



Principle vs. Practicality: The Rocket's Red Glare

By Mike Winther

There are some human behaviors that are clearly not tolerable in society. Among them are activities such as murder, theft, and vandalism. But there are many other activities where citizens disagree as to whether or not they should be allowed. Among these are such things as the sale of fireworks, corporate takeovers, the use or sale of tobacco, etc. For some people, these activities would be considered a “gray” area. “Gray” because the willingness of society to allow these activities often depends upon some indefinable circumstances.

As an example, Pat Patriot has never objected to the sale or use of fireworks (particularly during the 4th of July holiday). He has fond memories of lighting fireworks as a child. As an adult, he always buys a family assortment pack and shoots them off in his front yard—much to the delight of his children. This year, however, there were several mishaps in Pat’s small town involving fireworks. A small child was burned when an older brother accidentally dropped a lit sparkler into the child’s stroller. In another incident, two houses were burned down by a fire that was started by fireworks. Three people died in one of those fires.

Many of the concerned people in Pat's community began to call for a complete ban on all fireworks within the city limits. Pat was deeply concerned by the disastrous events and the unnecessary suffering in his community. When a local activist came to his door with a petition calling for a ban on fireworks, Pat was happy to sign it.

Food For Thought:

- Originally, Pat felt that it was okay to sell and use fireworks. Was this conclusion morally and philosophically based or practicality based?
- Is Pat's new view (after his change of heart) based on practicality or philosophy?
- Is there a God-given right to buy or use fireworks?
- Is the right to buy or use fireworks situational?

This case study used fireworks as an example, but the principles involved are far reaching to many other issues. Try to make a list of other issues where these same principles might apply. How many issues can you list?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____