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# The Voluntaryist

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Whole Number 169 “If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself.” 2nd Quarter 2016

## A Skeptic’s View of One’s Right to Defensive Force<sup>[1]</sup>

By Spencer Heath MacCallum

My brother and I scrapped a lot as kids. Since he was a couple of years older and I was a brattish younger brother, I was on the receiving end of a lot of rough behavior which I usually knew how to provoke to a point just short of really getting hurt. In the years since then I’ve given a lot of thought to the question of force, especially when asking the question, what is social behavior?

Years later at my alma mater, Princeton, a sociology professor once told his beginning class that social behavior was “anything involving lots of people interacting together.” My grandfather, Spencer Heath, had been invited to sit in on the class. He asked if war was an example of social behavior. “Preeminently so,” said the professor. “Then if war is an example of *social* behavior,” Heath replied, “would you give the class an example of *anti-social* behavior?”

The professor wasn’t taking into account the *quality* of relations among people. Heath’s view, on the other hand, was that it is useful to define society not merely as population, but as that fraction of a population - its boundaries ever permeable - engaged in voluntary, reciprocal kinds of behavior such as trading in the market place. The violent behavior to be found in the excluded fraction outside of society, he would say, including most notably that practiced by the state, is indicative of a failing, a lack of, or immaturity of social organization.

My subject here is not social behavior, however, but its antithesis, force. Doubtless force, or violence, will always be with us in a degree, since we are limited, finite beings. But if we want to enlarge the fraction of the population that constitutes society, it behooves us to ask if there are some ways of thinking about force that are more conducive to that end than others. Are there ways that might tend to damp it out rather than inflaming and escalating it?

Many libertarians I’ve known don’t oppose violence as such; they are not pacifists. They distinguish aggressive and defensive force and eschew the one, but are entirely comfortable with the other. Most of them strongly advocate using force “under the right circumstances,” and I’ve known many who spend a great deal of time carefully defining what those circumstances are.

Make no mistake, I’m not suggesting that anyone not stand up for her or his legitimate interests. I am not one to meekly turn the other cheek or supinely give in to the aggressor. Gandhi, who was often misunderstood on this score, set the record straight in these words:

He who cannot protect himself or his nearest and dearest or their honour by non-violently facing death, may and ought to do so by violently dealing with the oppressor. He who can do neither of the two is a burden. He has no business to be the head of a family. He must either hide himself, or must rest content to live forever in helplessness and be prepared to crawl like a worm at the bidding of a bully.[2]

The question is simply whether it is conducive to our purpose to say that one *has a natural right* to defensive violence. To speak in such terms is to launder violence; it is to say that, *exercised under the right circumstances*, it is good and just - perhaps even akin to the angels - rather than a leftover from our animal heritage that we must resort to sometimes when we can’t think of a more intelligent alternative.

The reluctance of many libertarians to critically examine what they hold to be their “natural right” to defend themselves violently is wholly understandable. For they are the holy keepers of an iridescent dream — and the dream is one in which they believe violence has its proper place.

The dream is to live in a world devoid of the state, its taxation, compulsions, and war, releasing human energy for creative play from the inmost world of the human psyche to the farthest reach of the cosmos. But immediately comes a question. Absent government exercising a monopoly of violence, who will protect people from theft and other aggressions? Libertarians normally answer that this is the responsibility of each individual person, who must be prepared to forcibly defend himself or to delegate his ‘natural right’ to private agencies from whom he’ll purchase protective services. Consequently, he must defend to his last breath that ‘right.’

But there is little agreement as to precisely how this force should, would, or could be handled. Some argue, as did Bob LeFevre, against using any force at all, while others argue for heavily arming themselves and retaliating on the slightest provocation. Fundamental to the argument for privatizing defensive violence is the distinction between *initiated* and

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# The Voluntaryist

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## Was Lysander Spooner Mistaken?

