to take the money from him. If he resists, those officers will be prepared to use violence to impose the penalty. Imprisonment, bodily harm, and even death could be the result. All this for selling a soda larger than 16 ounces!

That seems rather severe for an "offense" that is nothing more than a peaceful voluntary transaction. According to the Western liberal philosophy of the free society, force may be used only in defense of innocent life or to rectify a wrong committed by force or fraud. Violent interference with peaceful consensual acts of buying and selling clearly falls outside that line. The philosophy regards the individual as sovereign; each person is to be free to do what she wants so long as she does not violate other people's freedom to do the same. This is the theory of rights embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

Of course, governments have violated this principle in a variety of ways over the decades. During Prohibition, people couldn't buy and sell liquor. Under the so-called war on drugs, people can't buy certain other substances regardless of how responsibly they may use them. And now if Bloomberg gets his way, people will not be allowed to buy and sell sugared sodas in cups larger than 16 ounces — because some other people think having that freedom is bad for the buyers' health. Obviously, once that step is accepted as legitimate, there is no reason



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why free refills or large drinks in convenience stores shouldn't also be outlawed.

Yes, the advocates of such violations of freedom always have "good reasons." Today, health is the top-ranking reason for government interference. People who would never put up with such intrusions in the name of morality will readily do so in the name of good health.

But when it comes to the use of aggressive force, good reasons don't matter.

The end doesn't justify the means. This is so basic to commonsense morality that it shouldn't have to be explained. It is not enough that a means can accomplish an end. It must satisfy other moral criteria as well. If five lives could be saved by killing one person and harvesting his organs, would that make it right? Of course not, and it wouldn't matter who was doing the killing, a private individual or a government bureaucrat.

Force may be used only to meet aggressive force. Shame on you, Mayor Bloomberg. You should have listened to your parents.

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