

Publication

Rawls and religious paternalism

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MacDougall has argued that Rawls's liberal social theory suggests that parents who hold certain religious convictions can legitimately refuse blood transfusion on their children's behalf. This paper argues that this is wrong for at least five reasons. First, MacDougall neglects the possibility that true freedom of conscience entails the right to choose one's own religion rather than have it dictated by one's parents. Second, he conveniently ignores the fact that children in such situations are much more likely to die than to survive without blood. Third, he relies on an ambiguous understanding of what is "rational" and treats children as mere extensions of their parents. Fourth, he neglects the fact that those in the original position would seek to protect themselves from persecution and enslavement and thus would not allow groups of children to be killed because of their parents' beliefs. Finally, Rawls makes it clear that we should choose for children as we would choose for ourselves in the original position, with no particular conception of the good (such as that held by Jehovah's Witnesses).

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