By Carl Watner

In his short essay on "Taxation," which was printed as the "Appendix" to his 1852 ESSAY ON THE TRIAL BY JURY, Lysander Spooner wrote

It was a principle of the Common Law ... that no man can be taxed without his personal consent. The Common Law knew nothing of that system, which now prevails in England, of *assuming* a man's own consent to be taxed, because some pretended representative, whom he never authorized to act for him, has taken it upon himself to consent that he may be taxed. That is one of the many frauds on the Common Law, and the English constitution, which have been introduced since Magna Carta. [p. 222]

The veracity of Spooner's assertion that under the Common Law taxation requires individual consent came into question upon my reading of J. P. Sommerville's book, POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY IN ENGLAND 1603-1640. At one point, Sommerville appears to agree with Spooner, for he writes

In the early seventeenth century ... [t]o say that something was a man's property, - or and this was by far the commoner usage - that he had property in something, was precisely to say that the thing in question could not be taken from him without his consent. To take property without consent was to steal, and thus to break the Eighth Commandment. [Chapter 5, Paragraph 6, p. 147]

In correspondence with Professor Sommerville, I asked him if it was his opinion that Englishmen of the 17th Century considered taxation without personal consent to be stealing. He replied:

The usual argument in that period was that parliament (and especially the House of Commons) represent[ed] everyone in the country and that the consent of parliament therefore includes the consent of every individual. What parliament does, people said, was done by "common consent." Laws (including laws instituting taxes) bound individuals even if they had not explicitly

consented to them, because they had virtually consented through parliament.

It was clearly recognized in Section X of the Petition of Right (1628) "that ... no man be compelled to make or yield any gift, loan, benevolence, tax, or such like charge, without common consent by act of parliament; ... ." According to Professor Sommerville, "The Petition outlawed benevolences, which were (theoretically) free gifts granted to the monarch by individuals, because monarchs can easily coerce (or persuade, or encourage) individuals to hand over cash. The Petition therefore said that even if an individual consents to giving the monarch money, the gift is illegal unless it has parliamentary endorsement."

So accepting Professor Sommerville's argument on face value, parliament was supreme. It could approve taxes even though not consented to by an individual; and it could annul a benevolence even though an individual had granted it.

Although Spooner offers no historical evidence to buttress his case, there is some modicum of support to be found in STUDIES IN MEDIEVAL TAXATION UNDER JOHN AND HENRY III (1914). As Sydney Knox Mitchell observed, "The source of modern taxation was the feudal aid, the voluntary contribution which the vassal made to relieve the wants of his lord." [p. 346] However, this statement is followed by the acknowledgement that, "There were certain aids which were not voluntary, but which were fixed by feudal law." According to Chapter 12 of Magna Carta, these three payments were for ransom of the king, financial support in making the king's eldest son a knight, and payments toward marrying the king's eldest daughter. Such scutages were not dependent on individual consent, but rather on the "general consent" of the kingdom.

If as historians we accept THE NEW SHORTER OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY definition of common law, which is "the part of English law ... not fully prescribed by statute, purporting instead to be derived from ancient usage and judicial decisions," then I think it is safe to conclude that Spooner was mistaken: it was not a principle of the English constitution or the Common Law "that no man can be taxed without his personal consent." Yet, as voluntaryists we can agree with Spooner's conclusion that if a "government can take a man's money without his consent, [then] there is no limit to the additional tyranny it may practice upon him; for, with his money, it can hire soldiers to stand over him, keep him in subjection, plunder him at discretion, and kill him if he resists. And governments will always do this, as they everywhere and always have done ... ." ["Appendix," p. 222]

The proof is in the pudding. Taxation is robbery any way you consider it: without consent it is clearly stealing. On the other hand, would anyone ever 'consent' to taxation? Who would enter into an agreement whereby he or she in effect writes a blank check to be cashed by whomever has the most votes? Who would

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agree to an open-ended obligation to be determined by a legislative majority? Such an arrangement would effectively dispossess the taxpayers of any and all rights to their property since there would be no limit to how much tax could be assessed. If Spooner were here today and experienced taxation as we know it, he would clearly label it nothing more than sophisticated slavery - at its best - and communism - at its worst. [V]

## A Skeptic's View of One's *Right to Defensive Force*

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*defensive* force. Libertarians condone only the latter, but how to distinguish the two in real-life situations is no simple matter. Aggression itself is ill-defined. Moreover, how much violence is justified by a given kind and degree of trespass is subject to many interpretations, the most extreme of which would simply brand any aggressor at all "fair game." David Friedman has written a compelling critique of the natural-rights argument for defensive violence, showing the utter inadequacy of most libertarian theory in this regard.[3]

May not this problem arise, not from the need for individuals to look out for themselves, but from their gratuitously assuming in the first place a "natural right" to respond violently to what they perceive as aggression?

