



Masking Totalitarianism

One of the oldest notions in the history of mankind is that some people are to give orders and others are to obey. The powerful elite believe that they have wisdom superior to the masses and that they've been ordained to forcibly impose that wisdom on the rest of us. Their agenda calls for an attack on the free market and what it implies — voluntary exchange. Tyrants do not trust that people acting voluntarily will do what the tyrant thinks they should do. Therefore, free markets are replaced with economic planning and regulation that is nothing less than the forcible superseding of other people's plans by the powerful elite.



Because Americans still retain a large measure of liberty, tyrants must mask their agenda. At the university level, some professors give tyranny an intellectual quality by preaching that negative freedom is not enough. There must be positive liberty or freedoms. This idea is widespread in academia, but its most recent incarnation was a discussion by Wake Forest University professor David Coates in a *Huffington Post* article, titled "[Negative Freedom or Positive Freedom: Time to Choose?](#)" (11/13/2013). Let's examine negative versus positive freedom.

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Negative freedom or rights refers to the absence of constraint or coercion when people engage in peaceable, voluntary exchange. Some of these negative freedoms are enumerated in our Constitution's Bill of Rights. More generally, at least in its standard historical usage, 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. Likewise, my right to travel imposes no obligation upon another.

Positive rights is a view that people should have certain material things — such as medical care, decent housing and food — whether they can pay for them or not. Seeing as there is no Santa Claus or tooth fairy, those "rights" do impose obligations upon others. If one person has a right to something he did not earn, of necessity it requires that another person not have a right to something he did earn.

If we were to apply this bogus concept of positive rights to free speech and the right to travel freely, my free speech rights would impose financial obligations on others to supply me with an auditorium, microphone and audience. My right to travel would burden others with the obligation to purchase airplane tickets and hotel accommodations for me. Most Americans, I would imagine, would tell me, "Williams, yes, you have the right to free speech and travel rights, but I'm not obligated to pay for them!"

What the positive rights tyrants want but won't articulate is the power to forcibly use one person to serve the purposes of another. After all, if one person does not have the money to purchase food, housing or medicine and if Congress provides the money, where does it get the money? It takes it from



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on November 27, 2013

some other American, forcibly using that person to serve the purposes of another. Such a practice differs only in degree, but not kind, from slavery.

Under natural law, we all have certain unalienable rights. The rights we possess we have authority to delegate. For example, we all have a right to defend ourselves against predators. Because we possess that right, we can delegate it to government, in effect saying, "We have the right to defend ourselves, but for a more orderly society, we delegate to you the authority to defend us." By contrast, I don't possess the right to take your earnings to give to another. Seeing as I have no such right, I cannot delegate it.

The idea that one person should be forcibly used to serve the purposes of another has served as the foundation of mankind's ugliest and most brutal regimes. Do we want that for America?

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