
The Voluntaryist

Whole Number 189 “If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself.” 2nd Quarter 2021

Party Dialogue (Part 2)

By George H. Smith

Libertarian Party Advocate (LPer): So you don't think libertarians should run for political office. Does this mean that libertarians shouldn't vote either?

Anti-Political Libertarian (APL): Definitely, but there is more involved than simply not voting. Libertarians should oppose the vote in principle – they should oppose the mechanism by which political sanctification occurs. Political power is legitimized through the electoral process. The present voting system is based on the premise that fundamental rights can be gained or surrendered depending on the vote total. Libertarians must oppose this unconscionable process. We must oppose the political process itself – the mechanism whereby some persons gain unjust (but legitimized) power over others.

The vote sanctifies injustice. If the libertarian message is to be truly radical – if libertarians are to lead the fight, not only against this or that injustice, but against the political system that perpetuates and legitimates injustice – then we must condemn voting altogether. A libertarian cannot use the vote for his own end, as if the vote were morally neutral. The vote is the method by which the State maintains its illusion of legitimacy. There is no way a libertarian organization can assail the legitimacy of the State while soliciting votes.

LPer: You make it sound as if pulling a lever in the election booth is an aggressive act. But it's not, and there's no way you can equate the two, particularly if one votes for a libertarian.

APL: Voting is not an aggressive act in the narrow sense. But politicians don't aggress in this sense either. A President or Senator doesn't personally go out and arrest or strong-arm people who disobey their decrees. It's possible that President Carter has never personally committed an aggressive act in his life. President Johnson didn't personally travel to Vietnam to murder Vietnamese. Does this mean that libertarians cannot regard these politicians as violators of human rights? Of course not. We are dealing with a chain of command where the upper echelon does not have to implement its own dirty work. Referring to my earlier point, however, President Johnson did not have the moral right to order the murder of innocent Vietnamese; and no politician has the moral right to order the violation of rights, however small.

Now let's apply this idea to the voting booth. To be elected to public office is to gain the legal sanction to aggress. This is a fact, whether we like it or not,

and whether a given politician uses his power or not. But there is no corresponding moral right. The political right to aggress is a legal fiction without foundation in moral law.

I maintain, therefore, that no person has the moral right to vote. To vote a person into office is to give that person unjust authority over others. To vote for a presidential candidate is to grant to that person the legal sanction for injustice. Let us suppose that an LPer votes for Ed Clark for President. If Ed Clark were elected, he would, in his capacity as President, have the legal right of aggression. For instance, he could order the incarceration of political dissidents during a “national emergency.” But there is no such moral right as this. It is the usurpation of rights. And just as Ed Clark does not have the moral right to this kind of power, so no one has the right to grant him that power, or to legitimize that power. When an LPer enters the voting booth, he is attempting to place in office a person who will have unjust authority over me. But, claims the LPer, his candidate will not use that power. I reply that this, even if true, is immaterial. The legitimized power embodied in the political office is not his to give in the first place. The LPer does not have the right to aggress against me, and it is sheer presumption to assume that he has the right to grant this privilege to his political favorite. How the libertarian, of all people, can calmly grant his political candidate the legal right to aggress without the slightest qualms – when all libertarians know that one cannot transfer rights that one does not have in the first place – escapes my understanding.

LPer: Again, I sympathize with your point of view, but I must bring you back to the real world. In an ideal libertarian society there would not exist voting as we know it – agreed. But in this world, voting is the method by which political change is effected, for better or worse. Today libertarians should vote as a matter of self-defense. The government aggresses against us and will continue to aggress unless we fight back, using its own weapons, if need be. Surely you wouldn't deny to libertarians the right to vote in self-defense, as a means of fighting against the encroachment of state power. One can use the vote in this way without lending it moral sanction.

