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Frontiersman

Facing the truth, however great the cost.
June 2004

Here I Go Again

Sam Aurelius Milam III

This article was prompted by an e-mail message that was, I suspect, a spin-off of the Pledge of Allegiance controversy. The writer of the message claimed that the people in the USA should insist that the USA is a “nation under God”. He said that would enable people to claim that rights don’t come from the government, but from God.

The realization that rights don’t come from the government is a step in the right direction. The unconditional claim that they come from God suggests an indifference to the distinctions between the various different kinds of things that are called rights. Given the endless list of so-called rights claimed by the unending train of special interest groups, there’s a need for a better understanding of the common sort of rights, the kind to which anybody should be able to aspire. That understanding might be enhanced if such common rights had a name. For lack of a better idea, I’ll just call them common rights. Henceforth, when I use the word *rights* without a qualifier, and until a better name comes along, I mean common rights as contradistinguished from all of those other so-called rights.

For many years now, I’ve been trying to promote an understanding of the source and nature of rights, and of the differences between them and all of the other things that people mistakenly refer to as rights. Here I go again.

Right and Proper — First, rights shouldn’t be confused with what is “right and proper”. There are many things that we hope will be true, that we hope will happen, that we believe to be “right and proper”. However, what is “right and proper” hasn’t been generally and unambiguously defined. It is a matter of opinion. We can

hope that rights will promote what is “right and proper”, at least some of the time, but that isn’t a requirement. Rights cannot be declared piecemeal according to the whims or demands of anybody who has an opinion regarding what is “right and proper”. Rights must be generally and unambiguously defined.

Human Rights — The concept of “human rights” is another attempt to declare what is “right and proper”. As with what is “right and proper”, “human rights” haven’t been generally and unambiguously defined. I understand the concept of human decency but the idea of “human rights” has proven to be an irresistible temptation to evangelistic reformers, each of whom insists that everyone else must perform according to his own arbitrary understanding of “human rights”. The reformers have thereby converted “human rights” into mandates, to be enforced as mandatory forms of behavior. Today, the concept of “human rights” is largely a tool whereby evangelistic reformers justify their coercive meddling in everything from the private lives of individuals to the internal affairs of nations. If particular “human rights” can be achieved as common rights, legitimately and non-coercively, then so be it. However, when human decency becomes an excuse for the imposition of behavior onto other people who do not agree with it, then “human rights” has become a tool of tyranny and no longer has a place in a discussion of rights.

Natural Rights — It’s difficult to justify a claim of “natural rights” as common rights. If the idea of “natural rights” is to have any meaning at all, then that meaning must relate to those things that people would naturally do in the “natural” world. The concept must deal with uninhibited or impulsive natural behavior, such as occurs in the “natural” world. It must deal primarily with behavior that is associated with survival and procreation, including such →

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things as killing for food, evading capture, defending territory, breeding, and so forth. Such things aren't rights. They're only abilities, many of which we try to repress or regulate nowadays. There are some natural abilities that we might want as rights. However, there are other natural abilities that we'd prefer to omit from the agenda. Just because something is within a person's natural abilities doesn't necessarily mean that we want him to claim the thing as a right. To claim that we should all be able to exercise our natural abilities as rights is absurd.

God-Given Rights — The perception of God and spirituality today consists largely of many different rigid and parochial dogmas. In every sect, denomination, religion, or cult people claim to follow the One True Religion. Accordingly, members of each group declare a different set of "God-given rights". Worse yet, the claim that the declared rights come from God creates the perception of a mandate. That makes it easy to justify the conversion of the "God-given rights" into "God-given laws". After that, the forcible imposition of the "God-given laws" onto non-believers just naturally follows. The result isn't liberty. The result is arrogance, hypocrisy, intolerance, jihads, "holy wars", persecutions, pogroms, repression, and theocracies.

