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

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Taxation No Better Than Slavery

By Carl Watner

[This is the draft of an introduction to a proposed anthology tentatively titled Taxation: Essays in Opposition. Write or email The Voluntaryist for information regarding price and availability.]

Slavery is wrong.

Taxation is a form of slavery.

Therefore taxation is wrong.

The implications that follow from this syllogism are the subject of this book.

Slavery is wrong. A slave is a person who is the property of another or others, such that whatever the slave produces can be taken by force or the threat of force. [1] The slave has no right of self-ownership, and those who exercise dominion over the slave always have the *legal* right to use coercion against him, but certainly have no *natural* right to do so. He who takes the life, liberty, or property of another without that other's consent is stealing; and as the early abolitionist described it, *man-stealing* is just as wrong, if not worse, than *property-stealing*, because human beings hold a higher rank in existence than inert property matter.

Taxation is a form of slavery. A tax is a compulsory levy on a person subject to the jurisdiction of a government. Anyone who is taxed is a slave because his or her earnings and property are forcibly taken to support the State. Most individuals do not consent to taxation. Historically, the Romance languages, such as French, Spanish, and Italian, have tried to make the tax-payer "feel good" by euphemistically "calling him a 'contributor'." [2] "Customers" is the term that our own Internal Revenue Service uses to identify those from whom it extracts payments, using threats of force or actual force in some instances.

Therefore taxation is wrong. As Auberon Herbert, one of the contributors to this volume, pointed out decades before the passage of the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (on the basis of which Congress legislated a federal income tax): truth and consistency demand that if the State may forcibly take one dollar "out of what a man owns, it may take what it likes up to the last dollar Once admit the right of the [S]tate to take, and the [S]tate becomes the real owner of all property." To those who wish to debate this point, I only ask: where in the federal Constitution is there any limitation on the amount that Congress may try to take from us? [3]

But, as Charles Adams, one historian of taxation, has observed: "without revenue, governments would collapse,

society as we know it would disappear, and chaos would follow." [4]

True: coercive political governments which depend on violence to sustain themselves with police and armed force would disappear. Yes, society as we know it today in the United States would change.

But would chaos follow? Not necessarily. If the opponents of taxation used revolutionary violence to abolish the State, then there would undoubtedly be some who would fight for the re-establishment of taxation. But if taxation were to be abandoned as a result of a shift in public opinion and understanding, then in the words of Murray Rothbard, we would simply achieve a peaceful "society without a state." As Thomas Paine explained centuries ago: A "[g]reat part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of Government. It has its origins in the principles of society and that natural constitution of man. It existed prior to Government, and would exist if the formality of Government" no longer existed. [5]

All history attests to the fact that if a service supplied by government is truly wanted, a voluntary way will be found to provide it. It may cost some people more than when the government supplied it; but the point is that if a true demand exists, some entrepreneur or some group of individuals will associate cooperatively to provide it. Any number of examples can be used to illustrate this point: Did religion disappear when churches lost their government support? Did people go without coined money when there were no government mints? Did people go shoeless because there were no government factories to produce footwear?

A number of contributors to Section VI of this anthology attempt to answer the question, "How would a society of individuals function without taxes?" But perhaps the even more important question is, "Does our governmentally-directed society based on coercive taxation really work all that well?" If we were to start out *de novo* would we actually entrust all our protective and defensive services to the members of one organization, and empower them to collect their revenues at the point of a gun? What kind of service could we expect from a monopoly that had no competition and a guaranteed income? Who would protect us from our guardians if they turned venal? Who would guard the guardians? Voluntary, consensual arrangements are always more flexible and less predictable than those imposed by coercive governments, which always perceive change as a threat to their dominance and sovereignty. [6]

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Government taxation is a coercive activity that introduces force and violence into otherwise peaceful relationships. That is our primary reason for opposing taxation. It pits one man against another; one group against another group; upsets the natural market incentives that produce the greatest benefits for all. Although it is true that many who oppose taxation believe that a voluntary system will lead to a spectacular standard of living for the masses, that is not the reason for the opposition that inspires this book. We believe it is morally proper that a man keep the product of his labor; that he not be enslaved. If it is wrong for a slave owner to enslave a single person, then it is wrong for a group of individuals to do so. Majority rule cannot legitimize slavery or taxation. As R. C. Hoiles, founder of the Freedom Newspapers, was always keen to point out, there is only one standard of right and wrong, and that standard applies to the lone individual, to members of a group, and to the employees of the State. [7]

