

Mandatory Vaccines, Mask-wearing, and Freedom II

PHIL 334: Pandemic Ethics



Mandatory Vaccines & Mandatory Mask-wearing

Daniel Halliday · Dec 21, 2020 · 9 min read

Should a Covid-19 Vaccine Be Mandatory?



Amalia Coello · Jan 25 · 9 min read

Does Mandatory Mask-Wearing Restrict Individual Freedom?



Dilemma:
(1) Undermines freedom
(2) Necessary to end pandemic

Halliday's Argument

Status Quo:

Coercive measures to deal with COVID-19 (e.g., *lockdowns*)

Mandatory Vaccine:

A mandatory vaccine is a weaker instance of coercion than the status quo.

"So, if we think there is a moral problem with government coercion, we may think that coercing people to accept a vaccine is in fact the lesser evil compared to the status quo."

A mandatory vaccine is a **weaker** instance of coercion than the status quo.

So, it's the lesser evil.

Halliday's Argument

Equity:

Coercive measure with unequal burdens are worse than those with equal burdens.

Mandatory Vaccines would burden everyone equally (whereas lockdowns have unequal burdens).

So, if you're concerned about coercion, you still have good reason to prefer mandatory vaccinations to lockdowns.

A mandatory vaccine is a **more equitable** instance of coercion than the status quo.

So, it's the lesser evil.

Halliday's Argument

Conclusion (so far):

Mandatory vaccination is better than lockdowns.

But this isn't an argument *for* mandatory vaccinations unless they are *necessary*.

Voluntary vaccinations would be even better.

Fairness & Free-Riding:

Would voluntary vaccinations work?

Even if it would, still there's an argument to make it mandatory:

Free-riders treat us unfairly.

A mandatory vaccine is **more fair** than voluntary vaccinations.

Mandatory Mask-wearing & Individual Freedom



Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

If mandatory mask-wearing indeed infringes on our freedom, it is important to ask whether the infringement is justified, and what could plausibly justify it. I believe, however, that the reasoning process can be cut at the first stage: compulsory mask-wearing restricts a person's *specific* freedom to (not) wear masks, but it is not a restriction of a person's *overall* freedom (in fact, it increases overall freedom). And overall freedom is the freedom that matters morally (since, as I will explain below, it subsumes all the specific freedoms that one can enjoy).

Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

Thesis:

Compulsory mask-wearing restricts a person's *specific* freedom, but it is not a restriction of a person's *overall* freedom.

And it is *overall freedom* that matters morally.

So, compulsory mask-wearing is okay.

Specific freedom:

My freedom to "perform a specific action."

Overall freedom:

My overall freedom is the "total" freedom I enjoy; it's a function of the specific freedoms available to me.

Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

To know how free I am overall, I need to know how many specific freedoms I have, how valuable each of them is, and how they connect with each other. In fact, having one more specific freedom to do something does not always increase our overall freedom. It might make us less free overall.

Your **overall freedom** is not just the **sum** of all your **specific freedoms**.

1. The *number* of specific freedoms you have,
2. How *valuable* these freedoms are,
3. How these freedoms *connect* with each other.

Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

To know how free I am overall, I need to know how many specific freedoms I have, how valuable each of them is, and how they connect with each other. In fact, having one more specific freedom to do something does not always increase our overall freedom. It might make us less free overall.

Example:

Anarchy Utopia
Extreme Free Speech
Polka-dot Dotty

1. The *number* of specific freedoms you have,
2. How *valuable* these freedoms are,
3. How these freedoms *connect* with each other.

Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

the other specific freedoms available to the person. It increases the person's overall freedom if (i) it leaves the other specific freedoms available to her unaltered or (ii) reduces some of the specific freedoms available to her but is so valuable that it outweighs their loss. It decreases a person's overall freedom if it reduces the specific freedoms open to her without "compensating" for their loss.

Example:

Anarchy Utopia
Extreme Free Speech
Polka-dot Dotty

1. The *number* of specific freedoms you have,
2. How *valuable* these freedoms are,
3. How these freedoms *connect* with each other.

Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

Question:

Does the freedom to not wear a mask leave your other specific freedoms unaltered?

Answer:

No. Not wearing a mask helps spread the virus, which will lead to the restrictions of other freedoms.

Examples:

Stricter lockdown orders; reduced access to ICU beds, online education, to in-person socialization, to get on a plane or train, to go to the gym, ...

Do Mask-wearing Mandates Infringe Freedom?

Question:

Is the freedom to not wear a mask so valuable that it outweighs the loss of the freedoms it restricts?

Answer:

No. The freedoms it restricts are more valuable than the ones it makes available. And the specific freedom to not wear a mask *itself* isn't that valuable either.

Conclusion:

"By being deprived of this specific freedom, we do not become less free overall. In fact, lacking the freedom to (not) wear a mask makes us freer overall: it makes other, more valuable freedoms available to us. So, if we really care about freedom, then the obligation to wear masks should come as welcome news. It makes all of us a bit freer."

Mask-wearing Mandates
makes us **more** free.