



# An Essay on Rights

By Hillel Steiner

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## An Essay on Rights By Hillel Steiner

This book addresses the perennial question: What is justice? The usual answer draws on ideas such as fairness and impartiality. Hillel Steiner departs from this approach: he seeks an answer through an exploration of the nature of rights.

People standardly express their demands for justice in terms of rights, the items created and parceled out by just principles. So, the author argues, it must surely be possible to learn something about justice by identifying the characteristic features of rights - and something more by discovering how two or more rights can co-exist: indeed, a central part of his argument is that for a set of rights to be just they must at least be mutually consistent.

Every one is commonly thought to have rights to freedom and to some kind of equal treatment. The tensions between these claims have long exercised the minds of philosophers, moralists, economists, jurists and others. And they have informed the issues at stake in ideological conflict, wars and revolutions. How these tensions are handled in law, politics and economic activity affects relations between individuals, not least as members of different societies and generations. Their resolution is found here in a set of rights that is at once libertarian and redistributive in its demands.

The author clarifies and analyzes the role played by ideas of liberty and rights in legal, moral and economic reasoning. He then moves to formulate a coherent set of original rights that is at once appropriate for persons' external property and for their bodies, and which takes account of differences between their locations in time and place and their genetic endowments.

This original and important book will appeal to readers concerned with central problems in moral, political and legal philosophy, the history of ideas, and theoretical aspects of economics and social policy. Its trenchant argument is accessible, even on technical issues, and is illustrated throughout with real and hypothetical examples. It is also written in an engagingly colloquial style.



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Steiner's book is an engaging and challenging romp through important issues in rights theory, moral and economic reasoning, theories of freedom, and questions of justice. Steiner's arguments are complex and rich in detail. He raises more questions and interesting side issues in a few pages than many books do from beginning to end. His discussions of moral structures and economic reasoning are original and are certain to invite comment. *An Essay on Rights* may serve to reopen debates that in recent years have come to seem intractable." *Samantha Brennan, The Philosophical Review*

"This is an interesting and rigorously argued book which makes a fundamental contribution to our understanding of the nature and scope of rights." *Raymond Plant*

"Steiner's enthusiasm for argument and his ingenuity in pursuing it achieves the almost impossible by making meticulous conceptual analysis enjoyable. Building on the analysis he develops a theory of justice with many curious implications. Those who are persuaded will have learned a lot; those who are unpersuaded will learn a lot by being forced to figure out where the rabbit was introduced into the hat." *Brian Barry*

#### From the Back Cover

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## About the Author

**Hillel Steiner** is a Canadian living in England where he teaches political philosophy at the University of Manchester. He has contributed articles on liberty, rights and moral reasoning to various philosophy, politics and economics journals and collections, and is a member of the editorial boards of *Ethics* and *Social Philosophy & Policy*.

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