
The Voluntaryist

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"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."

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The Voluntaryist Spirit

By Carl Watner

[Author's Introduction of February 2004: This hitherto unpublished essay was first written in June 1983, and then revised in August of that same year. It sat for two decades (receiving only limited private circulation) until it was read by Peter Ragnar of Avalon Mint and Roaring Lion Press. At Peter's request it was re-edited with a view to posting on the world wide web. The author wishes to thank Alan Koontz (editing of 1983) and Julie Watner (editing of 2004) for their timely assistance in commenting on this essay.]

Voluntaryism is a dual doctrine, having both a positive and a negative side. As a brand of anarchism it is the doctrine that all coercive government (what most people would refer to as "the State") should be voluntarily abandoned; that all invasions of individual self-ownership rights should cease. This is its negative side. Its positive side is that all the affairs of people should be conducted on a voluntary basis. It does not argue for the specific form that voluntary arrangements will take; only that the sovereignty of the individual must remain intact, except where the individual coerced has already aggressed upon the sovereignty of another non-aggressive individual.

To voluntaryists, this dual doctrine represents a means, an end, and an insight. The end, predicated upon a theory of self-ownership and just property titles, is a peaceful anarchy, an all voluntary society. All the affairs of people, both public and private, should be carried out by individuals or their voluntary associations. The means to reach such an end-state must be consistent with the goal sought. As shall be demonstrated, it is in fact the means that determine the end. So only voluntary methods of persuasion, education, and nonviolent resistance to State criminality may be used to bring about voluntaryist goals. People cannot be coerced into freedom. Finally, voluntaryism is a realization about the nature of political society, viz., that all States are grounded upon general popular acceptance and require the cooperation of their victims.

These three aspects of voluntaryism mutually reinforce each other. The very goal of an all-voluntary society suggests its own means. The attempt to use governmental or political processes to reform or abolish the evils of coercion is not a voluntaryist means because it rests on coercion. The distinguishing marks of voluntaryism — that it is at once both nonviolent and non-electoral in its efforts to convince people to voluntarily abandon the State — set it apart

from all other methods of social change. The voluntaryist insight into the nature of political power does not permit people to violently overthrow their government or even use the electoral process to change it, but rather points out that if they shall withdraw their cooperation from the system, it will no longer be able to function or enforce its will.

The voluntaryist spirit is thus an attitude of mind or a sense of life, if you will, which animates those engaged in the struggle for the recognition of self-ownership rights and the demise of the State. It is the passionate, disinterested love of justice for its own sake, regardless of the consequences which the struggle brings to one personally. It is a knowledge that if one takes care of the means that the end will take care of itself. It is an understanding that the morality and principles of voluntary interaction with other self-owners is the only practical manner of living life upon this earth. It is an epistemological rejection of violence, a knowledge that coercion can never rationally convince. Come what will, wherever the chips may fall, voluntaryism seeks the perfect way, but it differs from other philosophies of life in seeking it with utter disinterestedness. Right means are an end in themselves, their own reward.

There is a great deal of affinity between what has been called "the aristocratic spirit" and the voluntaryist spirit. Writing in the March 1920 issue of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, Hanford Henderson defined the former "as the love of excellence for its own sake, or even more simply as the disinterested passionate love of excellence. The aristocrat, to deserve the name, must love excellence everywhere and in everything." Continuing on, Henderson wrote:

He must love it in himself, in his own beautiful body, in his own alert mind, in his own illuminated spirit and he must love it in others; must love it in all human relations and occupations and activities, in all things in earth or sea or sky. And this love must be so passionate that he strives in all things to attain excellence, and so tireless that in the end he arrives. But not even the hope of Heaven may lure him. He must love and work disinterestedly, without the least thought of reward, enamored only of the transcendent beauty of excellence, and quite unregardful of himself.

Both the aristocratic spirit and the voluntaryist spirit demand the highest effort of the individual. It is a contradiction to say that aristocracy or volun-

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Potpourri from the Editor's Desk

No. 1 "What Did Jesus Say About Tax Collectors?"

