

Gratitude of Opportunity



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“One Improved Unit” is an original column appearing sporadically on Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OIU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

So I’m all about the voluntary principle, right? I refrain from using coercion as best I can. I still sin in this regard from time to time, mostly social coercion, but I’m getting better and discovering more tools to keep me on the straight and narrow, as it were. What I thought I’d explore this Thanksgiving is how grateful I am for the opportunity to earn the love and respect of – and to keep association with – my beautiful wife and children.

Love and Respect

Both of these beautiful concepts cannot be commanded or forced. Love and respect must be earned, either one on the basis of mutual-bond, -appreciation, -consideration, and -care. My wife and I love each other. We met, and then bonded, and our appreciation, consideration, and care for each other blossomed into an intense feeling of deep affection. We fell in love and remain in love to this day. I am grateful for the association I have with my wife. She’s inspired me to become a better person. Love and respect are the foundation of our relationship.

Opportunity of Association

My wife’s love and respect for me are not a given. I had to earn them, and she mine. They weren’t commanded or forced, nor will they be going forward. I must continue to earn her love, respect, and association if I am to remain true to my values as a voluntaryist. I am grateful for the continual opportunity of association with my wife. Enter our children.

My three children are nine, five, and a newborn. I think I’m a better father today than I was a year ago; than I was five years ago. Children have a natural dependency on the adults in their lives. This dependency is like a chain around their ankle with the other end in the hand of their caregiver. This imagery disturbs me. Sure life is coercive, nature is constantly trying to pull us down and kill us, but survival for an adult is in his own hands. Survival for a child is in the hands of someone else.

As a father, I have an incredible amount of power over the little people I've brought into this world. I can make their lives a living hell. I can command and control them from birth until they're powerful enough to stop me. But what kind of **voluntaryist** would I be if I did that? These people don't really choose to associate with me. They aren't old enough or informed enough to consent to that. I gave them life and forcefully brought them into my home. They never had a choice and at their current ages still don't have a choice. Like I said, that idea is very disturbing to me. As a voluntaryist I never want to force anyone – adult or child – to associate with me. I want to earn every association I have. And that *must* include my children. Their dependency on me only heightens this feeling of obligation I have to earn their association.

Final Thoughts

I got this feeling recently when gazing into the face of my newborn daughter. It was a feeling of moral outrage toward the prospect of forcing her to associate with me throughout her early life. It was a very brief feeling, but it gave me pause, and now I've discovered its lesson. My children are individuals. They aren't mine; they are their own. They need me, they depend on me, but if how I relate to them is not on a **voluntary** basis, then they are enslaved to me. I won't have that. Rather, like with my wife, I must continually earn their love, respect, and association. And for that opportunity, I am truly grateful.

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