William Ruddick has five theses:

1. "Liberty-rights (are) inappropriate for children", for children are unavoidably dependent upon "adult assistance."

2. Even if children had such rights, "liberty-rights without supportive claim rights are of no use to children" and are "dangerous and exploitative."

3. Children do have "the (claim-) right to become an adult" which, with a proper theory of child development, implies "the (claim-) right to have an adequate parent."

4. The government should play the role of "mother's helper" though assistance requires minimum standards so that "parental aid could be withheld from socially eccentric parents whose goals and ways of family life were socially deviant."

5. What is needed are not rights (not even claim-rights?), but virtues--specifically, attentiveness, patience, self-love, forethought, and flexibility.

(5) is independent of (1)-(4). I am not sure whether it is meant as a counter to any thesis about children's rights, including Ruddick's own, or as a supplement, and there is no argument regarding the accuracy or completeness of Ruddick's list of virtues. Why not reasonableness, for instance? But I am not in disagreement with the claim that parents ought to be virtuous, and I leave (5) to one side.
(4) is in part dependent upon (1)-(3). If children lack (what Ruddick calls) liberty-rights and have (what he calls) claim-rights, then government's role cannot be to enforce the former, but, at best, to aid in achieving the latter. There are problems with (4) independent of any problems with (1)-(3). For instance, who counts as socially deviant? The Amish, to mention one of Ruddick's examples? Christian Scientists? But these are matters requiring further development, and, rather than speculate, I leave (4) to one side.

I shall concentrate upon (1). For the rest of the paper, (4) included, hangs upon the claim that liberty-rights are inappropriate for children or, as Ruddick prefers to say, that children do not have liberty-rights (1, 5).

The only argument Ruddick suggests for this claim occurs in the example about his child wanting to leave home and live elsewhere. He says that "a mere offer of non-interference is an empty gesture to someone of her age and unavoidable dependence on adult assistance." As later remarks suggest, it is the dependence of children upon adults that is crucial, and if one were to try to sketch the argument out, it would begin like this:

\[ P_1 \text{ - Children are unavoidably dependent upon adults.} \]
\[ P_2 \text{ - Liberty-rights are rights that others not interfere with one's actions.} \]

I do not know how to complete this argument. For, first, I do not see the relevance of the claim that children are dependent upon adults to any claim that they have no liberty-rights or even, as in Ruddick's second thesis, that liberty-rights are of no use to children. And, second, I find Ruddick's views about liberty-rights and the difference between them and claim-rights enormously puzzling: he has left out the most important rights we all have, children included. Let me consider these points in turn.

It is easy to find counter-examples to the claim that because one being is dependent upon another the first therefore lacks liberty-rights. If a wife is unavoidably dependent upon her husband because financial conditions and a large family prevent her from being independent without his financial aid, it does not follow that she lacks a right, e.g., to work. It may be that she will not be able to work without his aid, but that is a different matter entirely. If we reverse the dependence relation for parents and children and take an elderly parent unavoidably dependent upon a child for financial support, say, do we say, or want to say, that the parent thereby has no right to, e.g., go out to a club to relax? The right of the elderly parent to relaxation is of use to the parent, for it provides a ground for a claim against the child--or against the state--to provide transportation. Indeed, any institutionalized person would provide a counter to Ruddick's theses. Someone who is ill in a hospital, or someone