Conscientious objectors to taxation recognize that some goods and services are essential to human survival, but also realize they need not be provided by the government on a coercive basis. What we oppose is the coercion involved in collecting taxes. We oppose the means and take the position that the ends never justifies the means. Our opposition to taxation doesn't concern itself with whether *too* much money is being collected, or whether that money is being spent wastefully. Rather, the focus is on the fact that any amount of money forcefully collected is stealing. It is no more proper for government agents to seize property than it is for you to rob your neighbor at gunpoint, even if you spend the money on something that you think will benefit your neighbor.

If some in our society think that certain government services are necessary, then let them collect the revenues to support those services in a voluntary fashion. We who oppose taxation may or may not support their efforts. It would soon be revealed which services are sufficiently desired. And if the people collecting the money to support these services do not, in their judgment, collect enough, then let them dig into their own pockets to make up the deficiency or do without. They do not have the right to spend other people's money.

The articles in this anthology have been chosen

because they discuss the historical, political, and philosophical relationships between taxation, slavery, and stealing. Robert Ringer, in his opening essay, describes taxation as a disgrace to the human race because it is a "violation of property rights, which means a violation of human rights." He points out that he is not only opposed to the income tax, but to all the "subtle" and hidden taxes that politicians on every level of government have enacted. He further alludes to the tremendous amount of "stolen" time that taxpayers surrender as they fill out their tax returns and compute the amount of taxes they owe. Harry Reid describes these activities as "voluntary" because everyone (or everyone's accountant) figures out the extent of his or her own tax liability. The interview with the Senator has been included because it demonstrates the gross absurdity of calling taxes, especially the federal income tax, a consensual activity. It only appears so because the American taxpayers are so brainwashed that most of them no longer perceive the government as a violent threat, but rather view it as an unending source of welfare benefits that someone else pays for.

Two articles by an anonymous author illustrate the inherent dangers in criticizing government authorities. If you were Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service and received a letter from a disgruntled citizen comparing your organization to the Mafia wouldn't you investigate

Slavery the Worst Form of Stealing.

Whatever may be said of other possessions, a man's person is his own; his life is his own; his liberty is his own. He who takes them away without his consent, and without any crime on his part, steals them. And surely stealing men is a much greater crime than stealing money, as a human being holds a higher rank in the scale of existence than inert and senseless matter. The eighth commandment, then, forbids, distinctly and peremptorily, all the despotic enslaving of our fellow men, of whatever condition or color, or of exercising absolute lordship over them; because those acts virtually deprive human beings of that property in themselves with which the Creator endowed them. This is a usurpation of the rights of man which no usage, law or custom, can legalize in the sight of heaven. No title can make good my claim to another's person; no deed of inheritance or conveyance transmits it to a third party. ... Every man under God, owns himself; He has a right to himself which no other man can challenge. I may be lawfully restrained, punished, and even executed by just laws; but I can never be owned; I can never be in the sight of God, either serf or slave; I cannot sell myself; no other can sell me. - Though I may, for a consideration, make over to another my right to my services, yet the right to myself is no more alienable by myself than by another.

- from George Bush, "Notes on Exodus," published in Vol. 7, No. 32, HERALD OF FREEDOM (October 1, 1841), p. 1

that critic to make sure he or she was paying his or her taxes? The fact is that the United States government has prosecuted and imprisoned those who question the constitutionality of its unapportioned taxation of income. In my own article, "Is 'Taxation Is Theft' A Seditious Statement?," I point out that judges in the federal courts have gone so far as to prevent defendants (alleged tax protesters) from presenting their constitutional arguments against income taxation. But as is apparent here, the U.S. Constitution has no special moral authority to convert taxation into non-theft. For those of our authors who embrace taxation as theft and slavery, Anonymous summarizes their opposition by writing: "I am going back to 'the old, traditional standards of religion, ethics, common law,' and common sense. I am refusing to act in a way that produces or contributes to evil."