Staring at the price tag on the item, I observe, "Gee whiz, this is certainly a bargain at \$ 15.00. I'll take it." The clerk rings it up, bags the item and says to me, "That will be \$ 16.05." I say, "Whoa, I thought the price was \$ 15.00?" The clerk, hesitating and usually referring to the cash register receipt says, "It is \$ 15.00, plus tax of \$ 1.05." Me, in a friendly but insistent tone, "Oh, then you're a tax collector?" Clerk, often apologetically, sometimes defensively, but almost always negatively, "Oh no, the register adds sales tax automatically." "I understand, but you are the one collecting the tax, are you not?" "Well," grinning sheepishly, "I guess if you put it that way" "I just like to be clear about who gets my money. Do you get to keep some of it?" "Oh, heavens no! Don't I wish." Me, handing the clerk a sheet of paper with a graphic image representing Jesus atop and some printing below. "It amazes me what the state is able to get people to do for it, and do it for free. Well, thank you Mr. (or Mrs.) tax collector. By the way, this may interest you." Me, giving the clerk a short quote from the Gospel of Matthew (Chap. 18, Verses 15-17): "If your brother sins against you, ... treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

—Submitted by Subscriber Jim Russell

No. 2 "A Prediction About Frequent Buyer Cards"

Sam Aurelius Milam III, editor of THE FRONTIERSMAN (December 2003), predicts that frequent buyer/food discount cards will become more and more widespread, until such time when it will be possible for the government to "legislate a mandatory ration card requirement. Who's going to object except for the very small minority of people like me who refused to apply for the cards? We need government ID for almost everything else. We need it to drive, have a job, to get married, and so forth. Our present ability to buy food without permission is a huge loophole in the web of control established by the government. As long as we can obtain cash somewhere and buy food without permission, we can just do without the other stuff and evade the control imposed by the government. How-

ever, once we need a government ration card to buy food, our geese are cooked. The legislation will be enacted and that will be that. No card, no food."

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No. 3 "Books Received"

James Payne, author of the Princess Navina series, has written A HISTORY OF FORCE: EXPLORING THE WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT AGAINST HABITS OF COERCION, BLOODSHED, AND MAYHEM (2004). Payne "traces the role played by the use of force in the evolution of civilization" and concludes that "the long run tendency in all societies is for the use of force to decline." Available from Lytton Publishing Company, Box 1212, Sandpoint, ID 83864. List price \$ 23.95.

No. 4 "The Magistrate Will More Likely Destroy That Which Is Good than Prevent Evil"

That men in power would be tempted to excess, to violation of the self-propriety of others, was something that the Leveller leaders recognized early in their activity: 'standing water will speedily corrupt, if it have not fresh running springs to feed it, though it were never so pure at first'. At Whitehall, Wildman argued that the magistrate was 'more probable to err than the people that have no power in their hands, the probability is greater that he will destroy what is good than prevent what is evil'. [citing A.S.P. Woodhouse, PURITANISM AND LIBERTY, p. 161]

—J. C. Davis, "The Levellers and Christianity," in Brian Manning, ed., POLITICS, RELIGION AND THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR (1973), pp. 225-250 at p. 249.

No. 5 "The Miracle and Morality of the Market"

In a free society, no man is required to do work or supply any good he considers morally wrong and ethically questionable. He may earn less from choosing to supply something that is valued less highly in the market, but he cannot be forced to produce anything that God and/or conscience dictates to be wrong.

On the other hand, we cannot prevent others from supplying a good or service we find morally objectionable. The ethics of liberty and the free market require that we use only morally justifiable means to stop our neighbors from demanding and supplying something that offends us. We must use reason, persuasion, and example of a better and more right way to live.

Unfortunately, too many of our fellow men want to preserve or extend a return to a form of a slave society - regardless of the name under which it is presented. Too many want to dictate how others may make a living, or at what price and under what terms they may peacefully and voluntarily interact with their fellow human beings for purposes of mutual material, culture and spiritual betterment.

—Richard Ebeling, "Notes from FEE," January 2004, p. 3. ▽

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taryism asks for privilege, which can only be upheld by violence. Coercive grants of power are contrary both to the doctrine of perfection and voluntary means. What the aristocrat and the voluntaryist want is that people come to share their attitudes toward life. Neither “may accept nothing which others may not have upon precisely the same terms, and the terms are unremitting, passionate effort. ... It is not a matter of birth, or occupation, or education. It is an attitude of mind carried into daily action. ...”