APL: Again I am accused of not living in the real world. May I suggest that this jab applies more to you than to me. I have argued that we should take a good, hard look at the world of politics. What is the State? What is the nature of political office? You reply that

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The Charles Dupont Story

as told by Robert Strelbel

This true story was told by Robert Strelbel at a Financial Times World Gold Conference in Vienna, Austria in 1988. Strelbel was a Member of the Executive Committee of the bank J. Vontobel & Co. Ltd. of Zurich, Switzerland. He ended his talk by telling “the story of a friend of mine, Charles Dupont.”

“Charles Dupont was born in Paris in 1900. At the age of 20, he inherited the handsome amount of one million French francs. On the advice of a very wise man, he exchanged his inheritance immediately for 50,000 gold Napoleons (coins), which were official legal tender at the time, worth 20 French francs each. In short, Charles Dupont was the owner of 50,000 French gold pieces.

“From that day onward (January 2, 1920), he sold one gold Napoleon each day to finance his accommodation, food, clothing, and amusements. In 1980, Mr. Dupont dies at a grand age in a simple apartment not far from the heart of Paris. His nephew moves into the apartment and one day finds the notes and diaries of his dead uncle. In these diaries, Mr. Dupont had written how, over the past 60 years, he had been able to live simply, but well, on one “Napoleon” a day. He also describes the war, mentioning the black market and the fact that in those difficult times pieces of gold fetched very good prices. In addition, he tells how the price of the 20 franc gold pieces appreciated substantially after currency manipulations.

“In his diary Charles Dupont also relates his experiences with the tax authorities. He never paid any taxes because he did not have any officially recognizable income. He was summoned to appear before the tax inspector three times, in 1928, 1938, and 1948. The tax inspector visited his apartment three times, in 1958, 1968, and 1978. ... Each time the inspector was forced to leave without finding anything. He found no incoming payment, no interest payments, no dividend payments, no wage payments. Charles Dupont appeared to have an invisible income.

“Some months ago (1988), his nephew was searching around in the attic in old chests, boxes and books that

belonged to his uncle. He found two chests that were extraordinarily heavy and when he opened them he found they contained a treasure of 28,100 Napoleons which as a man of the times, he immediately converted to present-day currency. A few weeks ago, he exchanged the coins at his bank for the sum of 13.9 million French francs.

“For 60 years, Charles Dupont sold one Napoleon a day. He had used 21,900 Napoleons, and with the remainder, he made his nephew a rich man.

“This story has not failed to have an effect on people and firms who have been managing money for decades, or even centuries. That’s why I am convinced that if you are dealing with a reputable asset manager, you will still find traces of gold – both now and in the future – in your portfolio.”

[The Math Behind the Story and Editor's Comments: This article was reprinted from GOLD NEWS, November – December 1988. The 20 franc French gold coin contained 6.4516 grams of gold, 90% pure, so 50,000 coins contained 290,300 grams of fine gold or 290.3 kilograms. A kilogram weighs 32.15 troy ounces, so the 50,000 coins amounted to 9333.15 ounces of pure gold. At the then price of \$ 20.67 per ounce, this amounted to almost \$ 193,000 US dollars. Dupont had spent 43.8% of his initial stash, leaving the remainder of 56.2% or 5245 ounces to his nephew. At \$ 1500 per ounce (as of this writing in late 2019), the remainder would be worth over \$ 7.8 million dollars. Apparently the French tax men did not think of applying a capital gains tax to the sale of Dupont's gold, nor did Dupont live long enough to be subject to any kind of wealth tax, which is now being bandied about by American politicians. This story further illustrates what I call the Midas Clutch, somewhat similar to Gresham's Law. If you have to sell assets, retain those which you judge to be the the most valuable in the long run, and dispose of those you expect to lose their exchange value in the short term. In other words, since gold has a long history of holding its purchasing power, 'clutch' on to it like Midas until you have disposed of your less valued property.]

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Party Dialogue

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this is immaterial? Why? Because libertarian candidates are brimming over with good intentions. They will sneak up on the State and turn this engine of monstrous power against itself. They will win the voting game, and all the bad politicians will gracefully concede defeat, pick up their marbles, and go home in pursuit of honest work.

