

# Reason and Rights

Facts About Human Nature and Morality	Facts About Physical Force	Rights Are Principles Recognizing Such Facts	Legitimate Governments Protect Rights
<p><b>Life and the Need for Life-Serving Action</b> To live, a person must act in accordance with the requirements of his life. This fact gives rise to the principle of egoism, the idea that if someone wants to live, he <i>should</i> act in a manner that sustains and enhances his life—including all of its physical, psychological, and social requirements.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p><b>Physical Force vs. Life</b> To the extent a person, group, or government uses physical force to stop someone from acting as his life requires, he can't act as his life requires. (If someone forces you into a cage or into prostitution or slavery, you can't act as your life requires; you can't live a human life.)</p>	<p><b>The Right to Life</b> The right to life is the recognition of the fact that in order for a person to live fully as a human being, he must be fully free to act as his life requires; thus, no one, no group, and no government may force him to act in any way contrary to the requirements of his life—so long as he refrains from violating the rights of others.<sup>2</sup></p>	<p><b>Protecting the Right to Life</b> People, groups, and governments sometimes try to force individuals to act in ways contrary to the requirements of their life. Legitimate governments protect each individual's right to life, by banning physical force from social relationships and by using force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use.<sup>3</sup></p>
<p><b>The Need to Think and Act Rationally</b> The most basic requirement of human life is thinking and acting in accordance with one's rational judgment—reason being an individual's means of knowledge, including knowledge of what's good and bad for his life. This fact gives rise to the principle of rationality, the idea that if someone wants to live, he <i>should</i> think rationally and act in accordance with his rational judgment.</p>	<p><b>Physical Force vs. Rational Action</b> To the extent a person, group, or government uses physical force to stop someone from acting in accordance with his rational judgment, he can't act in accordance with his rational judgment. (If your judgment tells you to keep your store open, but a government agency forces you to close it, you can't act in accordance with your judgment.)</p>	<p><b>The Right to Liberty</b> The right to liberty is the recognition of the fact that in order for a person to live fully as a human being, he must be fully free to act in accordance with the judgment of his own mind; thus, no one, no group, and no government may force him to act in any way contrary to the judgment of his mind—so long as he refrains from violating the rights of others (including their rights to act in accordance with their judgment).</p>	<p><b>Protecting the Right to Liberty</b> People, groups, and governments sometimes try to force individuals to act against the judgment of their own minds. Legitimate governments protect each individual's right to act in accordance with his judgment—regardless of what others think or feel about it—by banning physical force from social relationships and by using force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use.</p>
<p><b>The Need to Produce and Trade Values</b> Key aspects of thinking and acting as one's life requires are producing the values on which one's life depends, and trading value for value with others who have produced values one needs or wants. These facts give rise to the principles of productiveness and trade: If a person wants to live and enjoy his life, he <i>should</i> produce values and trade them as necessary to achieve that aim.</p>	<p><b>Physical Force vs. the Use of Property</b> To the extent a person, group, or government uses physical force to stop someone from keeping, using, or trading the product of his effort, he can't keep, use, or trade the product of his effort. (If you produce and sell pastries, and the government forcibly takes 30 percent of your earnings via taxation, you can't keep, use, or trade that 30 percent.)</p>	<p><b>The Right to Property</b> The right to property is the recognition of the fact that in order for a person to live fully as a human being, he must be fully free to keep, use, and trade the product of his effort; thus, no one, no group, and no government may force him to relinquish or to use any product of his effort in a manner contrary to his judgment—so long as he refrains from violating the rights of others (including contractual rights, such as employment agreements).</p>	<p><b>Protecting the Right to Property</b> People, groups, and governments sometimes try to force individuals to relinquish the product of their effort or to use it in a manner contrary to their judgment. Legitimate governments protect each individual's right to keep, use, and trade the product of his effort—regardless of any differences in wealth that arise—by banning physical force from social relationships and by using force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use.</p>
<p><b>The Need to Pursue Happiness</b> In order to live a happy, fulfilling life, a person must choose and pursue values that will fill his days and years with meaning and joy. This fact further supports the principles of egoism and rationality, and it gives rise to the principle of pride: If someone wants to love his life, he <i>should</i> choose and pursue his values accordingly.</p>	<p><b>Physical Force vs. the Pursuit of Happiness</b> To the extent a person, group, or government uses physical force to stop someone from pursuing the values of his choice, he can't pursue the values of his choice. (If you want to pursue romance with a same-sex partner, but a religious gang threatens to kill or jail you if you do, you can't pursue the value of your choice.)</p>	<p><b>The Right to the Pursuit of Happiness</b> The right to the pursuit of happiness is the recognition of the fact that in order for a person to live fully as a human being, he must be fully free to pursue the goals and values of his choice; thus, no one, no group, and no government may forcibly prevent him from pursuing such values—so long as he refrains from violating the rights of others.</p>	<p><b>Protecting the Right to the Pursuit of Happiness</b> People, groups, and governments sometimes try to force individuals to pursue goals against their choice—or prohibit them from pursuing goals of their choice. Legitimate governments protect each individual's right to pursue the goals of his choice, by banning physical force from social relationships and by using force only in retaliation and only against those who initiate its use.</p>

1. The requirements of human life constitute the standard of moral value because human life is the fundamental phenomenon that gives rise to the possibility and need of moral values. See Ayn Rand's [The Virtue of Selfishness](#) or Craig Biddle's [Loving Life: The Morality of Self-Interest and the Facts that Support It](#).

2. To *have* a right is to have a moral prerogative to such freedom because (a) one needs it in order to live as a human being and (b) one hasn't forfeited that prerogative by violating the rights of others.

3. See "[Ayn Rand's Theory of Rights](#)."