Terence MacSwiney, an early 20th Century Hibernian patriot, referred to the voluntaryist spirit as “a moral force”, “that great virtue of mind and heart that keeps a man unconquerable above every power of brute strength.” “A man of moral force is he who, seeing a thing to be right and essential and claiming his allegiance, stands for it as for the truth unheeding of any consequence. It is not that he is a wild person, utterly reckless of all mad possibilities... and indifferent to any havoc that may ensue. No, but it is a first principle of his, that a true thing is a good thing, and from a good thing rightly pursued can follow no bad consequence. And he faces every possible development with conscience at rest — it may be with trepidation for his own courage in some great ordeal, but for the nobility of the cause and the beauty of the result that must ensue, always with serene faith.”

Although neither Henderson nor MacSwiney would have considered themselves anarchists, they did realize that this mind cast made for a laissez-faire attitude, particularly in such fields of endeavor as education and industry. The aristocratic spirit seeks excellence in variety and resists the tendencies towards enforced uniformity in all areas of life. It looks for a multiform and varied excellence. “The aristocratic world is not one of dead levels, but a world of varied interests and constant promise and unfaltering progress. It is, in a word, the world of evolution.” In fact, it is only in a voluntaryist setting that the aristocratic spirit can truly operate. The attempt to coerce must inevitably vitiate such a spirit. For as Henderson concludes, the teaching that the end justifies the means is not at all in harmony with the aristocratic spirit. “The whole event must be excellent, the means as well as the end. ... It is only in the disinterested quest of excellence that anything notable can be accomplished. ... Disinterestedness is the essential condition of success.”

MacSwiney, too, understood the importance of means and ends in the Irish struggle against England. “A fight that is not clean-handed will make victory more disgraceful than any defeat.” He maintained that Ireland could not win her independence by “base methods” and that no physical victory could compensate for a spiritual defeat. He also noted that every sphere of a man’s life is interconnected with the rest. Therefore he

claimed that the secret of strength was the development of individual character in every activity of life. In an interesting comment on means and ends, he noted that “the middle of the day has a natural connection with the beginning of the day and the end of the day, and in whatever sphere a man finds himself, his acts must be in relation to and consistent with every other sphere. ... One cannot be an honest man in one sphere and a rascal in another. ... Everything that crosses a man’s path in his day’s round of little or great moment requires of him an attitude towards it, and the conscious or unconscious shaping of his attitude is determining how he will proceed in other spheres not in view.”

Voluntaryism relies heavily on the means-end insight to justify its own position. Indeed, without any formal guidelines as to the shape that an all-voluntary society will take, voluntaryism necessarily concentrates exclusively on the means. Voluntaryism is means-oriented, not goal-oriented because all it objects to is the initiation of coercion against the non-invasive person. So long as the means are peaceful, respectful of self-ownership and property titles, the ends cannot be criticized from the voluntaryist perspective. This is not to imply that the only standard of judging human behavior is whether or not it is voluntary. Certainly some behavior may be irrational, vicious, immoral, religious, irreligious, (etc., etc.) but the first question the voluntaryist asks is: “Is it truly voluntary?” The voluntaryist spirit attacks the State on precisely this basis: although certain government goods or services may be essential, it is not essential that they be provided by government. Whether we object to what governments do (i. e., the provision of whatever product or public service, whether it be public schools, the post office, etc.) is beside the point. Voluntaryists oppose the State because it relies on force for its very existence. We oppose the State because of its means, regardless of its ends.

The means orientation of voluntaryism is not unlike the concept of disinterested attachment associated with the aristocratic spirit. Similarly, it relates to the Hindu doctrine of nonattached action which relies on the paradox “that one cannot travel on the path unless one has become the path itself.” Indeed, although one must have an ultimate goal and destination in life, one’s attachment to it eventually becomes irrelevant and disappears. One’s concern must be with the next step rather than the summit. Only in such a fashion can the exhilaration of the climb become an end in itself rendering unimportant the attainment of the peak. That is why the means to the goal become more important than the goal itself and why the means then become the test of progress. “To travel on the proper path” is more important than arriving at one’s destination. Thus full effort becomes the measure of victory rather than the attainment of one’s goal. The effort is within our power and control; the end is not.

