

Economics, Not Engineering

Editor's Pick. Written by Sandy Ikeda.

Let's say we lived in the kind of world in which the government could eliminate some well-recognized social problem, say violent crime, by simply passing a law. Although you may like that particular outcome, the question is, would you want to live in such a world?

While some might say "no" if it means giving up a cherished human right, what I have in mind is not to ponder a trade-off between rights and outcomes. Instead, I'm thinking about a deeper question. That is, before we can begin to sensibly discuss any trade-off between rights and outcomes, we need some assurance that such a trade-off is even possible. As my esteemed colleague Steve Horwitz has put it: Every ought implies an is.

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