This question of self-defense is a thorny distraction from the merits of the libertarian position. Many who at first find themselves attracted to libertarianism subsequently abandon that overarching vision for the more limited dream, which to them appears more realistic, of minarchy, or limited government. To them, their former fellows are impractical or self-deceiving in supposing that everyone could rely on self-help in this regard and the situation not degenerate into endless feuding, strife, and confusion. They themselves, however, while suffering the stinging accusation of having compromised their ideals, must now contemplate the conundrum - the veritable riddle of the Sphinx - of how to police the policeman.

The irony is that all such discord is needless. If libertarians and minarchists were to modify their thinking in just two ways, the problem might evaporate as dew from the morning grass. These two ways which I offer as propositions may at first seem unlikely. But I offer them in the spirit of Emerson, who observed that "senates and sovereigns can confer no honor like the presenting of a worthy thought and presupposing its intelligent consideration."

The first would be to relinquish the idea that anyone possesses a natural right or moral obligation to use any kind of interpersonal violence in any situation whatsoever, even defensively.

The second would be to make the *productive assumption* that, for any conflict situation, there are

always non-violent solutions.

Bear with me as I elaborate these points and explain how, together, they may offer a strategy for greatly diminishing reliance on violence in human affairs and so promoting cooperation, expanding that fraction of a population Heath called "society."

### First: Defensive Force

As noted, Friedman and others have pointed out both practical and theoretical problems with a natural-rights approach to defensive force. What alternative approaches might there be? A beginning to finding an alternative approach would be to cultivate a more dispassionate, clinical, non-judgmental attitude by looking at interpersonal force from a *functional* rather than either a moral or a legalistic viewpoint, seeing it as neither good nor bad in itself but accepting it for the limited purpose it sometimes serves as *response to crisis*.

All right, you may say, but what is a crisis? For this discussion, a crisis will be a situation perceived by someone as demanding action, but where the person doesn't know *what* action is appropriate to achieve her or his objective. In such a case, the person may run away if it's that kind of a situation, or he may try to dominate it by forcing it to his will. For a simple example of the latter, the television goes crazy during the last game of the World Series and the viewer doesn't know the least thing about fixing it. What shall he do? He may try kicking it; that at least is doing something. Such response is irrational in that it involves no understanding of how a television works and, consequently, has no assured outcome. Still, it might work. But kicking the set is a desperate sort of an act. It may or may not serve any purpose at all, and it will often prove to be counterproductive.

While force is distinctly second-best to acting from understanding, it nevertheless allows a person to respond in a situation demanding action, even if he can't act so as to control the outcome with any degree of assurance. In some situations, the mere fact of responding can have value. It is nature's primitive way of responding to an urgent situation in the absence of understanding.

Looked at in this light, force need no more be condemned than any other natural function. A simple example: when I was but a couple of years old, I had observed my nanny turning my pajamas right side out by a maneuver that, to me, looked like simply shaking them; I had yet to master the understanding that one reaches into the leg and takes hold of the cuff to pull it through. The next time the pajamas were inside out and nanny wasn't there, I shook and shook *and shook* them. I applied a lot of force, and got no results.

Our examples of television sets and pajamas are harmless, because they involve only things. The situation can become enormously more complex and dangerous where other people are involved.

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Do crises exhaust all possible occasions for force? What of the deliberate criminal who sees the use of force as simply a tool for acquiring the good things of life? His lack of those good things may be perceived by him as serious, but our definition of crisis requires that he not know how to respond appropriately. Ask him, and he'll say he knows perfectly well what to do and is skilled in the tools of his trade. There is clearly no crisis. But if wealth is the goal, the entrepreneur has infinitely greater potential for obtaining it in the marketplace than the criminal has by stealing. The criminal is acting inappropriately for his goal - out of ignorance.

