

ON HEALTH AND

ALEJANDRO
DE LEÓN

SOCIAL



JUSTICE

When exiling justice, that which
bonds human society, Freedom
dies as well, that which is united
with her and lives for her.

Juan Luis Vives

At the age of 70, my grandfather was forbidden salt by his doctor. Angry, he told me: “I have worked for 50 years after a Civil War, and now that I am retired and able to enjoy life, they expect me to live a saltless life”. I was 7 years old at the time, but these lines shaped my following 28 years. Since then, I have constructed a worldview where I believe liberty and freedom to choose what is best for oneself, should be the basis of civilization.

Inspired by this story and aiming to respond to the article on Health and Social Justice¹, I will take John Rawls² theory of justice into consideration. Rawls encourages us to imagine ourselves in a position behind a veil of ignorance and describe the world we want to live in. In this essay, I will attempt to respond to his experiment.

I imagine a world where I get to decide what is best for me. A world where the one core right is freedom. In this world, health would not be a human right but an alternative. A minimum state would be necessary, as those unable to afford health but willing to be insured, would be covered. As Prah Ruger (2004) implies when wondering about the urgency given to these worst-off individuals, this kind of theory “promotes the use of ‘public reasoning’ to forge a compromise between strict maximisation and prioritisation”³.

This reasoning poses my world’s main challenge, which lies in achieving an educated and well-ordered society in order not to result in another incomplete theorised agreement. Individuals would have to ask themselves relevant questions such as, who is responsible for my health? Do I want the power to decide upon my life or do I prefer the state to do this for me? What about my family’s health?

Aristotle sees happiness as the ultimate purpose of human experience, “that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else⁴”. Moreover, he associates health with the Supreme Good for man, which in other words refers to happiness. My world would empower the individual to take on more responsibility and decide what makes one happy. If happiness is correlated with health, wouldn’t individuals pick the path towards health? Shouldn’t we trust them to do that? And for those who do not pick health or happiness, aren’t they in their right to pick another path for themselves?

With these words I have attempted to add upon Health and Social Justice, where the author expresses the “need to revisit and underscore the moral and philosophical foundations for health improvement activities⁵”. I advocate for a positive view on mankind that trusts in its capability to take care of oneself, resulting in a happier and healthier society.

¹ Prah Ruger, Jennifer, The Lancet, Volume 364 (September 18, 2004). ² Rawls, John (1971). A Theory of Justice. Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. ³ Prah Ruger, Jennifer, The Lancet, Volume 364 (September 18, 2004), p.1077. ⁴ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Bekker page 1097b ⁵ Prah Ruger, Jennifer, The Lancet, Volume 364 (September 18, 2004), p.1075.