What you will not find here is the call for "tax reduction" or for declaring the federal income tax laws "unconstitutional." The closest we come to that is Vivien Kellems' chapter in which she attacks the federal withholding system as being "illegal, immoral, and unconstitutional" because it is not her responsibility, as an employer, to discharge the income tax liability of her employees by making deductions from their pay. Instead, you will find a moral clarity exuded by many of our authors. For example, Frank Chodorov declares that "taxation is robbery" and that no amount of verbiage "can make it anything else." In conclusion, he notes that there can neither be a "good tax nor a just one" because "every tax rests its case on compulsion." Mark Crovelli tackles the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and writes that "theft is theft - even if the State does it." His purpose is to harken back to the unadorned language of the 7th commandment that "offers a straightforward condemnation of the taking of other people's property without their consent." As he notes, the commandment "does not offer exceptions, such as "You shall not steal unless you are a government employee."

Some of the contributors to this volume label themselves pacifists and war tax resisters. In Michael Benedetto's essay on "The Origins of Conscientious Tax Objection" we find a review of the religious objections to war taxes. Juanita Nelson, author of "A Matter of Freedom," (reprinted here) and her husband, Wally, began their tax resistance in 1949, but it was not until June 16, 1959 that Juanita "became the first woman in modern times to be apprehended by the federal government for opposition to war and war preparation." Although she was eventually released, the government filed tax liens against her and in 1973, agents from the Internal Revenue Service attempted to seize two vehicles that she and her husband had parked at their home in New Mexico. "Each of them sat in front of a vehicle, and the agents finally left." [8] Ammon Hennacy, another one of our contributors, was imprisoned during World War I for his refusal to be conscripted. Out of this experience, he

Raised as a Catholic, I could not reconcile the concept of ending tax-supported welfare with Christ's admonition to love our neighbors.

In considering this dilemma, I suddenly became aware of a pivotal point: although refusing to help others might not be very loving, pointing guns at our neighbors to force them to help those in need was even less so. Honoring our neighbor's choice was more loving than the forcible alternative. If people needed helping, I should expend my energy to offer that help, rather than forcing others to provide it.

- Mary Ruwart, "Arriving At Libertarianism," in Walter Block (compiler), *I CHOSE LIBERTY* (2010), p. 305.

became a Catholic, an anarchist, and a tax refuser. He, the Nelsons, and other war tax resisters certainly earn my greatest respect for having the courage and consistency to stick to their beliefs - even when the State has used force against them. Yet, to them and all other war tax resisters, I ask: What about excise taxes, real estate taxes, personal property taxes, use taxes, inheritance and estate taxes, social security taxes, and sales taxes? Are they not wrong, too? Do these taxes not go to support government? Are not all activities of government ultimately dependent on force, violence, and threats? Why limit your opposition to government wars and their funding? Are not the actions of the U.S. government in controlling its citizens in its own domestic venue similar in nature to its military operations abroad since both are predicated on the exercise of coercion?

Randolph Bourne, an early 20th Century intellectual, once observed that "war is the health of the state." [9] Compulsion is its backbone; taxes are its lifeblood. The ultimate basis of State power is coercive taxation. [10] As Lysander Spooner pointed out in his essay, "Taxation," (reprinted here) written before the United States Civil War, with money a government can hire armed men to plunder and punish those of its citizens who do not obey. The underlying premise of government taxation is that you and your property belong to the State. [11] Whatever you are allowed to keep is due to its generosity, and if you resist and want to keep more of your own property, you will be fined, jailed for contempt of court, or killed resisting arrest. Taxation is nothing but a polite euphemism for stealing - legitimized by the overpowering strength of the State. Thus it becomes our duty as individuals, and as inhabitants of the earth, to speak out - to make known our views - about taxation. Regardless of how much or how little tax we pay, we can say: taxes are wrong. We agree with the Jewish Zealot, Judas of Gamala, who over two thousand years ago said that the census tax imposed by the Roman occupiers of Palestine in 6 A.D. "was no better than an introduction to slavery." [12]