Force or submission - fight or flight - is ignorant behavior, inappropriate behavior. But we all engage in ignorant behavior. Such behavior doesn't demand moral condemnation of the perpetrator. Where is the culpability in someone not being smart enough to cope adequately with a situation at hand? Looked at in this light, the person has simply fallen short. He is finite as are we all and, as with each and every one of us, there are other situations where he excels. If any emotional reaction at all is in order, it is *compassion* for someone who is unequal to her or his immediate situation.

If the goal is to see cooperation increase and conflict diminish, a supreme advantage in adopting such a purely functional perspective is that it no longer is necessary to differentiate between *kinds* of force. No longer is it necessary to distinguish aggressive from defensive violence. All is now seen in the same light, whether the violence be one's own or the other fellow's.

Not having to make such a distinction has a number of advantages. One is that in real-life situations, it is unrealistic to demand of anyone that he distinguish accurately and consistently between kinds and degrees of force in order to determine the rightness or wrongness of a strong action he may be about to undertake. We are finite beings, limited in all our faculties - as each of us is all too often and painfully reminded. Consequently our judgment is imperfect; we can't know or take account of all the factors in any real-life situation. Due to each person's unique makeup and background and the different filtering and reinforcing effects of his own experiences, no two observers perceive a given situation alike.

A second advantage is that we are often called upon to act on the basis of our imperfect observations at stressful times - times when our powers of discrimination and judgment are least available to us. When threatened, the body mobilizes its energies for action, whether fight or flight, by shutting down the higher brain functions so as not to be distracted by reflective thought. Have you noticed that our most creative thoughts often come when we are lying down - our least likely position for confrontation? It is no

accident that many people must learn to think on their feet. Yet it is precisely at the most stressful times that legalistically minded people demand of themselves and others fine discriminations of the sort that juries might deliberate for months without reaching agreement.

Add to this that we are rationalizing creatures, and the difficulty soars. Being conscious and self aware, we interpret our own behavior in ways consistent with our need for self-esteem. Hence, the common observation that there are two or more sides to most questions. We never escape the necessity of interpreting experience, but because we are finite beings, our information is necessarily incomplete. Accordingly, we always have some and often a great deal of latitude in the interpretations we make. Naturally we'll give ourselves the benefit of all reasonable doubt. As goal-seeking creatures whose all-encompassing goal is to live as fully and as effectively as we can, we would hardly do otherwise given any option at all - and our imperfect observation and information almost always give us the option.

### Judging Others

If now to this volatile mixture we add a fourth, wholly optional, ingredient, that of moral condemnation, the volatility rises dangerously.

The passing of moral judgment on others is a tricky and dangerous matter at best. Judgments are properly applied not to persons but to behavior, and most especially one's own behavior. Because of the uncertainties of life and the finitude of our knowledge, however, any of us is bound on occasion to rub the fur of our fellows the wrong way, and vice versa. We may then be inclined to resort to force if we know of no alternative. Under these circumstances it is all too easy to judge the other fellow. The act of judging removes one's normal self-restraint. It is *prelude to force*. Fortunately, it's an option we control; we are never under necessity of judging others. It is always our choice.

But when we do choose to condemn persons as morally bad, we alter the situation for the worse in at least four ways:

The first thing that we do is *reduce the likelihood of discovering a non-violent course of action*. For moral condemnation shuts off deliberation, suspends conscience. Social amenities no longer govern. The antagonist is thrust beyond the pale, becomes the stranger, the witch. He is a threat to be combated; for the logic of morality requires combat with evil. There is no compromise, no place for discussion. Battle lines are drawn. None has a choice but to be for or against - to be one of us or one of them. To engage in moral condemnation is to equip oneself with blinders like those put on the war-horse going into battle lest he be distracted by happenings to his right and left.

