

Some people believe in negative rights but not positive rights.

A negative right, like the right to life, is a right that others *not* do something to you—in this case, take your life. A positive right, like the right to healthcare, is a right that others *do* something for you—like provide you with some sort of aid.

And just to clarify, here I'm talking about *moral* rights, as opposed to legal rights.

In this video, I'm going to defend positive rights from a simple argument against them. In subsequent videos, I'll consider other arguments.

So, here's the simple argument:

(P1) If there are positive rights, then there are unchosen positive obligations.

(P2) But there are no unchosen positive obligations.

(P3) So, there are no positive rights.

The idea behind premise 1 is that rights place corresponding obligations on others, whether or not they choose to accept them. For instance, if someone has the right to life, then you have an obligation to not take their life, whether or not you choose to accept it.

Premise 2 alleges that you have no positive obligations that you didn't *choose* to accept. For instance, by agreeing to a contract, you acquire a positive obligation to fulfill it, but that's a *chosen* one.

But I think we should reject premise 2. If a child's drowning in a shallow pond, and you can save them at little cost to yourself, I think you have a positive obligation to do so, whether or not you choose to accept it. It's wrong for you to refuse.

So, there *are* unchosen positive obligations.