

Parents as the State

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Parents have a unique responsibility. They have the power to create life, and then the duty to protect it and raise it into a functioning adult. But can we say that this life that they create is theirs in the sense of materialistic ownership? I don't think we can. If we are to apply libertarian property appropriation principles, the one who first appropriates and puts to some use the child's body is its rightful owner. Since the child itself is the first one to do this, albeit with little rational direction, it stands to reason that the child is a self-owner the moment he takes his first breath of life (and perhaps before). Therefore, the relationship between parent and child cannot be one of ownership. The most we could call it, I suppose, is stewardship. And because the parent does not own his child, what sorts of behaviors and actions toward the child can we consider ethically justified on libertarian grounds?

Hans Hoppe defined the state as, "an agency that exercises a territorial monopoly of ultimate decision-making. That is, it is the ultimate arbiter in every case of conflict, including conflicts involving itself, and it allows no appeal above and beyond itself." And Murray Rothbard wrote, "the State is that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area." Let's look at these characteristics as they relate to parenting.

The "authority" of parents clearly extends beyond any spatial considerations. Their authority is not confined to their home only. It extends everywhere in the universe, anywhere their child might be. Because of this, we may say that parents are "an agency that exercises a [relational] monopoly of ultimate decision-making. That is, it is the ultimate arbiter in every case of conflict, including conflicts involving itself, and it allows no appeal above and beyond itself." This is true. Conflicts between children and between children and their parents are settled, in conventional parenting, by the parents. They allow no appeal, unless the child is old enough and brave enough to approach a third party, such as the police.

Likewise, parental authority is believed to give parents the justified use of force, that parents are "that organization in [the family] which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence." Parents don't allow their children to use violence against each other, but they permit the use of violence by themselves against their children. Parents can hit, but children cannot. Could we say that if a child doesn't like this arrangement that he is "free to move to another [family]"? Usually not. The parents would never allow it. They would use force to keep their child in their family, and even their home, so long as they are more powerful than their child.

The point of this short essay is clear. Conventional, authoritarian, parenting shares the defining characteristics of the state. Libertarians, and voluntaryists, who despise the state for these same characteristics must not hypocritically take them upon themselves when they have children. They must resist conventional wisdom and seek out non-statist, non-authoritarian alternatives. They certainly exist. If we are to raise the next generation in a culture of liberty and statelessness, we must cultivate a home and family of liberty and statelessness.

If we abhor the state, think it unethical and inefficient, why would we copy it's methods in our homes and families? Why would we who claim that initiatory aggression and violence is evil resort to using it against those we claim to love the most? "For their own good" is the statist defense of initiatory aggression. Let's reject it in theory and in practice.