The means-end insight encompasses many important points, the least of which is the commonplace observation that the means one uses must be consistent with the goal one seeks. It is impossible in the nature of things to wage a war for peace or to fight politics by becoming political. Gandhi, who might be considered one of the true aristocrats of all times, understood that "there is a great mystery concealed in the fact that the means are more important than the ends." As he wrote:

They say means are after all means. I would say means are after all everything. As the means, so the end. There is no wall of separation between means and ends. We have limited control over means and some over the ends. Realization of the goal is always in exact proportion to that of the means. ... Our progress towards the goal is always in exact proportion to the purity of the means. This method may appear to be long, perhaps too long, but I am convinced, it is the shortest.

Since the means are the only things we have to work with, they are at least as important as the actual ends we seek. Means to be means must be within our reach. As John Dewey explained it, "the end is merely a series of events viewed at a remote stage and a means is merely the series viewed at an earlier one." Means must be viewed as intermediate steps but because of this the one closest to us must be considered the most important. The most important means is the next one, the next step in the series of intermediate actions we take to finally arrive at our destination. If we take a false route, even though we know where we wish to go, we will never get there. To finish our journey we must not only begin it but we must begin it in the proper direction and this means attention to the means. "To reach an end we must take our minds off from it, and attend to the act which is next to be performed."

The idea that the ends can justify the means actually has the process in reverse order. Since the ends pre-exist in the means (like begets like, we shall reap as we have sowed), no end can ever justify a means. What actually happens is that the means not only justify what they accomplish, but they guarantee it. "What today is, makes tomorrow what it shall be." As Gandhi and many others have said: "take care of the means you employ and the end will take care of itself." The Rom (the gypsies) have a saying that "the road leading to a goal does not separate you from the destination; it is essentially apart of it" and this readily explains why impure means must result in an impure end.

Different means must inevitably bring about different ends for the simple reason that they lead one down different paths. For the voluntaryist concern with an all-voluntary society, this necessitates both eschewing the electoral process as well as revolutionary violence. Neither of these routes can even approximate voluntaryist goals because they depart

from the voluntaryist spirit. The existence of a voluntaryist society depends on a change in attitude, an improvement in the moral tone of the people who comprise it. Therefore our means must be voluntary, for moral ends can only be attained by moral means. Our means must be as pure as our ends.

Emma Goldman, in her analysis of the Russian Revolution, written in the early 1920's, realized that "today is the parent of tomorrow." The means used to prepare for the future becomes its cornerstone and therefore she held that the means used to bring about social change must always harmonize with its purpose:

There is no greater fallacy than the belief that aims and purposes are one thing, while methods and tactics are another. This conception is a potent menace to social regeneration. All human experience teaches that methods and means cannot be separated from the ultimate aim. The means employed become, through individual habit, and social practice, part and parcel of the final purpose; they influence it, modify it, and presently the aims and means become identical. ... The whole history of man is continuous proof of the maxim that to divest one's methods of ethical concepts means to sink into the depths of utter demoralization.

The voluntaryist holds that "the only way to freedom is 'by' freedom." This path does not dictate what specific form the economic system of voluntaryism will take. Its only guidelines are that the resultant system be voluntary, which already implies a respect for self-ownership and just property titles. A regime of proprietary justice allows all economic systems to compete on a voluntary basis and there is no reason why voluntary cooperatives could not exist side by side with voluntary communes or voluntary capitalist companies. How people choose to conduct their voluntary affairs in the absence of the State is up to them.

In advocating an all voluntary society, voluntaryists place the burden of proof on those who wish to justify any form of the coercive State. The advocate of any form of invasive coercion — State or non-State — is in a logically precarious position. Coercion does not convince, nor is it any kind of argument at all. In fact, the initiation of invasive force is a confession of the failure of the invader's persuasive powers. As William Godwin said, "if he who employs coercion against me could mould me to his purposes by argument, no doubt he would. He pretends to punish me because his argument is strong, but he really punishes me because he is weak."

The epistemological bias against violence is an essential part of the voluntaryist spirit. Those in the position of initiating violence are in a morally and logically indefensible position. As Godwin added, "Force is an expedient, the use of which is much to be deplored. It is contrary to the nature of the intellect, which cannot but be improved by conviction and

persuasion. It corrupts the man that employs it, and the man upon whom it is employed." The burden of proof rests on the advocates of violence (or the State) because "liberty, or the absence of coercion, or the leaving of people to think, speak, and act as they please, is in itself a good thing. It is the object of a favorable presumption. The burden of proving it inexpedient always lies and wholly lies on those who wish to abridge it by coercion."

