

## Natural Rights

### I. Definitions

1. Natural *adj.* - II. 8. a. Implanted, existing, or present, by nature; inherent in the very constitution of a person or thing; innate; not acquired or assumed. c. *natural right(s)*, in Western political philosophy, esp. since the 18th century, doctrines derived from concepts of the nature of man and the relationship of the individual to the state whereby certain rights are formulated (see quotes.) which the state ought to safeguard. (OED)
2. Right *n.* - 1. The standard of permitted and forbidden action within a certain sphere; law; a rule or canon. 9. a. A legal, equitable, or moral title or claim to the possession of property or authority, the enjoyment of privileges or immunities, etc. Freq. with qualifying word, as *civil*, *natural*, *real rights*: see the various adjs. *Declaration* or *Bill of Rights*, (OED)
3. "Natural rights are those not contingent upon the laws, customs, or beliefs of any particular culture or government, and therefore universal and inalienable (i.e., rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws)." (*Natural and legal rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-11-16)

### II. Rights are derived from laws.

1. Law *n.* - I. A rule of conduct imposed by authority. 1. a. The body of rules, whether proceeding from formal enactment or from custom, which a particular state or community recognizes as binding on its members or subjects.
2. "A *right* is a moral power residing in a person, or in unified groups of persons, of doing, possessing, or exacting something. A *duty* is the correlative of right; it is the moral obligation of doing or avoiding something. Rights and duties are of different classifications. A right or duty is *natural* or *positive* according to its basis in the natural law or in positive law. For every right and duty rests ultimately on law, which is the norm of all human activity. A man's right to life, and his right to freedom from enslavement, are *natural rights*." (Paul J. Glenn, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 411)
3. Example: If a *law* says that no citizen of a city shall be denied access to a public bus, then every citizen of that city has a *right* to ride a public bus.

### III. Natural rights and natural law

1. Natural Law
  - A. *Natural Law* is the idea that *all men* have the law of God written in their minds by natural and therefore have an innate knowledge of right and wrong.
  - B. This idea is false; see sermon series: [Natural Law - Does it Exist and is it Biblical?](#)
  - C. It is true that God writes His law on the hearts of His elect when He regenerates them, but it is not true that all men are born with the law of God written on their hearts.
  - D. Although men do not naturally have the law of God written on their hearts, God still has laws that govern the behavior of human beings.
  - E. Ignorance of a law doesn't abolish it.
2. Natural rights are derived from God's law.
  - A. God's law says "Thou shalt not kill" (**Exo 20:13**).
    - i. This means that all men have a *natural right* to *not* be killed.
    - ii. Therefore, all men have a *natural right* to their life.
    - iii. No other person has a greater claim on one's life than himself.
  - B. God's law forbids "menstealing" (**1Ti 1:10; Exo 21:16; Deu 24:7**).

- i. This means that all men have a *natural right* to *not* be stolen (kidnapped).
  - ii. Therefore, all men have a *natural right* to their body.
  - iii. Therefore, all men have a *natural right* to their liberty.
  - iv. No other person has a greater claim on one's body and one's liberty than himself.
- C. God's law says "Thou shalt not steal" (**Exo 20:15**).
  - i. This means that all men have a *natural right* to *not* have their possessions taken from them.
  - ii. Therefore, all men have a *natural right* to their justly acquired property.
  - iii. Therefore, all men have a *natural right* to acquire and control property.
  - iv. No other person has a greater claim on one's property than himself.

#### IV. Natural rights are *negative rights*.

1. Rights can be divided into *positive rights* and *negative rights*.
2. Positive rights
  - A. A *positive right* is a title or claim to the acquisition of property or to a service.
  - B. "*Positive rights* usually oblige action." (*Negative and positive rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-13-16)
  - C. "Rights considered *positive rights*, as initially proposed in 1979 by the Czech jurist Karel Vasak, may include other civil and political rights such as police protection of person and property and the right to counsel, as well as economic, social and cultural rights such as food, housing, public education, employment, national security, military, health care, social security, internet access, and a minimum standard of living." (*Negative and positive rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-13-16)
  - D. Examples of *positive rights* are:
    - i. a right to housing.
    - ii. a right to food.
    - iii. a right to education.
    - iv. a right to health care.
    - v. a right to welfare or disability payments.
  - E. A *positive right* requires that someone else *does something* for you.
  - F. Therefore, a *positive right* is not a *natural right*.
  - G. An easy way of testing a *right* to see if it's a *natural right* is to see if Robinson Crusoe had it living alone on his island.
    - i. Did Crusoe have a *right* to housing? No, there was not a carpenter to compel to build him one.
    - ii. Did Crusoe have a *right* to food? No, there was not a farmer to compel to grow him some.
    - iii. Did Crusoe have a *right* to education? No, there was not a teacher to compel to educate him.
    - iv. Did Crusoe have a *right* to health care? No, there was not a doctor to compel to care for him.
    - v. Did Crusoe have a *right* to welfare or disability payments? No, there was no State to steal money from others to give to him.
    - vi. Therefore, these are not *natural rights*.
3. Negative rights
  - A. A *negative right* is a claim to *not be aggressed upon*.