Secondly, we increase the probable *intensity* of the violence. Despite its frequent use by professed

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followers of established religion, moral condemnation is a mind-set for combat, not reverence. It is a powerful propaganda aid to brand the other fellow “immoral” and therefore deserving whatever might befall. Not only does it justify violence; it encourages it by *de-personalizing* the other fellow - by labeling him, reducing him to a symbol, and a symbol of evil, at that. We no longer identify with him as a fellow human being. Such lack of identification with the victim is well-known to predispose toward violence. During World War II, Americans who were horrified when Hitler killed several thousand Allied civilians by bombing Rotterdam showed little concern for the more than 100,000 so-called “enemy” civilians who died in the Allied fire-bombing of Dresden.

Thirdly, we lessen the chance of *learning anything* from the experience that might help avert future violence. Consider a hypothetical instance: The intended victim of a mugging has succeeded in knocking his assailant unconscious and is walking away. He has used violence and hurt a fellow human, perhaps disabling him for life. What is the burden of his self-talk? How will it be affected by the presence or absence of a judgmental attitude? The staunch moralist might be oblivious of any involvement in a human tragedy. He might be preoccupied, instead, with classifying the event as one in which he was within his rights to retaliate, rationalizing his resort to force in the name of natural justice. In his self-talk, he would be saying the fellow asked for it; if it happened again he’d give it to him even better. The tone might well be self-congratulatory.

The non-moralist, on the other hand, feeling no compulsion to justify himself by analyzing the matter in abstract categories, would simply be confronted by what had happened. He would be far more likely than the moralist to see the tragedy in the situation and to search his mind to think how he could have avoided the encounter or, failing that, handled himself differently in it. *Which of the two would be more likely to learn something from the encounter and less likely to find himself in another like it?*

Fourthly, adding yet more to the flammability of our mixture is the moralist’s conviction that, in combating evil (defined as any violation of his abstract ‘rights’), his action was not only justified, but commendable. If we entertain in our mind a class of situations in which violence is not only morally justified but virtuous, we will surely rationalize our experience to fit that ever-so-convenient category.

Indeed, the moral involvement so distorts perception that at times it becomes difficult even to recognize violence. Blumenthal’s 1972 study of attitudes of American men toward violence illustrates this. He found that only thirty-five percent of American males defined “police shooting looters” as violent, whereas fifty-eight percent thought “burning a draft card” was violent.[4]

A dividend, finally, from adopting a non-

judgmental attitude toward a perpetrator of violence is that it takes the machismo out of the situation. What is more macho than judging people as morally bad and dishing out to them their “just desserts?” How different it might be in the world if *compassion* or *pity* replaced admiration among the emotions commonly expressed when talking about violent people. If they were seen as objects of compassion, could bullies and war hawks then strut about?

The wise man of Galilee was blunt in his admonition to his followers, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” For those inclined toward exegesis, consider also the following. Of the two fruit trees in the garden, one was forbidden to man. But the other was not. The tree that was forbidden to Adam and Eve, and that they ate of, was the tree of the *knowledge of good and evil*, which is to say, the tree of moral judgment. The other tree was not forbidden. It was called the tree of *life*. The message could scarcely be put more plainly than in this Old Testament image.[5]

### **Second: A Productive Assumption**

Thus far, I have argued for adopting a non-judgmental approach toward persons behaving violently by conceiving of interpersonal force as simply a natural response to crisis. That may be good so far as it goes, but it is not enough. A second important step is called for. The second step is to make a productive assumption in such situations. That assumption is that *there are always appropriate alternatives to violence* (appropriate, that is, to our objectives).

It can’t be proved, of course, that there will always be such alternatives, but it is productive to make the assumption. Science gives us ample precedent. Causality cannot be proven. The scientist cannot prove that the universe is rational, that it is a cosmos and not a chaos. But she or he assumes it is, and that assumption, that article of faith, makes exploration and discovery possible. That powerful assumption underlies the whole of modern science and all the technology derived from it.

We may not always be able to think of an appropriate, non-violent solution when a crisis is thrust upon us. But the act of assuming that there are any number of solutions will increase the odds of our discovering one, and our self-talk after the experience will work in the direction of discovery and new understanding that will serve us in the future. A personal story from my family illustrates what a difference this can make.