One of the main purposes of this book is to encourage people to look at an old situation in a new way. Until individuals could recognize that there was a

practical alternative to slavery, it was difficult for them to see slavery as the moral atrocity it was. To speak of doing away with taxation, today, brings forth the same reactions and reasons that Robert Higgs describes in one of the concluding chapters of this book. The defenders of slavery could not visualize how civilization, how law and order, could be maintained without slaves, and yet, society and civilization have survived. It is our position that taxation is just as abominable, as unjust, and as unnecessary as slavery. There are many voluntary ways to solve societal problems if only people would begin to free their minds from the constraints of government indoctrination and propaganda. Only a free mind is able to recognize the truth. Paraphrasing Alexander Solzhenitsyn, only a free mind is able to take that courageous step, and refuse to take part in falsehood. Only a free mind can recognize that “one word of truth outweighs the world.” [13]

End Notes

[1] Lesley Brown, (ed.), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, See “slave,” Vol. II, p. 2893.

[2] Mario Pei, *Double-Speak In America*, New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973, p. 96.

[3] Auberon Herbert, “Some Reasons Why Voluntaryists Object To Compulsory Taxation In All Its Forms,” Section 27 (reprinted here). Even if there were such a limitation in the federal Constitution, of what value would it be? First and foremost, how can the Constitution possibly legitimize stealing and/or slavery? Second, and of lesser importance, what would prevent such a limitation from being amended, repealed, or ignored?

[4] Charles Adams, *For Good and Evil: The Impact of Taxes on the Course of History*, Lanham, Madison Books, 1993, pp. 1-2.

[5] See Murray Rothbard, “Society Without a State,” *The Libertarian Forum*, Volume 7, No. 1, January 1975, online at <http://mises.org/daily/2429>, and see Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1792), Ch. 1, Bk. 2.

[6] Rothbard, op. cit. For historical examples of voluntaryism, see Carl Watner (ed.), *I Must Speak Out: The Best of The Voluntaryist, 1982-1999*, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, 1999.

[7] See Carl Watner, “To Thine Own Self Be True: The Story of Raymond Cyrus Hoiles and His Freedom Newspapers,” in Watner, op. cit., pp. 151-152. Originally printed in *The Voluntaryist*, Whole No. 18, May 1986.

[8] Hedemann, Ed and Benn, Ruth (eds.), *War Tax Resistance: A Guide to Withholding Your Support from the Military*, New York: War Resisters League, Fifth Edition, 2003, p. 96.

[9] Lillian Schlissel, *The World of Randolph Bourne*, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963, pp. 246-250, and pp. 259-271. Excerpts reprinted in *The Voluntaryist*, Whole No. 39, August 1989. The fact is: there couldn't be wars without taxation.

[10] David Beito, *Taxpayers in Revolt*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989, p. 127.

[11] Anonymous, “Why I Refuse To Be Numbered,” *The Voluntaryist*, Whole No. 116, 1st Quarter, 2003, p. 1, 4th paragraph.

[12] Flavius Josephus, *Selections from His Works*, with an Introduction and Notes by Abraham Wasserstein, New York: The Viking Press, 1974, p. 179 (from *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Cited on the internet as *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.4-6). This description of the Roman tax is attributed by Josephus to Judas of Gamala (otherwise known as Judas the Galilean), the reputed founder of the Zealots who revolted against the institution of the poll tax by the Romans in 6 A.D. in Palestine. He is to be distinguished from the better known Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles and the betrayer of Jesus.

[13] I would like to thank Jim Russell and Spencer and Emi MacCallum for their critical reading and suggestions on how to improve this introduction. ☒

“The entire existence and power of the State is wrapped up in the taxation question.”

- Murray Rothbard, 4 QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS (2001), p. 43.