Voluntaryist arguments proceed against State coercion by criticizing the means, regardless of the ends. Health care or vaccination may be important, but if they are to be achieved by force (the means) they "ipso facto" become tainted. If those who advocate compulsory vaccination or State health care must rely on force to accomplish their goals, then there is something drastically wrong with their ends. Vaccination or health care is either good or bad. Its goodness removes the need for compulsion and its badness destroys the right to coerce those who oppose it. Coercion never convinces, never brings about a change of mind.

Similar arguments may be applied against the State itself. Either it is good or bad. Its goodness should avoid the need to apply invasive force (for it should be possible to persuade people of its goodness) and its badness already speaks for itself. If a government cannot rely wholly on voluntary support, then it deserves not to exist. Statists, in their anxiety to coerce others, already demonstrate their own lack of faith in the prescription they suggest.

On the other hand, the voluntaryist spirit is permeated with peaceful, nonviolent means. Voluntaryism is certainly not the cure all or end all of social evils, but to the extent that people can be persuaded to embrace the voluntary principle, it offers the best of all possible worlds. Voluntaryism is not to be compared with the model of perfection, it is only offered as the most satisfactory among competing theories.

Voluntaryists do not operate on the principle that everyone necessarily knows his or her own best interest, but only that everyone should have the right to pursue his or her interests as they deem best. "What is being asserted is the right to act with one's own person and property and not the necessary wisdom of such action." So long as you "do your own thing" with your "own" person and property you in no way violate the spirit of voluntaryism.

The claim that governments have a monopoly on knowledge is implicit in the arguments of statists. However, given the fact that every individual person is a unique human being, it is highly unlikely that any monopolistic government could engineer or plan a society better than the outcome of the workings of the voluntary principle. Governments have no exclusive monopoly on knowledge or any exclusive monopoly of the knowledge of facts which would enable them to run an economy. In fact, they would have no need to resort to the use of force if their services were

voluntarily desired. The very fact they must initiate force to sustain themselves proves they are unwanted and undesired by at least some of the people within their purview.

The fact that the State coercively monopolizes the administration of justice (courts, police, and law code in a given geographic area) makes the State, and its employees, automatically suspect. If there are certain natural laws of justice, then there is no reason for government to become a coercive monopolist. Because the principles of justice are grounded in objective, natural laws, they fall within the province of human knowledge by all who choose to study them and reason them out. Just as we do not require a government to dictate what is right or wrong in steel-making, so we do not require a government to dictate standards and procedures in the realm of justice. If it is possible to verify objectively that one legal procedure is valid, and another not, then it does not matter who employs the procedure in question. We should look to reason and fact; not to government. On the opposing hand, if there is no such thing as natural law and natural justice, then government could certainly not claim to administer a thing which did not exist. In such case there would be no need for government.

Austrian economics, bolstered by the arguments developed by Ludwig von Mises, has long argued that economic calculation under central government planning is impossible. Since profit and loss serve as the central guide for directing the flow of resources, the government of a centrally planned economy has no rational way of calculating because it has sabotaged or destroyed the market pricing system. This inability to make rational economic decisions saps the vitality of any economic system and is inherent in all forms of government intervention. Despite their seeming ability to "direct" and "fine-tune" the economy, government employees and politicians have no special means of obtaining knowledge, any different from those of others. No one has a monopoly of knowledge and no single group or person has a monopoly on the truth, honesty, or fair play. As we have seen of government itself, the very fact that a centrally planned economy needs to initiate force to sustain itself indicates that it is not the most efficient method of social and economic organization. As Murray Rothbard has asked, "if central planning is more efficient, why has it never voluntarily come about through the creation of one big firm?"