If God and spirituality were widely understood, then I suspect that the application of "God-given rights" to politics would be irrelevant. Indeed, in that case even politics itself might be irrelevant. However, for the foreseeable future "God-given rights" should be left in the churches, the synagogues, the temples, and so forth. There isn't any place today in politics for "God-given rights".

Civil Rights — "Civil rights" are not rights. They are privileges. They are created, granted, and regulated by government. They exist under the jurisdictions of legislatures or of courts. Rights and "civil rights" are mutually exclusive conditions. When we mistakenly declare "civil rights" to be rights, then we confuse ourselves and give the government an irresistible tool with which to control us. "Civil rights" don't have any place in a discussion of rights.

Animal's Rights, Women's Rights, Children's Rights, Homosexual's Rights, Minority's Rights, Handicapped People's Rights, Commuter Lane User's Rights, Old People's Rights, Fat People's Rights, Prisoner's Rights, Patient's Rights, Shopper's Rights, Consumer's Rights, Victim's Rights, Snowmobiler's Rights, Hunter's Rights, Etc., Ad Nauseam — Ideas such as these are a further degeneration of the general idea of "civil rights". They are not rights. They are privileges created, granted, and regulated by government. They don't have any place in a discussion of rights.

Rights — I've observed that, even if I try to exclude such ideas as "God-given rights", "natural rights", "human rights", "civil rights" and so forth, then people STILL don't know what a right is. I ask them for a definition of rights and, instead, they give me a list of things that they believe ought to be rights. A list isn't a definition. Worse yet, everybody has a different list. Rights are going to be sought to everybody, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or anything else. Therefore, we need to be extremely careful and specific in what we declare to be a right. We don't want rights to become mandates, resulting in repression, stronger government, or intolerant special interest groups. We can't do that with a million different lists of so-called rights. We need a definition of actual rights that is general and unambiguous. For about ten years now, I've been proposing such a definition.

A right is something that is within your ability, for which you don't need permission, and which is generally or customarily approved or at least generally or customarily tolerated.

My definition of rights provides an objective test, independent of anybody's preconceived notion of what is "right and proper" and without regard for the agenda of any special interest group. Test something against the definition. If it satisfies the definition, then it's a right. If it doesn't satisfy the definition, then it isn't a right. The definition is general and unambiguous. It can be used to test any behavior or opinion. I recommend that we start to use it. 🦅

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Stray Thoughts

Sam Aurelius Milam III

Kind of Makes You Wonder — During my childhood and adolescence, I regularly attended the Boldtville Presbyterian Church. Now don't get me wrong. It was a good experience. If we had more churches like that one today, and if more kids attended them, then we might have a better country. Nevertheless, while I was recently pondering the idea of "God-given rights" for the article *Here I Go Again*, I recognized an oddity in the teachings of the people at the Boldtville Presbyterian Church. I expect they might have overlooked it. Here it is. They taught that being in Heaven is defined as being in the presence of God. That seems like as good a definition as any. They also taught that God is everywhere, so that we're always in God's presence. That appears to be good doctrine. However, if the two teachings are simultaneously true, then we're already in Heaven. Whether we like it or not, this is as good as it's going to get.

Haunted — I worked for the Nuclear Energy Division of the General Electric Company in San Jose, California from (as I recall) about 1971 to about 1981. A measure of the carelessness, incompetence, and neglect that I found there is that, after almost 25 years, I still regularly have distressing and even bizarre dreams about working there again.

Incongruity — Executive Immunity is a contradiction in terms. Intellectual Property is a contradiction in terms.

Hard Times — This country has fallen into such a state of political, legislative, and judicial disgrace that having been in jail is no longer necessarily perceived as disreputable.

Inconsistent — Why do people complain so much about unsolicited advertisements in their e-mail when they are so willing to tolerate them on their televisions?

News — Why didn't they use the Emergency Alert System on September 11, 2001?