Next I argued that voting entails empowering someone to act as your agent, and that you cannot morally grant to your agent rights which you do not properly possess. Moreover, I pointed out that the vote is the basis of political legitimacy in America today. It is the taproot of political authority in the minds of most Americans. Now this is a hard fact, whether we

like it or not. You reply that this doesn't matter, that libertarians can overlook these inconvenient details. Other people, you argue, may think that we approve of voting and the political process because we run candidates for office, just like every political party, and because we encourage people to vote, just like every political party. Those poor silly people. They obviously don't realize that, despite appearances, we are really against voting and political power. Deep down inside we really oppose these things. It's just that we have to defend ourselves.

To your plea of self-defense, I reply: Fine, defend yourself, but leave me alone. But voting is wrong precisely because it does not leave me alone. If you elect your candidate to office in the name of self-defense, his power will not be restricted to you and to those who voted for him. He will have power over me and others like me as well.

When you enter the voting booth, you are committing an act of enormous presumption. You presume that you have the right to appoint a political guardian over me – a benevolent one, you claim, but a guardian nonetheless. Now as one libertarian to another, I must repeat my question: Where did you get such a right? You have no special authority over me. Where, then, did you obtain the right to appoint an agent with this authority? Where do you get the nerve to advocate that Ed Clark (or anyone else) should have the power of life and death over me and millions of other Americans? You claim self-defense. I claim that your vote extends far beyond the legitimate boundaries of self-defense.

LPer: You place great stress on this notion of abstract political power, which you say is the legal right to aggress, and you claim that the vote sanctions this power, whether or not a particular politician exercises it. It is primarily on this basis that you exclude political action. It seems to me that you sacrifice a strategy with great potential in the name of this abstract notion. We confront real-life crises, questions of economic survival and even of life-and-death. If we can elect politicians who will roll back the powers of the State, and who will not use those unjust powers inherent in their offices, then I say we contribute greatly to the cause of liberty.

APL: You miss the point of much of what I said. I, as an individual, do not somehow forbid political action. I contend that libertarian principles forbid it. You find this inconvenient, and you complain. I say, if you wish to complain, then complain about the principles, not about me. Political action conflicts with libertarian opposition to legitimized aggression – political power. Consistency demands, that I reject it. I accept libertarianism, and this very acceptance compels me to reject political action.

Therefore, when I am told that political action is a good strategy to achieve libertarian goals, I can only reply: Even if that were true (which I don't accept), it

would not change the rightness involved. As the poet Heine once wrote: "We do not take possession of our ideas, but are possessed by them. They master us and force us into the arena, where, like gladiators, we must fight for them." So here I am, logically mastered by the consistency of libertarianism, forced into the arena to fight against political action.

LPer: You anti-party types amaze me. Here we have thousands of dedicated libertarians working to change things in America, and you purists sit in your ivory towers carping away. Words, words, words! If libertarians listened to you purists, nobody would do anything, and government power would continue to increase. I suppose you'll still be spouting your principles when the State comes to haul you off to jail.

APL: If the State hauls me off to jail then, yes, I will still be spouting my principles, especially if it's a libertarian State that does the hauling. You accuse me of purism. I reply, "So what?" If "purism" means anything, it means the refusal to budge on matters of principle even at the expense of apparent short-term gains. What is the alternative? "Impurism?" "Corruptism?" "Selling Outism?"

And as long as we're discussing amazing things, let's go back to the issue of strategy of which you seem so fond. Hasn't it ever struck you as paradoxical how libertarians who are innovative when it comes to free-market alternatives, can be so pedestrian and orthodox in the area of political strategy. I mean, libertarians never tire of outlining plans for free-market roads, sewers, utilities, charities, schools, police forces, and even courts of law. When our critics ridicule free-market education, for instance, we encourage them to expand their thinking and to reject the notion that just because government has provided something in the past, it must continue to provide it in the future. Fresh, imaginative thinking is the key here. But now comes the issue of political strategy, and the imaginative libertarian suddenly turns slavishly orthodox. "How can we change things," he asks, "without political action? Nobody, especially the media, will pay any attention to us. Everyone knows that you have to muster the power of votes before you can change things significantly. We must get petitions signed; we must get our people on the ballot; we must get them elected to office – this is the only effective way to implement our goals."

