

## Are some rights just wrong?

### *Thought for the Day*

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It's often said that radio has better pictures than television! That's probably a generational thing, but it appeals to me also because I can do other things at the same time – sometimes creating interesting coincidences.

Yesterday morning, for example, I was reading a newspaper story about a potential human rights challenge to the electronic tagging of young offenders, while my radio was pressing the merits of the traditional clip round the ear.

It is easy to caricature both extremes of this debate, as Stephen Sondheim did in *West Side Story*: on the one hand

Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke  
You gotta understand  
It's just our bringin' upke  
That gets us out of hand ....

While at the other extreme:

It ain't just a question of misunderstood  
Deep down inside, he's no good!

But perhaps the underlying issue of anti-social behaviour is too serious for satire. For example, I spend a lot of my time amongst teachers, and for very many of them, indiscipline is their single most pressing concern – they have a vocation for education, not for crowd control.

Perhaps the problem lies within our culture of rights: I only need to assert my rights when your action somehow threatens me, but in doing so, I interfere with your right to do as you wish. So one child's right to self-expression can threaten the right to education of twenty or even two hundred.

Most faiths stand by a version of the so-called Golden Rule, “do as you would be done by” – or as the Talmud puts it: “Do not do unto others as you would not want them to do to you”. But that is unlikely to restrain the bully who has the strength to get his own way.

The fear is that human rights law can sometimes strengthen that bully rather than protecting his victim, making might legally right, and devil take the hindmost. Perhaps some alleged rights are just wrongs, and it is mutual responsibility, not self-serving rights, which are the foundation of civilised society. The other way lies anarchy.