Voluntaryists, seeing all forms of government as invasive 'per se', nonetheless realize that the State is just one form of coercive monopoly which sustains itself by the use of force, albeit legitimized in the eyes of many. An examination of how to attack coercive monopoly on the market should shed light on how to undermine State power. After all, the problem with government is exactly the same problem as with any other coercive monopoly. The voluntaryist insight points out that all businesses depend on the cooperation, support,

and patronage of their customers. The ultimate weapon of both consumers and producers on the market is the option of expressing their indignation by not purchasing from or selling to, boycotting, ostracizing, and not cooperating with the would-be or actual monopolist. In fact, all market activity on the free market can be interpreted as a variety of nonviolent resistance against those with whom one does not wish to deal. An understanding of monopoly theory applies not only to private monopolies but to any situation where one group has acquired control over the means of production over a large area.

The voluntaryist spirit attacks government and coercive monopolies where it hurts them the most: it destroys whatever legitimacy they lay claim to and urges the withdrawal of the consent and cooperation on which all organizations depend. The "popular health movement" of the 1830's and 1840's in the United States illustrates this attitude at work in two distinct ways. First, it shows what incredible diversity can come about when a government does not attempt to monopolize knowledge and coerce people into accepting its authority. Second, it demonstrates the integral nature of freedom. As one medical historian has explained: "A people accustomed to govern themselves... want no protection but freedom of inquiry and freedom of action. It was the spirit of the times to throw all fields of business and professional endeavors open to unrestricted competition — why not medicine among the rest? ... Hence medicine, with all other human activities, must take its chances in the grand competitive scramble characteristic of the age." If Americans were entitled to religious freedom, why not medical freedom as well?

"The freedom to discover truth" is what competition is all about. It is only through voluntary exchanges that the truth of the market place can be discovered. "The subjectivity of human wants implies that only individuals participating in an exchange can be the legitimate judge of their own interests. Competition is a learning process" where self-ownership and property rights "provide an incentive to make individuals responsible for their mistakes and give them an incentive to learn." It is only under voluntaryism that this learning process and self-responsibility are able to exist.

The voluntary principle insures that while we may have the possibility of choosing the worst, we also have the right to choose the best. "By attempting to compel virtue, we eliminate its possibility." Thus we can see that "freedom is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the achievement of virtue." Certainly the price of moral freedom is the responsibility of acting at one's own peril and this always includes the possibility of failure. The voluntaryist spirit, however, asserts that the real victory goes not to those who win the battle but rather to those that fought the best. As David Norton, the author of *PERSONAL DESTINIES*, has explained, "moral nobility

is earned by the efforts of the individual. It comes about in no other way, it is available to all persons, and it is not a matter of birth but of individual effort." He reminds us, "that if there is a chance for a good life, the risk of a bad one must also be accepted."

The voluntaryist spirit, as we have seen, comprises several diverse areas of libertarian thought. It expresses the epistemological bias against violence by arguing that rational persuasion is the only means of judging success. In a very real sense, there are only two relations possible among men — that of logic and war. The person who does not accept physical might as the expression of truth, who rejects the doctrine that might makes right, demands logic instead of force. The person who always demands proof and who never assumes anything on faith alone therefore always remains implicitly a voluntaryist. Such a person refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of government because it "wields the most violence," or because "no human society has ever existed without it," or because "there would be chaos without government-provision of law and order."

The resort to violence, in place of argument, is an implicit confession that one's argument is weak and unconvincing. This explains why freedom is better than compulsion. To paraphrase the argument of a 19th Century English bishop, who preferred to see Englishmen free (and possibly drunk) rather than compulsorily sober, we say: With freedom, in the end we might attain our highest desires, but on the other hand, compulsion assures us that we would lose both freedom and our most highly cherished ends. A poor freedom is always better than a rich slavery.

Voluntaryism also emphasizes the importance of self-ownership and just property titles, which form the underlying basis for the very definition of voluntary relationships with others. In fact, we can have no concept of what it is to violate the rights of others, nor can we even make the distinction between invasive and non-invasive force without having an implicit concept of justice, or a code of principles, which defines what a man is due. In short, the very distinction between voluntaryism and coercion depends upon and presupposes a theory of justice in property titles and people. "The principle of self-ownership means we must treat all others with absolute respect for their self-ownership. You literally have no claim on the lives of others, nor they on you. You can only relate to them when, where, and how they want you to; otherwise you must let them be. You must treat them with respect for their self-ownership rights or not at all."

