

Gewirth's Argument

1 Argument for what Gewirth calls "prudential rights."

1. I do X for end or purpose E.
2. E is good.
3. My freedom and well-being are necessary goods.
4. I must have freedom and well-being.
5. I have rights to freedom and well-being.
6. All other persons ought at least to refrain from removing or interfering with my freedom and well-being.

Proof of point 5.

7. Suppose it is not the case that all other persons ought at least to refrain from interfering with my freedom and well-being. (Denial of 6)
8. Then other persons may (i.e. it is permissible that other persons) remove or interfere with my freedom and well-being. (Consequence of 7)
9. And I may not (i.e. it is permissible that I not) have freedom and well-being. (Another consequence of 7)

9 follows from 7 and conflicts with 4; 4 is true so 7 is false. 7 is the opposite of 6, so 6 is true. 6 is equivalent to 5, so 5 is true.

2 Move from prudential rights to moral rights

10. I have rights to freedom and well-being because I am a prospective purposive agent.

Proof of point 10.

11. Suppose I have rights to freedom and well-being *only* because I am R (e.g. “an American” or “a male”).
12. Then I do not have rights to freedom and well-being. (Conflicts with 5, so 11 is false and 10 is true.)

Back to the argument establishing moral rights.

13. All prospective purposive agents have rights to freedom and well-being. (From 10)
14. I ought to act in accord with the generic rights of my recipients as well as myself.