Vinoba Bhave and the Genesis of the Indian Land Reform Movement

Within a year or two of the establishment of India, a number of his [Gandhi's] followers decided to have a nationwide meeting to see how best to continue his work. They hoped to convince one elder, Vinoba Bhave, Gandhi's closest disciple and heir apparent, to lead this conference, but he declined. “We cannot revive the past,” he stated. After much pleading, they finally convinced Vinoba to lead their gathering, but only on the condition, as he requested, that it be postponed for six months, giving him enough time to walk on foot from where he lived to the meeting site, halfway across India.

He began to walk from village to village. As he stayed in each village, he would call a meeting as Gandhi had done. He would listen to their problems and at times advise the villagers. Naturally, he walked through a series of very poor villages, there being many of them in India. In one, many people spoke of the hardship, of their hunger and how little food they had to eat. He asked them, “Why don't you grow your own food,” but most of them were untouchables, and they said, “We would grow our own food, sir, but we have no land.” Upon reflection, Vinoba promised them that when he returned to Delhi he would speak to Prime Minister Nehru and see if a law could be passed giving land to the poorest villagers in India.

The village went to sleep, but Vinoba, struggling with the problem, did not rest that night. In the morning he called the villagers together and apologized. “I know government too well.” He said, “Even if after several years I am able to convince them to pass a law granting land, you may never see it. It will go through the states and the provinces, the district head man and the village head man, and by the time the land grant reaches you, with everyone in the government taking their piece, there will probably be nothing left for you.” This was his honest but sad predicament.

Then one rich villager stood up and said, “I have land. How much do these people need?” There were sixteen families, each needing five acres apiece, so Vinoba said, “Eighty acres,” and the man, deeply inspired by the spirit of Gandhi and Vinoba, offered eighty acres. Vinoba replied, “No, we cannot accept it. You must first go home and speak with your wife and children who will inherit your land.” The man went home, got permission, and returned saying, “Yes, we will give eighty acres of our

land.” That morning eighty acres of land was granted to the poor.

The next day Vinoba walked to another poor village and heard the plight of hunger and landlessness from its lowest caste members. In the meeting he recited the tale of the previous village, and from his story another rich landowner was inspired. He offered one hundred and ten acres for the desperate twenty-two poorest families and again was directed to get permission from his family. Within the day the land was granted to the poor.

Village by village, Vinoba held meetings and continued this process until he reached the council several months later. In the course of his walk, he had collected over 2,200 acres for the poorest families along the way. He told this story to the council, and out of it, many joined him to start the great Indian Land Reform Movement. For fourteen years that followed, Vinoba Bhave and thousands of those inspired by him walked through every state, province, and district of India, and without any government complications or red tape, collected over ten million acres of land for the hungry and most impoverished villagers.

- Jack Kornfield, *A Path With Heart*, New York: Bantam Books, 1993, pp. 300-301. Used per Contract # 279385, by permission of Bantam Books, a division of Random House, Inc.☐

“Sin seems to disappear whenever a group of people can be made to share responsibility for what would be a sin if an individual did it. When everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.”

- Donald D. Kaufman, *THE TAX DILEMMA* (1978), pp.26- 27.

The Good Funding the Evil

By Larken Rose

Even if an individual is never personally victimized by “law enforcement,” never has a run-in with the police, and sees little if any direct impact by “government” upon his day-to-day life, the myth of “authority” still has a dramatic impact, not only on his own life but also on how his existence affects the world around him. For example, the millions of compliant subjects who feel an obligation to surrender a portion of what they earn to the state, to pay their “fair share” of “taxes,” continually fund all manner of endeavors and activities which those people would not otherwise fund—which almost no one would otherwise fund, and which therefore would not otherwise exist. By way of “taxes,” those claiming to be “government” confiscate an almost incomprehensible amount of time and effort from millions of victims and convert it into fuel for the agenda of the ruling class. To wit, millions of people who oppose war are compelled to fund it via “taxation.” The product of their time and

effort is used to make possible something they morally oppose.

The same is true of state-controlled wealth-redistribution programs (e.g., “welfare”), Ponzi schemes (e.g., “Social Security”), the so-called “war on drugs,” and so on. Most of the programs of “government” would not exist if not for the belief among the general population in a moral obligation to pay one’s “taxes.” Even “government” programs purported to have noble goals—such as protecting the public and helping the poor—become bloated, inefficient and corrupt monstrosities, which almost no one would willingly support if there was no “law” requiring them to do so.