When World War I broke out, my grandfather was manufacturing airplane propellers in Baltimore. He had just developed the first machine-mass-production of propellers, replacing the workman who stood at a bench and carved them out by hand. Because his was the only plant at the time that could turn out propellers in volume, he produced more than three-quarters of the propellers used by the Allied governments in that conflict.

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Not all of the propellers made in his plant during the war were of his design; frequently the War Department ordered propellers made to its own specifications. One morning specifications for a large government order came in, and my grandfather detected a design flaw that would cause the blades to have a tendency to break up in the air. He studied the problem with great care, came up with the least modification that would make the blades safe, and went to the War Department with a revised design.

My grandfather had never enjoyed a warm rapport with the War Department. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and my grandfather had strongly resisted his introduction of cost-plus contracting on defense orders on grounds that it created the wrong incentives and led to featherbedding and corruption. Consequently the War Department was not now sympathetic toward his suggestion of altering a propeller specification and assumed the attitude that he was a “war profiteer” attempting in some way to line his pockets. But my grandfather persisted. Finally, the dialogue was brought to a stop with blunt words: “Mr. Heath, this is wartime. You make those propellers, or we’ll shoot you.”

What would a reasonable person do in such a situation? What would you do? The answer isn’t obvious; so think carefully. Would you have made the propellers as specified and endangered the lives of the pilots? (And you know who would be blamed after the war, the propellers having been made in your plant.) Or would you have risked disobeying orders in wartime?

My grandfather made the propellers exactly according to the faulty specifications. When he was telling me this story, I interjected at this point, “Popdaddy, you didn’t!” He said, “Hear the rest of it.”

The propellers were completed as ordered and were crated and stacked on the loading dock to go out on the early train the next morning. That night, after hours, my grandfather and a workman came back with crowbar, hammer and nails. Together they opened every crate and, with a rubber stamp he had prepared ahead of time, stamped the hub of each propeller. Then they nailed up the crates, and in the morning the shipment went out on schedule.

Years later, altogether by chance, my grandfather learned that the propellers had never gone overseas. Someone had discovered the stamped hubs before shipment, and the entire lot had gone to a warehouse in Texas where, for all we know, they are still.

That original rubber stamp is still in my possession. It reads:

**MADE UNDER PROTEST  
CONDEMNED BY MANUFACTURER**

Had my grandfather assumed that he had but two options, both of them unacceptable, he would have been caught on the horns of a dilemma of his own making. But he didn’t let himself be trapped in that false alternative; he wasted no time there. He had no assurance that he would think of a solution, or think of one in time. But his assuming that any number of favorable options existed was his first putting out of energy toward the discovery of one or several of them.

How does all this translate into a workable personal philosophy? The path toward greater life and wider opportunities entails, among many other things, eschewing force of any kind, while realizing that there will be times when it can’t be avoided. Gandhi recognized that. When it happens, we must not be hard on ourselves but, as with others, take a non-judgmental attitude. We must recognize that we did what we could and now must learn from the experience. My grandfather, of Quaker background, disavowed the use of force. When someone said to him, “But suppose a bear caught you at the wrong end of a box canyon? Would you fight then?” “Yes,” he said, “and with a right good will to win. But when the fight was over and I’d climbed out of that canyon, if I survived, I’d do some long thinking about how to avoid getting caught in a situation like that again!”

### **Conclusion**

Granting that force sometimes may serve in a crisis, albeit precariously, I have challenged the idea that it can ever be a dependable tool or an appropriate or rational behavior for accomplishing desired ends. It is most especially inappropriate in interpersonal relations. Because categories are slippery, perceptions always imperfect and subjective, and our minds and memories never what they ideally might be, especially under stress, problems will tend to arise when the use of force is institutionalized or ‘legitimized’ in any social situation whatsoever. In more poetic words, our use of interpersonal force is “Cain’s mark” on each one of us, ever reminding us of our own fallibility.