Voluntaryists have a clear understanding of the nature of power (what they call "the voluntaryist insight") — that all governments and human institutions depend on the consent and cooperation of its victims. A person who harbors the voluntaryist spirit understands that he or she cannot be compelled to do anything against his or her will. Such a person

may suffer the consequences of holding to his or her belief, but as Corbett Bishop, a World War II conscientious objector who fasted for over 400 days in government prisons and hospitals, pointed out: Governments know that they can terrorize individuals into submitting to tyranny by grabbing the body as hostage and thus hoping to destroy the spirit (of conscience and resistance within the individual). But if one repudiates the body and will have nothing to do with it, the spirit remains free. This is the essence of total non-cooperation with one's oppressors. The voluntaryist spirit also reminds us of the stoics "who were different from others" in refusing to allow pain to disturb the equanimity of their minds and the exercise of their reason.

There is the story of a Stoic who was captured and told to renounce his beliefs. He refused and was tortured. Still unable to make him recant, his captors told him he would be put to death. He answered they could do whatever they wanted with his body but whatever they did could not injure his philosophy. That was in his mind and their authority, in its physical and moral aspect, did not extend [that far].

As the relator of this story continues, "Stoicism was unique in that its martyrs did not go to death believing their ideas would change the world." They went to death because their integrity was worth more to them than their existence. For life, if the courage to die be lacking, is slavery. The man who is afraid to die cannot possibly live up to his vision of the truth because he fears for both his person and property. Thus the only favorable course to those who uphold voluntaryism is "to remain loyal to one's own integrity. For man, as a moral agent, has an obligation to value truth for its own sake, not for any supposed benefits it might bring as a by-product."

The emphasis on the means-end insight in voluntaryism explains why voluntaryists deem it necessary to take action to achieve their goals. They know they cannot run away from weakness, that sometimes they must resist and disobey or else lose their own self-respect. The voluntaryist spirit is a passionate, disinterested quest for justice and truth. Since all times are proper for pursuing what is right, they realize that there is no time like the present; that the first chance is always the best. They are not bound by difficulties, but by justice. They must do what they think right and let the consequences take care of themselves. The love of truth is infectious. One's ideals and ideas must be professed everywhere; there is no escaping it and no middle way. If voluntaryism is worth anything, it is worth the effort to try to work towards it. The truth is something to be done, not just something to be believed. The true secret of freedom is the courage to resist. "No one ever remains free who acquiesces in what they know to be wrong." In the context of the voluntaryist critique

of the State, disobedience to invasive laws is the greatest virtue.

It is said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and the voluntaryist realizes that only by beginning the long-term efforts to deligitimize the State can any progress be made toward his or her goal. As futile as a single step may seem, it is only by taking that very first step that the journey towards voluntaryism can be started. Those who are moved by the voluntaryist spirit realize that they must do everything humanly possible to move towards their goal. People may not feel they have done everything they can do until they have tried to do it.

It was Ludwig von Mises in his *NOTES AND RECOLLECTIONS* who argued that it is a matter of temperament how we shape our lives in the knowledge of inescapable catastrophe. In high school he had chosen a verse by Virgil as his motto: "*Tu ne cede malis sed contra audientur ito.*" (Do not yield to the bad, but always oppose it with courage.) In the darkest hours of World War I he recalled this dictum:

Again and again I faced situations from which rational deliberations could find no escape. But then something unexpected occurred that brought deliverance. I would not lose courage even now. I would do everything (I) could do. I would not tire in professing what I knew to be right. ... I regret only my willingness to compromise, not my intransigence. ▣

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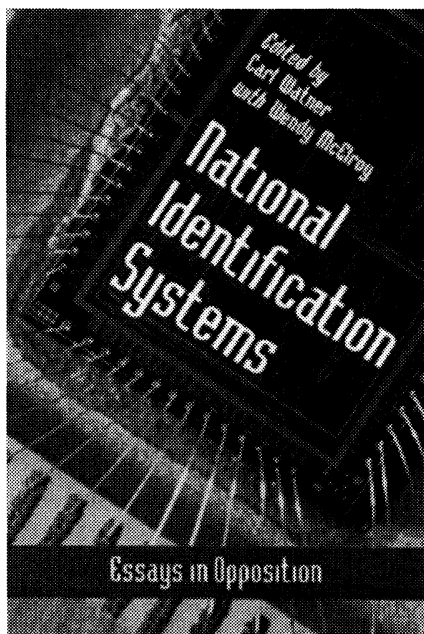
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