

Freedom and the Common Good

Freedom is one of the most strongly held values of our society in the United States. Indeed, the United States is widely considered to be one of the freest countries in the world. However, our freedom is not unlimited. I am not free to enter your house and take anything I want. I am not free to damage public property. I am not free to drive my car at 100 MPH on most roads in our country. In Ohio and many other states, I am not free to allow my household sewage to drain into the environment without sufficient treatment to ensure that it does not pose a risk to others. If there is no public sewage treatment available where my house is located, then I'm required to have a functional sewage treatment system installed and maintained which usually costs several thousand dollars. This last example especially highlights an important aspect of our freedoms. We are free to act as we prefer, as long as our actions do not pose a risk to the health and welfare of others. This is a critical aspect of the concept of freedom in the United States. This is at the heart of many of our laws and regulations which mandate a large number of restrictions on our freedoms to protect and promote the common good rather than the interests and preferences of some. We are not free to act in such a way that our actions threaten the health or welfare of others.

COVID-19 has killed more than 800,000 people in the United States. It is a dangerous viral infection. Three vaccines have been granted either full approval or emergency use authorization by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration based on a great deal of data that establishes their efficacy and safety. There is an exceptionally large amount of additional scientific evidence that demonstrates that inoculation with one of these vaccines provides very good protection from this infection and the risk of adverse effects from COVID-19 are immensely greater than the risks of adverse effects from vaccination.

Those who are infected with COVID-19 can transmit the infection to others. Some members of our society are especially vulnerable to the harmful effects of this infection. Some people are vulnerable who are not aware of their susceptibility. While vaccination reduces the chance of severe adverse effects of COVID-19 it is not perfect and does not provide absolutely complete protection. Furthermore, there are some individuals who are severely allergic to the vaccines or have certain health problems that make vaccination extremely risky for them and who therefore, cannot have the protection provided by the vaccines. The more prevalent the number of infected people are the more likely vulnerable people are to be infected and to suffer severe adverse health effects and possibly die, as many people have.

The more people who are vaccinated, the fewer people will be infected and the lower the chance that vulnerable people's health will be threatened by this disease. This is the justification for vaccine mandates: they are based on the best available scientific evidence that vaccination promotes and protects the common good. Sometimes individual freedom must be restricted to serve the interests of the common good. This is absolutely consistent with the basic principles on which our country was founded and which continue to serve as the basis for the governing of our democratic republic. Vaccine mandates have been

enforced many times in the past and they have always been based on the principle of protecting and promoting the common good, especially protecting those who are vulnerable. It is our responsibility to help with this effort and to fulfill our individual role with meeting the goal of protecting the health of all using the best available scientific evidence. Elsewhere in this website in my statements regarding vaccination I have explained how our individual health affects others. We are not totally independent, we depend in many ways on each other and what we do affects others in many ways. We are truly all in this together and we truly all bear joint responsibility for protecting and promoting the common good.