If You Need Violence to Enforce Your Ideas…

…your ideas are worthless. Or so goes the meme I've seen recently on Facebook. Actually, I've seen it before, in the past, and I shared it, thinking it was clever. This time around, however, I had a different take.

Are all ideas that need violence to enforce them worthless? Perhaps. I'd say a strict pacifist would say so. But I'm not a strict pacifist.

It hit me rather quickly this go around. What are rights if not a claim that one may use violence to protect them? Is the idea of rights worthless? I suppose it depends on what you mean by rights. They can be rather broad, after all.

Rights are a mental and social construct. People claim rights because they desire via an appeal, primarily to reason, to protect themselves and their resources. We all do it. Even when we argue that rights don't exist, we do so using resources that we've claimed and would defend with… you guessed it: violence. And that's what rights are, made manifest in reality.

The purpose of this meme was not to question rights, properly conceived. It was to question the practice of advocating that ~~criminals~~ governments pass laws to force innocent people behaving non-aggressively to live within arbitrary guidelines.

People who say things like, "There should be a law!" don't seem to have a clue what law is. Law is not a set of club rules we all agree to follow so that we can play together in the tree house. Law is the death penalty for setting up an unlicensed lemonade stand.

And that's not hyperbole. What good is law if not enforced, and what good is enforcement if it won't escalate, and what is the end point of escalation? Death by decree.

Many ideas that require the violence of law to enforce are indeed worthless. Worse than worthless. They're murderous. Each of us must decide which type of murder we're willing to support, the kind that occurs in defense of our lives and liberties, or the kind that occurs because our neighbor's grass is too high, he collects rain water, and he prefers torrenting new movies to paying high theatre prices.