Public trust is an informal bind

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observation of what actually happens in the world. US citizens who do not pay their taxes are imprisoned. Criminals are imprisoned and may even lose their lives. These are examples of human beings whose rights (to freedom, to life) have been removed. If the State has the power to violate the rights of specific members, as it apparently does, then such rights effectively do not exist except as a result of society's restraining the State.

As I see it, in my column, a solitary man has relatively little power over his fellow members of society. A society of a hundred million people, however, has the cumulative power of its hundred million members. A society can use this power to establish rights and responsibilities for its members. Through the State, society enforces these rights.

The public trust is an informal obligation imposed by society on its members and institutions of power. Society expects its members to act responsibly toward other members. Hunter states that a “person has the moral right to his own life.” A moral right, however, is a right which is in accordance with principles of right and wrong. But who defines these principles? God? The community? The individual? This is an undecidable issue.

Nevertheless, in voluntarily becoming a member of society, the individual agrees to abide by its rules and regulations (its definition of right and wrong) until he decides to withdraw his membership. As a member of society you share in both the benefits and obligations of the community.

The basic tenet of Ayn Rand's philosophy is that the individual is the only thing that matters. To a pure Randian, the rest of society is of no concern. The Randian might generously consider the needs of society, but only if it's worth his while. Mr. Hunter, if inalienable moral rights exist, then these rights must apply not only to you, but to the rest of humanity as well. It would be immoral for you to think only of yourself when making decisions that affect other people.

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