To this political libertarian, I say: "if you spent a fraction of the time considering alternatives to political action as you do considering alternatives to public roads, utilities, etc., something might occur to you. You spend thousands of dollars and expend thousands of hours to get petitions signed and run political campaigns. If you spent a fraction of that energy and money on nonpolitical alternatives, you might witness a degree of progress that you now consider impossible.

LPer: But you're forgetting about the government and its repressive laws. Somebody, at some time, must

work to repeal those laws. Education, counter-economics, civil disobedience, alternative institutions – all those things sound good, but of what use are they unless they result in the repeal of laws and regulations that restrict our freedom? And this repeal necessarily entails political action.

APL: First, it's not true that laws have to be repealed in order to be rendered ineffective. There are thousands of laws on the books today which are virtually dead, because the public would not tolerate their enforcement.

Second, there are always plenty of political hacks around who will attempt to curry favor by doing whatever is popular with the general public. Laws will become ineffective or will be repealed when it becomes impossible to enforce them – when the public sentiment overwhelmingly opposes them.

This brings me to a fundamental difference in our view of what libertarians should strive for. You wish to work directly through the political process. I maintain that this reinforces the legitimacy of that process. You tell people, in effect, that the way to assert their natural rights is to ask the government's permission. When the government gives you permission to keep your earnings, or to teach your children, or to live a particular lifestyle, then it's O.K. to do so. It's all very proper; the game is played by the State's own rules.

I maintain on the contrary, that libertarians should breed a thorough and uncompromising disrespect for the government and its laws. We should tell people, in no uncertain terms, that decrees of the government have no moral legitimacy whatever – that they are on par with decrees of the mafia. We must work to minimize and demystify the State. Of course, there is the practical problem of avoiding penalties, and individuals may choose to obey particular laws in order to escape punishment. But a government that must rely entirely on fear cannot long survive. All governments must cloak themselves in legitimacy in order to win the passive acquiescence of their subjects. Libertarians must seek to dissolve this aura of legitimacy. We must tell people: you have certain rights, period; and what the government does cannot change that. The government is a thug and a thief; be on your guard, watch it with caution, for it is powerful. But do not be awed by it. Do not grant it respect or moral sanction. Treat it as you would any villain.

I submit that if this disrespect could be inculcated on a wide scale, we would experience a rebirth of liberty in America. Politicians would be beside themselves if only one percent of the population showed up to vote. Politics would be a laughing stock. One law after another could be passed, and nobody would pay any attention. The government would die of neglect. This rather than political action, is the course I would recommend to libertarians. And the likelihood of its success is no less than the prospect of dismantling the government from within. Granted, it lacks the flashy trappings of political campaigns. There would be no

campaigns and media hype. It would be a quiet revolution and one that is largely decentralized. It would entail dozens of different strategies. It would take a long time, and it wouldn't be glamorous. There would be few, if any, positions of power to fight for. It would require dedication and knowledge. But it could be deadly.

This strategic vision, as I have argued, is incompatible with political action. We wish people to look elsewhere than government for their freedom. We wish them to view government with contemptuous indifference. This cannot be achieved through political action.

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Monetary debasement brings about cultural debasement, and ultimately personal debasement.
- Attributed to Guido Hulsmann by Jeff Deist, "The Free Lunch Is Over," in *THE AUSTRIAN*, July-August 2016, p. 7.

Lotte Hendlich and the "The German Hyperinflation," 1922-1923

By Max Shapiro

In the autumn of 1923, Lotte Hendlich, a German widow in her fifties, returned to her native Frankfurt after an absence of more than four years in Switzerland. In 1919 she had gone to spend a few pleasant weeks in a Swiss village where her relatives lived. But almost immediately, Frau Hendlich broke her hip in a fall. During her long convalescence her chronic cough became worse, and the doctor attending her advised her that she was suffering from advanced tuberculosis. The months and years of her illness dragged on interminably even though her relatives were genuinely solicitous (they insisted on defraying all her expenses, including the fees of the doctor). At last, in September 1923, she was "cured" and considered well enough to return home. Her much longed-for homecoming soon became a nightmare.

