

The Fundamentals of Nonvoting

“One Voluntarist’s Perspective” is an original column appearing sporadically, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins.

Late tomorrow night will mark the end of the latest show of the political circus here in the United States (pending another hanging-chad-like controversy). Millions will go to the polls to vote on Federal, State, and local politicians and issues. The “changing of the guard” will commence, and unpopular rulers will be replaced by new ones. If the media is any indication, most Americans participate, thereby consenting to the entire political process no matter the outcome. It is true, that “most” Americans do participate, but in actuality “most” hovers around 55%. Of all elections, roughly half vote for Democrats and the other half Republicans. That means that of everyone of voting age in the United States, 25%~ give their consent to Democrats, 25%~ give their consent to Republicans, 5%~ give their consent to a third party, and a whopping 45% keep their consent for themselves. An interesting statistic, and the primary reason that so many engage in “Get out the vote” campaigns. Our rulers know they are illegitimate. Voluntarists know they are illegitimate for a myriad of other reasons, but what I wanted to examine here is the voluntarist’s position to abstain from electoral politics. The following arguments are the fundamentals of the nonvoting position.

The Individual Rights Argument

Democracies or democratic Republics operate on the basis of majority rule. In essence, whatever “powers” the majority of voters give to government is thereby deemed justified and legal (disregarded constitutions notwithstanding). The problem with this is that majorities cannot vote away the rights of minorities. Our rights are inalienable. No majority nor governing authority can deprive us of them. Voting is the means by which some deprive others of their rights. To believe in the voting process as evidenced by one’s utilizing it, even for seemingly self-defensive strategies, is to believe in the fallacious principle of majority rule.

The Apolitical Argument

Voluntarists are political atheists. We don’t believe in using political means to bring about social change. Voting is a sacrament of the state. If religious atheists are hypocrites for praying to what they perceive is a mythical god, then voluntarists are hypocrites for participating in the voting process of the mythical state (mythical in the sense that it’s power is illegitimate). The political process should be bypassed in lieu of better avenues of social change.

The Irrational Strategy Argument

“If voting changed anything, it would be illegal” goes the timely quip. And it’s true. Not only is the outcome tightly controlled (by controlling the inputs), one’s vote is virtually worthless, mathematically speaking. Of course, value is subjective, so what psychic benefits one gains through participation may be personally valuable, but the mathematical worth of 1 vote out of millions is near non-existent. Paired with the time that must be spent on research in order to make a well-informed decision, one might say that Proper Voting Procedure is irrational.

The Alternatives Argument

As voting is bad strategy to obtain the ends sought by voluntaryists, other strategies easily present themselves and can be shown to be more effective avenues of social change. Unschooling gives the individual the ability to set the stage for the rest of their children’s lives. It establishes free-thinking at an early age. Children are given the freedom to explore their world free from the compulsory demands of schooling. They learn to manage their lives by managing their lives and mentorship. Peaceful parenting teaches children that their bodies are their own; that nobody has a right to handle them in ways that they don’t approve of. Through example, it teaches children to question authority and to empathize with the weak.

Educate ourselves, our children and anyone else we can on the principles of liberty and personal responsibility. Offer the world, first, “one improved unit”, and then encourage others to do likewise. The marketplace and technology have done more to improve the human condition than any politician, libertarian or not, anywhere ever has. The power wielded by the individual today is greater than at anytime in the history of the world. That power is compounded as people trade with one another and expand unregulated markets. The agorist insight is an important reminder of the amount of power society ultimately controls. This “social power” is our primary weapon against the infringing power of the state. Using it strengthens it. These and other voluntaryist means are theoretically and historically more efficient and more peaceful to bringing about the ends sought by voluntaryists and libertarians, eg. the free society.

The Power Argument

If it is impossible for me to make legitimate rules governing my neighbor’s property, than how is it possible that I can appoint someone else to do it? Electoral politics is the business of democratic or republican states. It’s the business of voting for law makers, law enforcers, and dispute-over-the-law adjudicators whose jurisdiction extends everywhere in a given geographical area, originally established via the usurpation of the rights of its dissenting subjects. As one of these dissenting subjects, what authority do I have to

maintain this arrangement by appointing new legislators, governors, or judges? And what right do they have to accept it and promise to uphold it? If I am unable to exercise power over my neighbor's property, how I can put someone else in a position to exercise power over my neighbor's property? What right do I have to maintain the power structure of the state over property that I don't own?

The Moral High Ground Argument

Voluntaryists believe their moral philosophy to be superior to those who attempt to justify the use of invasive force to bring about their desired changes in society. Direct violence, conquests, bullets, or the ballot box are all coercive means to achieve their political ends. For the voluntaryist to use any of these means to achieve the free society is to betray the moral high ground where voluntaryists currently stand. Nonviolence is the primary weapon of the voluntaryist. The use of violence is to exclaim the failure to persuade.

The Appearance of Evil Argument

When one believes something to be evil, they should avoid (as best they can) even appearing to support that evil. For example, when one believes that imbibing alcohol to be evil (as a social vice), one should be careful not to be seen drinking out of bottles that could be mistaken for alcohol. Likewise, when one believes that using the political means (from bullets to ballots) is evil, one should not be caught (even dead!) in the voting booth. Though they would claim to be voting for defensive reasons, their acting like the run-of-the-mill political participant is to appear to support and sustain the political machinery of the state. Others perceive this as their approval of the process (and arguably it is) and are less likely to take their voluntaryist arguments seriously.

The Playing by the State's Rules Argument

The state has established coercively the rules by which society can affect change in government. Playing by those rules is both bad strategy and a concession that the state has the right to establish these rules. Whether or not we believe they are just, playing within the rules of the state tells the state that we accept and value its sovereignty. Voluntaryists as a matter of principle do not accept and value the state's fraudulent claim of sovereignty. Playing by the state's rules betrays basic voluntaryist principles.

Final Thoughts

I cannot say that this list is exhaustive. There are many more valid arguments for the nonvoting position. I can and will say that I believe in all of these arguments and will be avoiding the ballot box this year and every year like the plague that it is. Voluntaryists must show the world by their actions the principles that they believe in. Political participation is unbecoming of the voluntaryist. I don't mean to sound dogmatic about this,

but politics is the business of the state. We won't achieve the free society by trying to change the myriad parts of the machinery of the state, but by unplugging it from our minds and our means.