In addition to the waste, corruption, and destructive things which “government” does with the wealth it confiscates, there is also the less obvious issue of what the people would have done with their money otherwise. As “government” takes the wealth of the producers to serve its own purposes, it also deprives the producers of the ability to further their own goals. Someone who surrenders \$1,000 in “taxes” to the ruling class may not only be funding a war he morally opposes, but he is also being deprived of the ability to put \$1,000 into savings, or donate \$1,000 to some charity he considers worthwhile, or pay someone \$1,000 to do some landscaping work. So the damage done by the myth of “authority” is twofold: it forces people to fund things that they do not believe are good for themselves or society, while simultaneously preventing them from funding things that they do view as worthwhile. In other words, subservience to “authority” causes people to act in a manner which is, to one extent or another, directly opposed to their own priorities and values.

Even the people who imagine that their “tax” dollars are doing good by building roads, helping the poor, paying for police, and so on, would almost certainly not fund the “government” version of those services, at least not to the same degree, if they did not feel compelled—by moral obligation and the threat of punishment—to do so. Any private charity that had the inefficiency, corruption, and record of abuse that AFDC, HUD, Medicare, and other “government” programs have, would quickly lose all of its donors. Any private company as expensive, corrupt, and inefficient as “government” infrastructure programs would lose all of its customers. Any private protection service which was so often caught abusing, assaulting, and even killing unarmed, innocent people would have no customers. Any private company that claimed to be providing defense, but told its customers it needed a billion dollars every week to wage a prolonged war on the other side of the world, would have few, if any, contributors, including among those who now verbally support such military operations.


The feeling of obligation to pay “taxes” seems to be

little hampered by the fact that “government” is notoriously wasteful and inefficient. While millions of “taxpayers” struggle to make ends meet while paying their “fair share” of “taxes,” politicians waste millions on laughably silly projects—everything from studying cow farts, to building bridges to nowhere, to paying farmers to *not* grow certain crops, and so on, ad infinitum—and billions more are simply “lost,” with no accounting of where they went. But much of what people make possible through payment of “taxes” is not just wasted but is quite destructive to society. The “war on drugs” is an obvious example. How many people would voluntarily donate to a private organization which had the stated goal of dragging millions of non-violent individuals away from their friends and families, to be put into cages? Even the many Americans who now recognize the “war on drugs” as a complete failure continue, via “taxes,” to provide the funding which allows it to continue to destroy literally millions of lives.

Even the most vocal critics of the various abuses being perpetrated by the evergrowing police state are often among those making that abuse possible, by providing the funding for it. Whether the issue is blatant oppression, or corruption, or mere bungling bureaucratic inefficiency, everyone can point to at least a few things about “government” that do not meet with his approval. And yet, having been trained to obey “authority,” he will continue to feel obligated to provide the funding which enables the same bungling, corrupt, oppressive “government” activities that he criticizes and opposes. Rarely does anyone notice the obvious inherent contradiction in feeling *obligated* to fund things that he thinks are *bad*.

Of course, people who work for non-authoritarian organizations can also be inefficient or corrupt, but when their wrongdoing comes to light, their customers can simply stop funding them. That is the natural correction mechanism in human interaction, but it is completely defeated by the belief in “authority.” How many people are there who are not currently being forced to fund some “government” program or activity that they morally oppose? Very few, if any. So why do those people keep funding things which they feel are destructive to society? Because “authority” tells them to, and because they believe that it is good to obey “authority.” As a result, they continue to surrender the fruits of their labors to fuel the machine of oppression—a machine which otherwise would not and could not exist.