On the positive side, I’ve suggested promoting peace in today’s world by altering two ways in which we habitually think and talk about interpersonal force or violence. Discard the idea of there ever being a *natural right* to the exercise of force in any situation - even in defense of one’s life - and make the *productive assumption* that that there are always peaceful alternatives to be found.

I am not suggesting by any means that rights are unimportant. The appropriate place for discussion of rights is in connection with property. Property rights in one’s self and one’s possessions are the building blocks of social organization - of means of cooperation among people. Here we have been discussing crisis situations, and discussion of rights in this context is altogether misplaced.

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This departure from conventional libertarian thinking is not offered as a cure for the problem of violence in human affairs. That would indeed be Utopian. - but it can't be a bad place to begin.

### **Editor's Addendum:**

From his skeptical perspective, Spencer MacCallum urges us to consider the alternatives to defensive violence. I have previously written on this topic in "A Way Out - Victory Without Violence," in which I discussed what I would do if a violent person threatened my family. As I mentioned in that article there are numerous nonviolent ways of dealing with interpersonal violence and/or its threat. These range from pretending to faint, disarming the attacker emotionally, offering the assailant sanctuary or more than he or she demands, etc. In recently reading the biography of David Hartsough, I found another true-to-life response to threatened violence. On June 11, 1960, Hartsough was participating in a sit-in at a People's Drug Store in Arlington, Va., hoping to persuade the management to drop their segregation policy. "Late in the evening of the second day," Hartsough writes,

I was reading from a pocket New Testament I had with me. I had turned to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, ... "Love your enemies ... Do good to those who hate you."

I was meditating on those words when I heard a voice behind me say, "You nigger lover. Get out of this store in two seconds, or I'm going to stab this through your heart." I glanced behind me at a man with the most terrible look of hatred I had ever seen. His eyes blazed, his jaw quivered, and his shaking hand held a switchblade - about half an inch from my heart.

Loving my enemy was suddenly more than just a discussion in Sunday school. ... For a fleeting moment I doubted that Jesus meant to include a man so hateful among those who deserved to be loved. I just had seconds to respond to him, and I was grateful for those many hours of role playing and practice the previous two days.

I turned around and tried my best to smile. Looking him in the eye, I said to him, "Friend, do what you believe is right, and I will still try to love you." Both his hand and his jaw dropped. Miraculously, he turned away and walked out of the store.

That was the most powerful experience of my twenty years of life. It confirmed my belief in the power of love, the power of goodness, the power of God working through us to overcome hatred and violence. I had a profound sense that nonviolence really worked. [pp. 19-20]

Hartsough's story also reminds me of Gandhi's observation that "nonviolence is not of the weak but of the strong." It takes guts and forethought to respond to a violent situation nonviolently. There is no guarantee that either defensive violence or nonviolence will be successful in overcoming potentially violent situations. But I think it is safe to say that there will be far fewer deaths and casualties resulting from the use of nonviolence. As William Henry Furness in his 1860 critique of John Brown put it, "violence produces violence," and it requires "a far higher courage" to respond nonviolently than to fight an opponent violently.

I urge readers of *The Voluntaryist* to consider nonviolent alternatives to violence. Below is a short list of pertinent reading material.

David Hartsough, *WAGING PEACE: GLOBAL ADVENTURES OF A LIFELONG ACTIVIST*, Oakland: PM Press, 2014.

Carl Watner, "A Way Out - Victory Without Violence," in Issue 38, *THE VOLUNTARYIST*, June 1989, p. 3.

Carl Watner, "Voluntaryist Resistance," in Issue 125 of *THE VOLUNTARYIST* (2nd Quarter 2005). Especially see Section V, pp. 4-5.

John Yoder, *IF A VIOLENT PERSON THREATENED TO HARM A LOVED ONE ... WHAT WOULD YOU DO?*, Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1983.

### **End Notes**

[1] The author, a social anthropologist, first tried out these ideas at the Libertarian Party State Convention in Los Angeles, February 14-17, 1986. The silence, he remembers, was deafening. Twenty-five years later he offered them again in this talk at the second annual Libertopia Conference in San Diego, California, October 21-23, 2011. This time the ideas got a very different reception, the author receiving many comments and several requests for copies. Were there significant changes in public attitude during that period of time?

