



A Superior Vision

Last month, I celebrated the beginning of my 81st year of life. For nearly half that time, I have been writing a nationally syndicated column on many topics generating reader responses that go from supportive to quite ugly. So I thought a column making my vision, values and views explicit might settle some of the controversy.

My initial premise, when looking at all human issues, is that each of us owns himself. I am my private property, and you are your private property. If you agree with that premise, then certain human actions are moral and others immoral. The reason murder is immoral is that it violates private property. Similarly, rape and theft are immoral, for they, too, violate private property. Most Americans will agree that murder and rape violate people's property rights and are hence immoral. But there may not be so much agreement about theft. Let's look at it.

Theft is when a person's property is taken from him – through stealth, force, intimidation, threats or coercion – and given to another to whom it does not belong. If a person took your property – even to help another person who is in need – it would be called theft. Suppose three people agreed to that taking. Would it be deemed theft? What if 100,000 or several hundred million people agreed to do so? Would that be deemed theft? Another way to ask these questions is: Does a consensus establish morality?

Self-ownership can offer solutions to many seemingly moral/ethical dilemmas. One is the sale of human organs. There is a severe shortage of organs for transplantation. Most people in need of an organ die or become very ill while they await an organ donation. Many more organs would become available if there were a market for them. Through the National Organ Transplant Act of 1984, Congress has made organ sales illegal. Congress clearly has the power to prevent organ sales, but does it have a right? The answer to that question comes by asking: Who owns your organs? One test of ownership is whether you have the right to sell something. In the case of organs, if it is Congress that owns our organs, then we have no right to sell them. That would be stealing from Congress.

People have the right to take chances with their own lives. People do not have a right to take chances with the lives of others. That is why laws that mandate that cars have brakes are consistent with liberty and seat belt laws are not. You might say, "Aha, Williams, we've got you there because if you don't wear a seat belt and you have an accident and turn into a vegetable, society is burdened with taking care of you!" That's not a problem of liberty. It's a problem of socialism. Nobody should be forced to take care





Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on April 27, 2016

of me for any reason. If government assumes the job of taking care of us, then Congress can control just about every aspect of our lives. When I was a rebellious teenager, my mother frequently told me, “As long as you’re living in my house and I’m paying the bills, you’re going to do as I say.” That kind of thinking is OK for children, but not for emancipated adults.

I have only touched the surface of ideas of self-ownership. The immorality associated with violation of the principle of self-ownership lies at the root of problems that could lead to our doom as a great nation. In fiscal 2015, total government spending — federal, state and local — was about \$6.41 trillion. That’s about 36 percent of our gross domestic product. The federal government spent \$3.69 trillion. At least two-thirds of that spending can be described as government’s taking the property of one American and giving it to another. That’s our moral tragedy: We’ve become a nation of people endeavoring to live at the expense of others — in a word, a nation of thieves.

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