“Governments” produce no wealth; what they spend they first must take from someone else. Every “government,” including the most oppressive regimes in history, has been funded by the payment of “taxes” by loyal, productive subjects. Thanks to the belief in “authority,” the wealth created by billions of people will

continue to be used, not to serve the values and priorities of the people who worked to produce it, but to serve the agendas of those who, above all else, desire dominion over their fellow man. The Third Reich was made possible by millions of German “taxpayers” who felt an obligation to pay up. The Soviet empire was made possible by millions of people who felt an obligation to give to the state whatever it demanded. Every invading army, every conquering empire, has been constructed out of wealth that was taken from productive people. The destroyers have always been funded by the creators; the thieves have always been funded by the producers; through the belief in “authority,” the agendas of the evil have always been funded by the efforts of the good. And this will continue, unless and until the most dangerous superstition is dismantled. When the producers no longer feel a moral obligation to fund the parasites and usurpers, the destroyers and controllers, tyranny will wither away, having been starved out of existence. Until then, good people will keep supplying the resources which the bad people need in order to carry out their destructive schemes. [Reprinted with permission from THE MOST DANGEROUS SUPERSTITION (pp.87-90) by Larken Rose (2011). Available from Box 653, Huntington, PA 19006 or amazon.com] 

The most basic and important lesson I learned while growing up [in my father’s store] was that you must cheat on your taxes to succeed or even survive in business, and that most everyone who could, did so. It all began when I realized we treated the front “cash” register different from the “back” cash register. After a little persistent questioning, my father said that we paid taxes on one, but not necessarily the other. He explained that if we paid taxes on every dollar of sales, we would barely break even, and that if we went out of business both we and our customers would be worse off. The meaning of this was clear to me and I understood its implications. This was not stealing. It was our money and if we gave it to the government they would just go and build more urban renewal [or spend it in ways different than those who paid it would have chosen]. Getting “let in on” the family business made my job even more enjoyable, and I would regularly divert sales to the tax-free register.

As I learned more about our operation, it seemed like everything we did violated some government rule or other, but none of the regulations - from recycling prescription bottles to the location and storage of cocaine - made sense. We never got caught and never got sued. I never heard a customer complain and we had plenty of happy long-term customers of all races and creeds.

- From a friend who wishes to remain anonymous.

My Deprogramming

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matter what. If my reverence for the Constitution got in the way of being principled and philosophically consistent, then the Constitution had to go. If “limited government” didn’t fit with a coherent, rational, consistent set of principles, then it had to go, too. In short, I had to back up, past all of the “civics” stuff we were all taught, and start from scratch. What I found was very freeing, and very disturbing. I found that the entire mythology about “government,” “authority,” and “law” was nonsensical garbage. Despite the fact that the mythology was being repeated just about everywhere, by just about everybody, it made no sense at all, for a dozen different reasons.

I should mention that a lot of this examination and reconsidering was the result of my wife and me throwing ideas at each other. She’s another one of those wacky people who want to know the truth-whatever it is-and who don’t want to believe in lies and contradictions. Having both been “limited government” believers, over time we basically “corrupted” each other into becoming anarchists, eventually giving up the mythology of “government” entirely. (Don’t talk or think too much, or the same thing might happen to you!)

Now, most of the anarchists I know gave up statism because they decided that, as a practical matter, a completely free society would work better than any “government”-controlled society, and that “government” is not really necessary. But I arrived at anarchism/voluntaryism by a different route: I figured out, via simple logic, that “government” is impossible. I don’t mean that GOOD “government” is impossible (though it is); I mean that the entire concept of “government” is a self-contradictory myth. There’s no such thing, and can be no such thing. There can NEVER be a legitimate ruling class, so arguing about WHAT KIND of ruling class we should have, or what it should do, was a completely pointless discussion. If “government” isn’t real, debating what it should be like is silly.

Of course, the gang of mercenaries is very real, as are the politicians, but it is the supposed LEGITIMACY of their rule that makes them “government,” and makes their commands “law,” and makes disobedience to such commands “crime,” and so on. Without the RIGHT to do what they do-without the moral right to rule-the gang ceases to be “government,” and becomes organized crime.

By trying to reconcile contradictions in my own political beliefs, I proved to myself that “government” can NEVER be legitimate. It can never have “authority.” However necessary it supposedly is, and

however noble the stated goal might be, I eventually realized that it is utterly impossible for anyone to acquire the right to rule others, even in a limited, “constitutional” way.

