Progressives and Conservatives are Allies on a Fundamental Level

August 2020: I read this essay and added commentary for Episode 345 of the Everything Voluntary podcast.

I've put together a simple thought experiment for those who consider themselves political enemies. (As always, I stand on the shoulders of giants.) Those who consider themselves a part of "the Left", such as liberals, progressives, social justice warriors, *et cetera*, aren't really divided from those who consider themselves a part of "the Right", such as conservatives, beltway libertarians, alt-righters, *et cetera*. The thought experiment goes as follows:

Me: I understand you hate Donald Trump, is that right?

Progressive: Oh my god, yes! I hate everything he stands for and everything he does!

Me: You consider him a political enemy, yes?

Progressive: Absolutely. He's the worst thing to ever happen to America.

Me: What if I could show you that you and Trump are allies on a fundamental level?

Progressive: That's not possible. We have nothing in common, and everything he does I oppose.

Me: Let me ask you this, do believe your government has the authority, or the right, to create and enforce laws that have the effect of controlling other people's peaceful personal and economic decisions?

Progressive: Of course, that's what government is, and why we need government. Without government, especially without democratic government, people would do whatever they want to other people, including hurting them.

Me: Do you think Donald Trump also believes his government has the authority, or the right, to create and enforce laws that have the effect of controlling other people's peaceful personal and economic decisions?

Progressive: Yes, obviously. He's the President of the United States, hashtag notmypresident.

Me: So then, it would seem that both you and Donald Trump believe in your government's authority, and their right, to control other people. Do you know that there are people, such

as myself, who do not believe that anybody calling themselves “government” have the authority, or the right, to forcefully control other people’s personal and economic decisions so long as they are peaceful?

Progressive: People like that, like yourself, are delusional if you think society can exist without government.

Me: You agree that the question of government authority is fundamental, then?

Progressive: I suppose.

Me: Then it would seem that you and Donald Trump are in agreement on a fundamental level. You and Donald Trump are political allies against those like me who do not believe that anyone, including those who call themselves “government”, have the authority or the right to control other people’s peaceful decisions.

Progressive: Ugh, gross! I’m not an ally with Donald Trump!

Me: As long as people like yourself and Donald Trump believe in government authority, there will always be conflict over other people’s peaceful decisions. History is replete with examples of political groups violating the liberties of other groups and other people. Government authority, democratic or not, is one-size-fits-all and has little tolerance for people like me who prefer to control their own personal and economic decisions. If you believe in government authority, then you stand with Donald Trump in using it to control other people. You may disagree with how he uses it, but you don’t disagree on his right to use it as President of the United States. If you did, then you’d be an anarchist, just like me.

This thought experiment works no matter the audience so long as they believe in government authority. Try it out sometime, and see where the conversation goes!