



Rights Versus Wishes

Here is what presidential aspirant Sen. Bernie Sanders said: "I believe that health care is a right of all people." President Barack Obama declared that health care "should be a right for every American." The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: "Every person has a right to adequate health care." President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his January 1944 message to Congress, called for "the right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health." And it is not just a health care right that people claim. There are rights to decent housing, good food and a decent job, and for senior citizens, there's a right to prescription drugs. In a free and moral society, do people have these rights? Let's look at it.



In the standard historical usage of the term, a "right" is something that exists simultaneously among people. As such, a right imposes no obligation on another. For example, the right to free speech is something we all possess. My right to free speech imposes no obligation upon another except that of noninterference. Similarly, I have a right to travel freely. Again, that right imposes no obligation upon another except that of noninterference.

Contrast those rights to free speech and travel with the supposed rights to medical care and decent housing. Those supposed rights do impose obligations upon others. We see that by recognizing that there is no Santa Claus or tooth fairy. If one does not have money to pay for a medical service or decent housing and the government provides it, where do you think the government gets the money?

If you agree that there is no Santa Claus or tooth fairy and that Congress does not have any resources of its very own, the only way for Congress to give one American something is to first take it from some other American. In other words, if one person has a right to something he did not earn, it requires another person's not having a right to something he did earn.

Let's apply this bogus concept of rights to my right to speak and travel freely. Doing so, in the case of my right to free speech, it might impose obligations on others to supply me with an auditorium, microphone and audience. My right to travel freely might require that others provide me with resources to purchase airplane tickets and hotel accommodations. If I were to demand that others make sacrifices



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so that I can exercise my free speech and travel rights, I suspect that most Americans would say, “Williams, yes, you have rights to free speech and traveling freely, but I’m not obligated to pay for them!”

As human beings, we all have certain natural rights. Of the rights we possess, we have a right to delegate them to government. For example, we all have a natural right to defend ourselves against predators. Because we possess that right, we can delegate it to government. By contrast, I do not have a right to take one person’s earnings to give to another. Because I have no such right, I cannot delegate it to government. If I did take your earnings to provide medical services for another, it would rightfully be described and condemned as an act of theft. When government does the same, it’s still theft, albeit legalized theft.

If you’re a Christian or a Jew, you should be against these so-called rights. When God gave Moses the eighth commandment — “Thou shalt not steal” — I am sure that he did not mean “thou shalt not steal unless there is a majority vote in Congress.” The bottom line is medical care, housing and decent jobs are not rights at all, at least not in a free society; they are wishes. As such, I would agree with most Americans — because I, too, wish that everyone had good medical care, decent housing and a good job.

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