

Authority: If It's Good, Why Does It Make Us Feel So Bad?

Editor's Pick. Written by Kevin Carson for C4SS.org.

In the past, I've argued against authority on both principled and consequential grounds. Institutions like the state don't have legitimate authority over you because we don't own other people, and you can't delegate an authority you don't have to an institution to exercise on your behalf.

On a purely practical level, authority leads to irrationality and inefficiency because it filters and distorts information flow and causes decision-makers to operate in a purely imaginary world. That was true of Gosplan in the old USSR, and every Fortune 500 corporate headquarters is for all intents and purposes just a mini-Gosplan. Authority leads to socially suboptimal outcomes because decision-makers are able to externalize the negative consequences of their decisions on subordinates and appropriate the positive consequences for themselves.

But a lot of people don't find such intellectual arguments convincing. They don't feel them in their gut.

So this time I'm going to attack it from a different angle: Authority is bad because of the way it makes you feel.

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