

# Maya's Philosophy

Hugh Taft-Morales

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I am a dad, and I am a high school philosophy teacher. While I have tried to keep these roles separate, I cannot always help myself. Obviously, my children have picked up bits and pieces of philosophy from dinner table conversation.

DAD: Can we talk about philosophy a little?

MAYA: Philosophy? Philosophy is hard. It's like extra homework.

DAD: I will just ask you some questions and you tell me what you think. I want to ask you about "rights". Does that sound alright?

MAYA: Rights? What are those?

DAD: Good questions. Can we try it?

MAYA: Ok.

DAD: What do you think of when someone talks about "human rights"?

MAYA: Rights are what someone is allowed to do by the government and the laws, and the rules, and the parents. They all have the power.

DAD: Do you think there would be "human rights" if there were no governments?

MAYA: Yes. A right is just when you have something that can't be taken away.

DAD: Like what? Example of a right?

MAYA: To be able to wear what you want.

DAD: Someone on a desert island, without any rules, would they have many rights? They don't have a government, but they can do almost what ever they want. If there are no authorities.

MAYA: Rights are everything that no one says you can't do.

DAD: It sounds like rights are nothing!

MAYA: You mean like solid. No—but it's not that they don't exist. It's kind of like how sound exists. It's not a solid, but it is there.

DAD: But sound is actually the movement of tiny molecules and particles. Are rights like that?

MAYA: No (bemused).

DAD: Is there anything solid or physical about a "right"?

MAYA: Yes . . . , no . . . I have changed my mind. Rights can be like a solid, but not like a solid. It's an idea. You can't take it and put it in a jar, but it's there. Rights are like ink on paper. The President or Congress writes them down on paper.

DAD: Are there other rights?

MAYA: Yes. Other rights are being able to say what you want, to be scared of what you want to scared of, to go where you want, to love who you want, to paint what you want, to believe what you want.

DAD: Where do rights come from?

MAYA: Mainly from adults, and the government. The people who make rules.

DAD: Some people think that God gives people rights. What do you feel about that? MLK and Thomas Jefferson thought that.

MAYA: They believe in God. And they think that God is very important. That he is not just a man up in the sky. I don't believe in God. I don't say rights come from God. I don't say they do.

DAD: How do we know we have human rights—the type you believe in, given to us by the governments?

MAYA: They make some laws and not others. They don't say that you have to wear a particular style of clothes, so you have a right to wear any style.



DAD: So a "right" could be just something the government doesn't say you can't have?

MAYA: Not necessarily. A toy isn't a right, and the government doesn't say you can't have toys.

DAD: Do you think that people have the right to live?

MAYA: Depending on what they do. If they kill people, then they don't have the right to live...or at least they can't live how they used to. You can put people in jail, or sometimes they kill people. It is better for one person to be killed than for a million.

DAD: We've been talking about some rights, like the right to live. Are there rights to have good doctors and affordable medicine for people, or the right to an education?

MAYA: It depends on how much money you have. If you are poor you can't have doctors and schools. If you are rich you can.

DAD: Is being able to do something the same as having a right?

MAYA: A right is what you are able to do.

DAD: Does a poor person have rights?

MAYA: Yes, but a poor person doesn't have enough money to really have many rights. That is one way that rights, and what you are able to do, are different.

DAD: Do rights do you any good if you don't have the money or power to use them?

MAYA: For some things you don't need power. Like the right to be scared of what you want to be scared of, or the right to love who you want. You just need your imagination and be able to think. That's all part of the mind.

DAD: What happens, what do you think about it, and how do you feel about it when you see people having their rights taken away?

MAYA: It depends. If rights are just taken away from someone for no reason I feel bad for them. But if they did something bad, like killing someone, then that's too bad. They have to take responsibility. That's life.

DAD: Are there such things as animal rights?

MAYA: Yes, I guess. But they have less rights. But they have less laws and rules and stuff that take away rights.

DAD: Do rocks have rights?

MAYA: I'm not sure.



*"The right to go to school."*

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