[2] *YOUNG INDIA*, November 10, 1928.

[3] Friedman, David, *THE MACHINERY OF FREEDOM: GUIDE TO A RADICAL CAPITALISM* (Second Edition). LaSalle, IL 1989: Open Court Publishing Company. pp.167-176.

[4] Blumenthal, M.D., "Predicting Attitudes Toward Violence," *SCIENCE*, 23 June 1972, pp. 1296-1303.

[5] Nothing in this argument as developed so far impugns the notion of morality understood as a guide to one's own actions. Even there, however, if we follow the cautionary lesson of Genesis, a more suitable standard of behavior might be the aesthetic. What behavior do we find beautiful? What behavior inspires? And, especially for this discussion, is there ever a need for the inspired person to be admonished? This is a pregnant line of thought developed in the philosophy of Spencer Heath. ▣

## **Put Up Thy Sword into The Sheath**

*(Continued from page 8)*

cowardly to draw the sword. (20) ...

Revolutions effected by force always end, sooner or later, in reestablishing the tyranny they undertake to overthrow. And our boasted American Revolution is no exception to this truth, but an impressive instance of it.

It is high time that the savage attempt to convert men by killing them, by wholesale murder, should come to a full end. (21) ▣

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## Put Up Thy Sword into The Sheath

By W. H. Furness

[Editor's Note: William Henry Furness (1802-1896) was a Unitarian minister, a non-resistant abolitionist, a station master on the Underground Railroad, and a critic of John Brown. The following excerpts are taken from "A Discourse delivered before Theodore Parker's Society at the Music Hall, Boston, Sunday, March 11, 1860," and was published by R. F. Wallcut later that same year. John Brown's strategy was to capture the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, and start "a liberation movement among enslaved African Americans" by establishing armed guerrilla bands in the west Virginia mountains. Brown was convicted of treason against the Commonwealth of Virginia, and hung in Charles Town, Virginia on December 2, 1859. Page numbers of the original text are indicated in parentheses. The title of the piece is taken from the NEW TESTAMENT in John xviii. 11.]

[W]hile I heartily honor John Brown for his generous purpose and for his heroic courage ... I see that in resorting to force, in drawing the sword for the slave, he was wrong, and that the means which he employed tended to hurt the cause which it was in his great heart to serve. (14) ... He did not take into account the undeviating law, that violence produce[s] violence, and that the force, which he intended to employ very guardedly and under the stead[y] restraint of a watchful humanity, would look, in the eyes of those against whom it was directed, like nothing but what it was, pure, untempered, brute force, and so would be sure to arouse a force in them which would regard no restraints. (15) ...

The sword can only kill and wound the body,

and upon the mind it can have no effect, but to madden it with rage or drive it wild with terror; thus, so far from convincing the understanding, or strengthening the sense of Justice, or breathing into men the spirit of repentance and humanity, closing both heart and understanding against Truth. Every body knows this. Every body knows that a blow is not an argument, that stabbing and shooting prove nothing, that physical force displaces the greater force of Truth. (17) ...

Therefore, because the Truth is so great, let the sword be put back into the sheath. We need something stronger than that, and Truth is much more effectual than any brute force, ... (18) ...

As I see the immeasurable superiority of intellectual and moral power over all the revolvers and rifles and artillery that have ever been or ever will be devised, as I hold this superiority of power of the mind over the force of the body to be as true as the shining of the sun in the heavens, I believe that unless men lose their senses, and are bereft of the commonest faculties of discernment, they must sooner or later, recognize this truth, recognize it, too, so clearly that they will be at a loss to conceive how men, laying claim to any civilization, could have ever been so absurd as to undertake the fight against evil with physical force, when the invincible Sword of the Spirit is always within reach. ... But there is a far higher courage, there is a far more daring spirit than his who knows how to fight. There is a braver [one] than he. It is the man who knows how to die, who, never thinking to insult the Truth by employing in her behalf any weapons but her own, speaks her message (19) in love, and without fear, prepared to suffer violence, but never to commit it; who, in a word, is so brave that he holds it

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