In the stack of accumulated mail she found three letters from her bank; they delineated her ruin. The first - written in mid-1920 by a minor bank officer who had befriended her - advised her "to invest most of the funds in your rather substantial bank account" (amounting to over 600,000 marks, or the equivalent of more than \$70,000 at the exchange rate prevailing in 1919). "It is my judgment," the writer continued, "that the purchasing power of the mark will decline, and I suggest you try to guard against this through some suitable investment which we can discuss when you come into the bank."

The next letter, dated in September 1922, and signed by another officer said, "It is no longer profitable for us to service such a small account as yours. Will you kindly withdraw your funds at the earliest opportunity?"

The third letter, dated several weeks before her return from Switzerland, announced, "Not having heard from you since our last communication, we have closed out your account. Since we no longer have on hand any small-denomination bank notes, we herein enclose a note for one million marks."

With gathering panic Frau Hendlich looked at the envelope that had contained the letter and the million-mark note. She noticed that affixed to it there was a canceled postage stamp of one million marks. Her bank account - which four years before seemed large enough to provide her with a serene existence to the end of her days - had been utterly consumed by inflation and could no longer pay for an ordinary postage stamp.

[Max Shapiro, *THE PENNILESS BILLIONAIRES* (1980), pp. 170-171.] V

An Intellectual and Political Disconnect - Excerpts from a Letter Written by Walter Grinder

[Editor's Note: Walter Grinder (b. 1938) has taught economics at Rutgers University, wrote an important introduction to the Free Life Editions reprint (1973) of Albert Jay Nock's *OUR ENEMY, THE STATE*, helped found the Center for Libertarian Studies and the Institute for Civil Society, and for many years was associated with the Institute for Humane Studies. He is now retired, but continues to encourage "hundreds of budding and established scholars" interested in the classical liberal tradition. These excerpts can be found in Mr. Grinder's generally favorable review of C. Bradley Thompson's book *AMERICA'S REVOLUTIONARY MIND* (2019). His comments were addressed to George H. Smith.]

I understand that reality is the stuff of which people's minds interact to form the basis of knowledge and, skipping a few moves, and, then, discovering morality. I understand that these laws of morality can and do form the basis of law and infuse the law with the theory of right and wrong throughout the whole of the legal structure. I understand that these legal and moral theories serve again as the infrastructure both of political theory and of the communities that are necessary for people to live together peacefully. What I don't understand and where I see a grave disconnect lies in the intellectual and political attempts to apply these fine moral theories to the state and, get this, they are surprised when, after a generation or less, the ship of state springs a leak, or two, or many and the whole enterprise begins tumbling down, and after another generation or so begins to sink. The state is quite simply a different kind of animal. The state is theft incarnate! And, so shall it always remain regardless of the hopes and delusions of those who think they can turn a rabid pit bull into a dove of peace and tolerance.

That is the disconnect I simply cannot follow and do not understand; for the whole of human history animates against such hopes and, in all honesty, delusions. States

always have and always will plunder their citizens, sometimes directly, often indirectly, but it always remains the epitome of the term plunder. To put lipstick on the state does not change its nature. It was, I think, Gertrude Stein who, while sitting, sipping her Pernod at a Left Bank cafe in Paris, said that a state is a state, is a state, or something very close to that. ...

I wonder, however, in general, about intellectuals sitting in their comfy, well-appointed offices and with their not impecunious salaries, refusing to see that plunder is plunder, even though hidden conveniently behind the veil of constitutionality. In fact, statism [for that is what constitutionalists are advocating] is the best method of plunder ever devised and maintained throughout all the forms of government ever dreamt up or just happened upon over the past 6,000 years. Why do these folks persist, in what seems to me, to be their obvious moral and historical obtuseness? I tend to think it is, in fact, the very absence of good old-fashioned history on their reading lists, good old fashioned, bottom-up, rough and tumble history. I don't mean simply intellectual history [though I am not against intellectual history], although they often, it seems, are little read outside of their narrow discipline even in terms of what historical knowledge they have accumulated. ...

