

Questions on a Voluntary Society

A cousin sent me a message over Facebook with a few questions he had regarding voluntary societies. I reproduce his questions below (italicized), each followed by the answer I sent him.

There are a few real world concerns that I have for a complete voluntary system.

1. Most people don't value having the strongest army in the world, yet I don't have a budget to do it myself.

Why would a voluntary society need the strongest army in the world? I'd think they'd just need a big enough army to repel any would-be invaders. They wouldn't be policing the world or invading anyone, so they wouldn't need the strongest army in the world. This, of course, begs the question, what about the would-be invaders? If free markets do provide services more efficiently and cheaper – as sound economic theory suggests it does – this seems to suggest a few things, a) voluntary societies would be free trade hubs with the rest of the world, reducing the likelihood of being invaded, b) voluntary societies would be wealthier, attracting “the huddled masses” away from would-be invader states – just as more free states have done historically and do today – thereby siphoning off their cannon fodder, and c) I can imagine efficient mercenary firms that would be contracted by a voluntary society's various insurance companies (who's liable for property and life damage resulting from invasion) to enter and assassinate would-be invader state leaders.

2. I don't see how courts could enforce anything if one party does not want to come to a resolution.

Historically, this is before nation-states, back when judges were decentralized and without political power, places like ancient Ireland, Iceland, southeast Asia, all over Africa, the Anglo-Saxons, disputants were pressured to appear by their families, whose reputations' were on the line. The losing side's family would cover restitution and then indenture their wayward member. It's been theorized that in the future both families and insurance companies would act in this same enforcement role, and ultimately society through ostracism and/or banishment of the uncooperative party, forcing them into outlawry, where the law no longer protected them. It was and would be in everyone's best interest, a) to not initiate aggression against others, called torts, or actual crimes (with a victim), b) to correct wayward family members, and c) cooperate in disputes so that one does not have to absorb all the costs of his security on his own, and be forced out of society, becoming a legal target of those who may thirst for blood (psychopaths, who would find it less costly to hunt outlaws, like Dexter).

3. I don't see how having multiple private police forces does not end real badly.

The difference in state police forces and voluntary society police forces is in their role. State police forces are primarily law enforcers, not security. Any state judge today will tell you that security and property protection is not the role of the police. Voluntary society police forces would be primarily security, not law enforcers (that would be left to bounty hunters hired personally or by insurance companies). As security firms with a voluntarily earned budget, any costs of aggressive action would be borne themselves, and so they'd be far less likely to engage in aggressive action. And further, aggressive action, as it's more costly, would require they ask for a higher price from their customers. Some customers might be interested in the firm's aggressive actions, but what are the chances that enough would be to make the aggressive actions profitable? Rather, aggressive actions by security firms would probably be PR nightmares, and they would lose their clientele over night, going bankrupt the following morning.

I'll be sure to share in follow-up.

Skyler.