

The State is a Tool, for Justice?

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

Had a long and drawn out conversation with a social Democrat* (my label) recently. He readily admitted that the only basis for the applicability of state law is their superior might, their “because we say so.” Didn’t seem to be an issue really. In fact, it was part of a larger conversation on where government comes from. He likened it with the establishment of rules by a group of people among themselves.

I have no issue with that, it’s how many an association or institution is established. Of course, no modern government today was ever established that way. In fact of history, they were all established via the conquest and expropriation of weaker parties. Not via mutual agreement among interested parties.

Even so, says this social Democrat, their laws apply because they say so, and if we don’t like them, we can either ignore them (at our potential peril), try to change them, or leave. Pragmatically speaking, he’s absolutely correct. It would be no different than if I found myself in a neighborhood controlled by the Mafia or the Crips. Even within the living room of some unsavory homeowner. They’re going to do whatever they want to do, “applicability” of their rules be damned.

One difference between that and states, however, is the pretense of fairness and justice and objective, evidence based conviction on the part of states (usually). That’s what makes the challenge of jurisdiction effective when utilized against charges by government. Such is absolutely ineffective against other sorts of criminal organizations. In either case, their laws are nothing more than their opinions backed by their guns, so this social Democrat readily conceded. He holds no illusions about this and would never consider their laws to be sacred or written by the gods or anything like that. He knows full well that government laws are just how some people wish to use violence in order to get the things that they want.

And so we come to why he’s a social Democrat. Government, you see, is a tool of violence. It may be used to achieve whatever ends one chooses that one believes requires violence to obtain. To the libertarian, violence is required to fend off aggression, so many libertarians are okay with a government tasked with fending off aggression. This social Democrat is also okay with using “government” to fend off aggression. The difference between the libertarian and this social Democrat is in what they consider aggression.

They both consider theft to be aggression, but what the social Democrat considers theft is the exploitation by the haves of the have-nots. That’s a loaded term, but this particular social Democrat considers it exploitation any time someone with an

advantage (wealth, knowledge) uses that advantage in trade with one without such an advantage. A rich person trading with a poor person is exploitation, and over time the rich person gets richer while the poor person gets poorer. To this social Democrat this is always the case, and it's the same result when rich nations trade with poorer nations.

As I hope is obvious to any thinking person in the 21st century, poor nations develop economically, ie. get richer, as a result of their trade with richer nations. Same goes for poor people. What this social Democrat is lacking is any sort of understanding of sound economic theory. He's confused on the causes and effects of the wealth and poverty of people and nations. He thinks that some people having more money than other people is the cause of all our social ills, and so he doesn't think twice about the use of government violence to fend off what he considers aggression by the haves over the have-nots. He, like the libertarian, is justified in his use of government to right what he considers wrong. The difference in their thinking is in the social Democrat's dearth of economic knowledge.

What this conversation and exploration of this social Democrat's ideas and thought processes taught me was that the issue for most people is not a moral or ethical one. It's an economic one. What the world is missing is sufficient understanding of economic law and logic. This is why groups like FEE and the Mises Institute are so important. They're developing and spreading economic knowledge. Once received, how one views state actions is flipped on its head. No longer is it seen as a tool for justice, but rather as a tool for injustice, intentional or not.

* Another conversation with this individual can be found [here](#).