- B. "*Negative rights* usually oblige inaction." (*Negative and positive rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-13-16)
  - C. "Rights considered *negative rights* may include civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, life, private property, freedom from violent crime, freedom of religion, habeas corpus, a fair trial, freedom from slavery." (*Negative and positive rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-13-16)
  - D. Examples of *negative rights* are:
    - i. a right to *not* be killed (right of life).
    - ii. a right to *not* be beaten (right of life).
    - iii. a right to *not* be kidnapped (right of liberty).
    - iv. a right to *not* have one's property stolen (right of possessing property).
  - E. A *negative right* requires that someone else *refrains from doing something* to you.
  - F. A *negative right* can be maintained without the presence of another person.
  - G. Crusoe still had the right to his life, liberty, and property, being alone on an island.
  - H. Therefore, a *negative right* is a *natural right*.
4. Negative rights versus human rights
- A. *Negative rights* should not be confused with *human rights*.
  - B. "Natural rights were traditionally viewed as exclusively negative rights, whereas human rights also comprise positive rights." (*Natural and legal rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-11-16)

#### V. When natural rights conflict with each other

1. You have a right to swing your fist.
2. I have a right to my life.
3. Therefore, your right to swing your fist ends at my nose.
4. "Rights have certain characteristics or properties. A right is *enforceable*, but good order requires that *personal violence* be employed only as a last resort. A right is *limited* by the rights of others. When rights *collide*, that right prevails which is the more important or rests on the stronger title." (Paul J. Glenn, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 412)

#### VI. The natural rights of life and liberty are naturally inalienable, but can be revoked by God.

1. In that God's law forbids murder (**Exo 20:13**) and manstealing (**1Ti 1:10**), all men have a natural right to life and liberty (see previous section).
2. However, a person's liberty is not unlimited, but is regulated by the laws of God (**Gal 5:13**; **1Pe 2:16**).
3. A person can forfeit their natural right of life by sinning.
  - A. The wages of sin is death (**Rom 6:23**).
  - B. The soul that sinneth shall die (**Eze 18:4**).
4. A person can forfeit their natural right of liberty voluntarily, or by doing wickedness.
5. If a person gets himself into debt, he gives up his natural right of liberty and he can sell himself, or be sold, into slavery (**Mat 18:23-25**).
6. If a person or a nation rebels against God, God revokes their natural right of liberty.
  - A. God allowed Israel to take captives of war (**Deu 21:10**).
    - i. This is the risk a soldier takes when he goes to war.
    - ii. Israel could have killed them, so taking their liberty rather than their life was a mercy to them.
  - B. God allowed Israel to make slaves of the nations surrounding them (**Lev 25:44-46**).

- i. Those nations were wicked sinners (**Lev 18:27-28**).
  - ii. The result of sin is bondage (**Joh 8:34; Rom 6:16,20**).
  - iii. By their sin, those nations forfeited their natural right of liberty.
- C. God sold His own people into captivity because of their sin (**2Ki 24:14-16; Isa 5:13**).
- i. They relinquished their natural right of liberty by their sin and rebellion.
  - ii. If we sin, we are the slaves of sin (**Rom 6:16-17**).

VII. Governments can't *give* natural rights, *nor can they take them away*.

1. Because *natural rights* come from God and His law, Governments can only *acknowledge* and *protect* them, they can't *grant* them.
2. If they can't grant them, then they can't legitimately take them away.
  - A. The founders of America recognized this fact and enshrined it in the Declaration of Independence.
  - B. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men..." – The Declaration of Independence
3. Both politicians and patriots promise to give people liberty, but many of them are the servants of corruption (**2Pe 2:19**).
4. Natural rights may be *violated* by governments, but they can never be *taken away or alienated* from a person by anyone, including a government.
  - A. "Seneca the Younger wrote: 'It is a mistake to imagine that slavery pervades a man's whole being; the better part of him is exempt from it: the body indeed is subjected and in the power of a master, but the mind is independent, and indeed is so free and wild, that it cannot be restrained even by this prison of the body, wherein it is confined.'" (*Natural and legal rights*, [Wikipedia](#), 4-11-16)
  - B. The apostle Paul was bound in prison, but his mind was not bound, nor was the word of God which he wrote and preached (**2Ti 2:9**).
  - C. The truth will make us free (**Joh 8:32**), no matter what kind of oppressive government we live under.
  - D. As Christians, we have liberty in Christ (**Gal 2:4; Gal 5:1; Gal 4:26-31**).
    - i. Jesus came to set the captives of sin free (**Luk 4:18; Joh 8:33-36; Rom 6:17-18,22**).
    - ii. The New Testament in Christ's blood is the *law of liberty* (**Jam 1:25; Jam 2:12**).
    - iii. Where the spirit of the Lord is there is *liberty* (**2Co 3:17**).
    - iv. At the resurrection we will be completely free from the bondage of corruption (**Rom 8:21**).
  - E. Even if we are servants or slaves, we are Christ's freemen (**1Co 7:22**).
    - i. If we can be free, then we should choose to be free (**1Co 7:21**).
    - ii. We belong to Christ and we should not spiritually be the servants of men (**1Co 7:23**).
    - iii. In Christ Jesus and in His church, it matters not if we are servants or freemen (**1Co 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11**).
  - F. Men can take our freedom from us, but they can't take our joy (**Joh 16:22**).