The intelligentsia always lie. They will never admit that their basic motivation is a desire for power.
- paraphrasing Vladimir Bukovsky, *JUDGMENT IN MOSCOW* (2019), p. 427.

I mean history in the sense of the rough and tumble of people's daily lives. Again, history from the bottom up. What history they do read is primarily, I think, what governments [or perhaps just as bad or even worse, other scholars] have done and continue to do. There is no sense of real people in what they often read. How would they know about plunder, except on April 15, and they can then quickly forget about that plunder till next year's 'contribution,' as they have plenty left over after having paid their taxes - unlike the masses of the families who scrape and scabble to get from one paycheck to the next, who pray that the next hardship just around the corner does not hit them this time, and I don't mean here only those living at the outermost margins of our society. I also mean the vast middle class, which is being continuously pushed closer and closer to marginal existences themselves. [I fully understand that many from the middle class are being swept up into the upper-middle class and beyond (but) here I'm discussing only those who are being swept the other direction]. V

THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY

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cal legitimacy entails "the right, on the part of a government, to make certain sorts of laws and enforce them by coercion against the members of its society-

in short, the right to rule.” Political obligation follows as “the obligation on the part of citizens to obey their government, even in circumstances in which one would not be obligated to obey similar commands issued by a nongovernmental agent.” Analysis of these concepts leads to the conclusion that governments enjoy a special form of authority. They are supposedly authorized to commit acts that would be crimes if carried out by any private individual or group.

Next, Huemer examines the major theories that supposedly justify the special status of government to exercise political authority. First is the social contract.

Although this concept dates back to Plato, Enlightenment figures such as Thomas Hobbes (1651), John Locke (1690), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1752) brought it to full flower. With no historical evidence, these authors proposed that governments arose when groups of people agreed to yield to a ruler some of their rights (e.g., to exact private retribution against wrong-doers) in exchange for the ruler protecting their remaining rights. However, history shows that the vast majority of governments came to power through force of arms. Perhaps the constitutional convention that founded the United States comes closest to a “social contract.” However, only a small portion of Americans then living actually ratified the Constitution. The convention was an assembly of delegates appointed and later ratified by the state legislatures, which in turn were elected by simple majorities among white male property holders who voted. Arguably, the only people bound by the Constitution were those who signed and ratified it more than 200 years ago, together with later government officials who swore oaths to uphold and defend it. Anyone who holds that the U.S. Constitution obligates you or me needs to read Lysander Spooner's NO TREASON: THE CONSTITUTION OF NO AUTHORITY, written in 1869. But I digress...

History demonstrates that gradual mismanagement and ultimate corruption of all fiat currencies is inevitable. The only unknown is in whose lifetime.

- Kenneth R. Ferguson, CONFISCATION (2018), p. 106.

Returning to Huemer's essay on the social contract: Beyond the fact that no such contract ever existed, the social contract bears no relation to any valid contract. First, there is no way of opting out short of leaving the country, and virtually no habitable space on the planet where one can live free of State domination. Second, the State refuses to recognize explicit rejection of the social contract. Third, the alleged contract is imposed upon everyone residing in the territory, almost regardless of what they do. Fourth, the State renounces any specific obligations to its subjects, as illustrated by repeated court rulings that police cannot be held liable for failing to protect

victims of criminal assaults.

Some philosophers acknowledge that no explicit social contract exists, but maintain that a hypothetical social contract is in force. [The] leading exponent of this view is John Rawls, [in his] A THEORY OF JUSTICE (1999). Basically, Rawls and others contend that hypothetical consent is valid when actual consent is impossible and when consent is consistent with the parties' beliefs and values. An example is doctors treating a patient who arrives at the hospital unconscious. Applying that principle to justify the State's coercively ruling everyone who resides within its territory, obviously requires leaps of logic. Again, although fully conscious, we cannot opt out, explicitly reject the contract, or compel the government to live up to its side of the bargain. The hypothetical social contract, like the explicit one, is an illusion.