There are several ways to prove this, and each of them is astonishingly simple. For example, if a person cannot delegate a right he doesn’t have, then it is impossible for those in “government” to have any rights that I do not personally have. (Where and how would they have acquired such super-human rights?) Furthermore, unless human beings can actually ALTER morality by mere decree, then all “legislation” is pointless and illegitimate. If one accepts the principle of non-aggression, then “government” is logically impossible, because a “government” without the right to tax, regulate, or legislate (which are all threats of aggression) is no “government” at all. And just as no one can have the right to rule me, I can never have any obligation to obey anyone’s command over my own “conscience,” which rules out any possibility of any outside “authority.”

In short, I came to the conclusion that “government” is one big lie. It is a mythical, super-human deity which people hope will save them from reality. It is a superstition no more rational than the belief in Santa Claus, and infinitely more destructive. “Anarchy,” meaning a lack of “government,” isn’t just what SHOULD be; it is what is, and what has always been. And by hallucinating an “authority” and a “government” that is not there, human beings have created an incomprehensible level of violence and oppression, covering the earth and stretching back to the beginning of recorded history.

So now I spend much of my time trying to persuade others to give up the cult of statism. I do not advocate abolishing “government” any more than I advocate abolishing Santa Claus. I just want people to stop letting their perceptions and actions be so profoundly warped and perverted by something that DOES NOT EXIST, and never did. That is why I refer to the belief in “government” and “authority” as “The Most Dangerous Superstition.” If people could give up that superstition, even if they did not otherwise become any more wise or compassionate, the state of society would drastically improve. I don’t pretend to have the ability to make anyone more virtuous, but by pointing out to them the contradictions in their own belief systems-the very same contradictions I struggled with for years-I hope to help some of them reclaim ownership of themselves, so they can start thinking and acting as rational, sentient beings, instead of as the well-trained livestock of malicious masters.

[Larken Rose is author of THE MOST DANGEROUS SUPERSTITION (2011). Available from Iron Web Press, Box 653, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006 or from amazon.com. \$ 12 + shipping. See excerpt printed in this issue.] [V]

My Deprogramming

By Larken Rose

I was raised in a conservative home, in a conservative town, with some libertarian leanings. I grew up thinking the good old U.S. of A. was the land of the free and the home of the brave, and that “our” Constitution made us fundamentally different from every other country. I was a big proponent of “limited government”-meaning police and military, and not much else.

Back then I considered myself quite adept at explaining and arguing why collectivism and communism are immoral and irrational, and why “government” should have only a very limited role in “society.” Since almost everyone was more pro-“government” than I was, I was almost always arguing AGAINST “government” doing this or that. I had little practice in rationally justifying “government” doing what I DID want it to do.

But there was a problem. My arguments for why “government” should NOT be taking care of the poor, controlling education, running the health care system, and so on, applied equally well to the things I thought “government” SHOULD be doing. For example, if individual liberty was the moral and practical choice when it came to food production, why was it not the moral and practical choice when it came to protection and defense? If a welfare state forcibly robbing people

in the name of fighting poverty was immoral and counter-productive, why was forcibly robbing people in the name of protecting them from thieves and invaders any better? Arguing “it’s for your own good,” or “it’s necessary,” or “the collective need justifies it,” made me sound exactly like the communists I routinely railed against. And saying “The Constitution says so” was a complete cop-out, as if my philosophical position didn’t need a rational basis as long as it matched what a sacred piece of paper said.

I’ve enjoyed arguing for as long as I can remember. And whenever one engages in intellectual battle, the chinks in his armor will always be his OWN inconsistencies. I had made a hobby out of aiming for the giant holes of inconsistency in the “armor” of collectivist ideas (socialism, communism, democracy, etc.). And I wanted my own philosophical armor to be invincible. To put it another way, because I considered THE TRUTH to be what matters above all, and because the truth can’t be inconsistent with itself, I wanted to make sure there were no contradictions or inconsistencies in my own belief system, and in what I was advocating. So I spent lots of time looking at my own philosophical “armor,” and saw that it had some gaping holes in it-in other words, I saw that my philosophy CONTRADICTED ITSELF. And that wasn’t okay with me.

So I set out to remove those inconsistencies, no

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