No Problem — If you don't like all this "health food" that they're trying to make us eat nowadays, all you have to do is add enough salt, butter, and sugar and you can completely transform it back to normal. 🐦

A White Man's Notes

Sam Aurelius Milam III

Assumption — The idea that the rights of women should be equal to those of men isn't a law of nature. It's an assumption. It isn't supported by objective argument but only by the desire of feminists that it should be true. In fact, there are some rights that can reasonably accrue to only women, some rights that can reasonably accrue to only men, and some rights that can reasonably accrue to both men and women. There are various rights that can reasonably accrue to minors, some that can reasonably accrue to sick people, some that can reasonably accrue to handicapped people, some to slaves, some to convicts, some to soldiers, or to any other category of people. The idea of equal rights is sheer nonsense. 🐦

Letter to the Editor

An epistle from: Pontius Aenibrius, IV XI MMIV

Dear Sam Aurelius Miliam (sic) III

I feel that it is incumbent to toss my "two pork chops" into this ongoing vegetarianistic "animal rights" fray. As a meat-eating-animal-loving-leather freak ... I take offense with the antics of the radical animal rights left. Spray-painting a fine mink coat is not the answer. I for one love the sexy feel of fine leather-along with the robust meaty flavor of a T-bone steak. And yes - I agree - we do not live in a perfect world. If I had my druthers .. my world would have both Ted Nugent & K. D. Lang happy. This world would be a place where you could step into your back yard orchard and pick a succulent tender pork chop off the pork tree. Then select several T-bone steaks off the beef tree. Alas, this meat orchard is many years and genetic experiments away. So for now we must grapple with matters at hand. First: we live in a sexist, ageist, political, and animalistic world. Second: deranged & rabid vegetarians abound at every corner and will nip at all beef eaters heels. With the banner of animal rightsness they will stop at nothing to slash our leathers & spray-paint our ladies' furs. Third: Most animals rights activists lack the knowledge of: the food chain, evolution, the wheel of Karma & reincarnation, puppy love, and supporting the ASPCA. Lest we not forget, one of history's greatest despots, Adolph Hitler, was a vegetarian. —Steve; Santa Rosa, California

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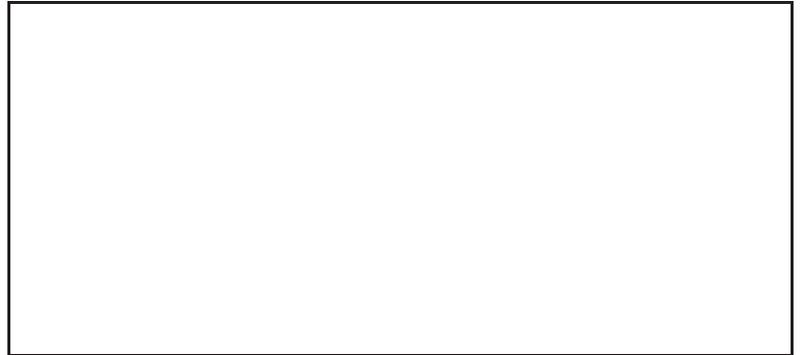


Nation in Distress

Revoke the U.S. Constitution.

Terminate the federal union.

Elevate the American states to
the status of politically
independent nations.



Acknowledgments

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—editor

Some Benefits of Being Old

Original Source Unknown. Forwarded by Don G.

- Things you buy now won't wear out.
- You can eat dinner at 4:00 p.m.
- You no longer think of speed limits as a challenge.
- You quit trying to hold in your stomach, no matter who walks in the room.
- Your investment in health insurance is finally beginning to pay off. ∞

Buck Hunter Shoots Off His Mouth

Dear Buck

How do you think our fore fathers, who wrote the Declaration of Independence, would feel about things today. —Constitutional Scholar

Dear Constitutional Scholar

I don't know, but wasn't they more than four of 'em?

You Know You're In California When

Original Source Unknown. Forwarded by David, of Idaho Falls, Idaho/

- Your coworker has 8 body piercings and none of them are visible.
- You make over \$300,000 and you still can't afford a house. ∞

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