Huemer next turns to the supposed authority of democracy. He quickly disposes of simple majority rule, as exemplified by two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for dinner. Some theorists base the authority of democracy on the deliberative process. In some situations, deliberation can lend legitimacy to a procedure, such as a jury trial versus a lynch mob. But anyone who claims that the actions of Congress or state legislatures involve careful deliberation is out of touch with reality. Rule by special interests is inherent to the legislative process. Weaker arguments in support of democratic authority, such as a supposed obligation to support equality and respect the judgment of others, also fall before Huemer's analysis.

Next Huemer takes on a series of miscellaneous arguments in favor of the State. Some of these arguments are pragmatic, such as claiming that the benefits of being governed outweigh the costs. Others are more theoretical, such as the notion that “one must obey the law because disobedience is unfair to other citizens.” All such arguments fail, both on their own terms and because of their limited scope.

Going on, Huemer takes up the psychology of authority, as illustrated by scientific experiments and real-life examples that demonstrate the shocking degree to which human subjects conform to supposedly authoritative orders. These include the experiments of Stanley Milgram at Yale University in the 1960s, in which subjects serving as “teachers” were asked to administer increasingly powerful electric shocks (faked) to “learners” (accomplices of Milgram) in the next room who failed to answer questions correctly. Despite being under no actual compulsion, most “teachers” progressed to the “Danger: Severe Shock” level and beyond, in spite of agonized screams from the “learners.”

Another example is the Stanford prison experiment (1971), in which volunteers were randomly assigned to be “guards” and “inmates” in a simulation of prison life. The abuse that the “guards” heaped onto the “prisoners” escalated to such dangerous levels that

the organizers ended the experiment prematurely. Then there is the “Stockholm syndrome,” named for a Swedish hostage situation in which victims came to identify with their captors. The best-known example to Americans was Patty Hearst, the media heiress who was kidnapped in 1974, by a radical terrorist group. Hearst joined her captors in a bank robbery. Other real-life examples range from the MyLai massacre in Vietnam to the Nazi Holocaust. Even when opting out is not particularly dangerous, many - perhaps most - people will commit atrocities at the behest of “authority.”

Huemer segues into Part Two with a section titled “What if there is no authority?” Here he examines implications a lack of political authority poses toward subjects such as moralistic and paternalistic laws, rent-seeking (interest groups try to gain financial advantages by manipulating those in power), immigration, taxation, and providing for the poor. He also takes up the moral responsibilities of private citizens and agents of the State as authority of the latter is being undermined. Huemer concludes that citizens should refuse to obey unjust commands, and State agents should refuse to implement them. However, violent resistance can be justified only in self-defense.

This section of his book addresses how a stateless society might function. The paramount consideration for many anarchists is what form of economic system will be adopted. Some insist on some form of communism, whereas others with equal force advocate laissez-faire capitalism. Huemer takes no stand, having little to say about economics beyond the concept that activities now monopolized by the State would be open to competitive experimentation. Without a State, no economic system can be dictated. People who favor communal organization would be free to adopt one. (Note that thousands of communal experiments have taken place in the United States and were not subjected to official repression. Nearly all failed because of their internal contradictions. Meanwhile, experiments at free-market economics in Communist nations are violently suppressed.)

Huemer insists that any stateless society must be grounded in human nature rather than utopian ideals. Among the assumptions he offers are: Most human beings are approximately rational; most are aware of their environments; and most are selfish but are not sociopathic. Statists frequently make the utopian assumption that government officials and agents will work toward the common good. As Huemer considers the “logic of predation” in stateless, totalitarian, and democratic societies, he notes the many inbuilt shortcomings of the latter, including voter apathy, dominance of special interests, the “sleeping watchdog” of the media, and the failure of constitutions and checks-and-balances to restrain predation on the part of those in power.

