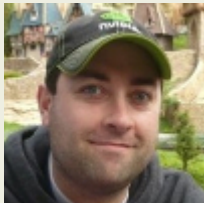


Rights as an Entitlement to Self-Ownning Action



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“The Self Owner” is an original weekly column appearing every Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Spencer W. Morgan. Spencer is a husband and father, and has studied History and Philosophy at the University of Utah. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Last week we examined in detail the concept of a “right.” It is a sphere of entitled free actions, the entitlement to which is non-conditional and need not be conveyed by any external source. The entitlement comes from reality itself, and the human condition. Many people may differ on their views of creation, but this question need not divide supporters of the proper concept of rights. Whatever process or being brought about the human condition, our condition is what it is... and that condition implies self-ownership. Our lives require us to be volitional actors and utilize our ownership condition in ways that presume it.

Now that we’ve established that each individual human is entitled, by virtue of their existence, to a certain range of self-owning actions, how do we deal with the results of those actions. How we address this question is very important. Mistaken approaches to this have led to some very enduring falsehoods and mistakes in the notion of rights.

Even though our human condition entitles us to take certain actions (without external interference via force), it doesn’t entitle us to the results of those actions. When we detach the idea of a right from the notion of entitlement to *actions* themselves, there is a tendency to assume an entitlement to results of actions without examining the way they were obtained. I’d like to examine a common fallacy that comes from conceptions of rights that go beyond entitlements to action.

Rights vs. Capability

One very common confusion with the idea of rights is to mistake capabilities for rights. While you have a right to take whatever self-owning actions of which you are capable, your rights are not decreased or violated by a failure in capability. I have a right to flap my arms and attempt to fly, but my inability to achieve the result does not reduce my rights. Since rights are an entitlement to my use of my self to attempt this, I am still acting on my

entitlement whether I succeed or fail... so long as my entitlement was not interfered with by force from another. Only force or fraud violates rights... not consequences from reality.

Once we understand that the entitlement involved in a right is an entitlement to the action, or the attempt, we can see that while it entitles us to use ourselves to pursue an objective, a right does not entitle us to evade the consequences reality will impose. To suggest that one has a right to expect a certain result of our actions is to expect either that another is obligated to make up for our failures in taking those actions, or to expect that reality itself must change to our desires. The former requires a violation of the very concept of rights we started with, negating those individuals' self-determination, and the latter is simply an absurdity.