Key problems for a society without political

authority include dispute resolution, individual security against criminals, and societal defense against aggression by States and by those who would reinstitute the State.

Huemer envisions competing protection and arbitration agencies, similar to existing private security and arbitration firms. As competitive businesses rather than coercive monopolies (like government police and courts), private agencies face strong incentives to be fair, prompt, inexpensive, and not to abuse their clients. Conflicts between agencies would be resolved peacefully and in most cases, in accord with prior agreements, similar to procedures that insurance companies use to resolve disputes among their clients. In a society lacking government courts, individuals who refused to accept arbitration could be denied future protection. In criminal cases, restitution to victims would be emphasized over punishment of the wrongdoers.

You can't eat gold, but neither can you digest paper money, crypto-currency, or stock certificates.

- Suggested by Egon von Greyerz, June 20, 2019.

As for societal defense, Huemer discounts the need for standing military forces. Modern nations such as Iceland, which has no army or navy, have long been secure against aggression. The world has come to condemn the former practice of invading neighbors to plunder and enslave them. As recent U.S. history illustrates, the greatest danger comes from belligerence on the part of one's own military forces. Moreover, a standing army itself is a great danger to liberty, whether the troops are following orders or carrying out a coup d'etat. The founders of the United States largely opposed standing armies and envisioned defense based on a citizens' militia armed with their own weapons. Without a central authority that can surrender, stateless society can wage endless guerrilla war against an invader. However, using historic examples, Huemer finds non-violent resistance to oppression more likely to be effective than armed uprisings. When the latter fail, they often trigger deadly reprisals, and when they succeed, they often usher in a reign of terror.

How we get from “here” to “there” remains the final question. Obviously it won't be through a revolution, violent or otherwise. The most effective means to escape the thrall of political authority likely involve the rise of private, voluntary alternatives to failing government programs and policies. When these enter the realms of personal and societal defense and of dispute resolution, the collapse of the State may be at hand.

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THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey, A Book Review

by John Nelson

[Editor's Note: Although this book was published in 2013, by Palgrave MacMillan, this is the first discussion of it in these pages, other than its addition to our Bibliography's Short List on the voluntaryist website. One reason for this is the author's opposition to the absolutist position that all taxation and all stealing is theft. For example, consider Professor Huemer's article ("Is Taxation Theft?") on Libertarianism.org of March 16, 2017. After determining that taxation is theft, he asks "does it follow that we must abolish all taxation? Not necessarily. Some thefts might be justified. If you have to steal a loaf of bread to survive, then you are justified in doing so. Similarly, the government might be justified in taxing, if this is necessary to prevent some terrible outcome, such as a breakdown of social order." An elaboration of this approach can be found on pages 176-177 of his book.]

Fundamental to any discussion of politics is the question of where the State obtains its supposed right to coerce its subjects to obey its laws and pay taxes. In counterpart is the question of where those subjects acquire their supposed duty to obey the government. For most of human history, the right to coerce and the

duty to obey were attributed to religious authority, as in the divine right of kings. Theocratic authority still holds sway in most Islamic nations. Elsewhere, the religious prop for the State has generally fallen out of favor, and political authority and duty are ascribed to other principles. In THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY, University of Colorado philosophy professor Michael Huemer analyzes these principles and their implications and finds all of them to be faulty. The State, Huemer concludes, lacks any moral authority to govern, and its subjects are under no moral compulsion to obey.

Conveniently, Huemer begins with [an] "analytical contents," which is an expanded table of contents summarizing the major conclusions of each chapter and section of the book. One can gain a fair appreciation of THE PROBLEM OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY simply by reading the analytical contents. Few nonfiction works contain such a succinct summary. The book is organized in two parts. In Part One, "The illusion of authority," Huemer tears down all moral justification for the State. In Part Two, "Society without authority," he examines in non-dogmatic fashion how a stateless society might be structured.

Logically, Huemer begins with definitions. Supposed justification for government rests on legitimacy and political obligation. As set forth on page 5, politi-

(Continued on page 5)

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