

The Voluntaryist Ethnicity

October 2020: I read this essay and added commentary for Episode 401 of the Everything Voluntary podcast.

Thinking of “ethnic” as an American of Northern European descent fills my head with images of people and cultures from Latin and South America, Polynesia, Africa, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Asia, and aboriginal Americans and Australians.

Reading about the etymology of the term is interesting. It began in the English language (after the ancient Greek and Latin) as a term for pagans and heathens, anyone who was not a [white] Jew or a [white] Christian. Then it was transformed through secularization to mean anyone *foreign*. Do Africans or Polynesians think of me as “ethnic”, I wonder? It’s very strange to think of myself that way. Ethnic was always non-“white” people, from my particular perspective.

Related uses around *ethnicity* include “adopted to the genius or customs of a people, peculiar to a people,” “band of people living together, nation, people, tribe, caste,” and “people of one’s own kind.” Your ethnicity is the array of customs peculiar to your people. So yes, I have an ethnicity, as do each of the various cultures and subcultures of Americans of Northern European descent.

In any event, as my family has traveled the country and met or stayed with other voluntaryists and unschoolers, I can’t help but notice certain general customs among people and families of this kind. Without putting anybody in a box or limiting how it is expressed or experienced, here is the voluntaryist ethnicity as I’ve seen it.

Peaceful parenting: Voluntaryists don’t use corporal punishment, don’t hit or smack their children, and typically don’t yell or traumatize them in any other way. Many are the tools employed by the voluntaryist parent in guiding, mentoring, correcting, and disciplining their children, all of which are based on love, compassion, play, reason, and, when required, serious talk or swift protective force (not allowing one child to hit another, *et cetera*).

Radical unschooling: Voluntaryists range in their approach to childhood education, from eclectic homeschooling to radical unschooling. The basis for whichever approach is employed is the realization that every child is unique and has needs specific to their personality and interests. For myself and my family, we’re radical unschoolers. We don’t employ any level of control on what my children do with their time day-to-day, and every day looks different for each of my children. Spontaneity is a regular feature of our time spent exploring the world around us.

Intellectual discussion: Voluntaryists, in my experience, always want to engage in heavy intellectual discussion, far more so than those not of this or similar ethnicities. Whenever voluntaryists are engaged in conversation, the topics range from politics to religion to philosophy to science to economics. You won't find a lot of discussion on the Kardashians or the latest sale at JCPenney.

Abstention from electoral politics: Voluntaryists typically don't participate in voting, as the futility (at least) of doing so is recognized early on in their philosophical journey. Oh, they'll have plenty of opinions on the many aspects of electoral politics, but their voice is not limited to entering marks in the ballot box. Many write and podcast and debate, doing so for reasons of mental stimulation, improvement, entertainment, and enjoyment.

Critiquing coercion: Voluntaryists are quick to recognize and criticize the use of coercion and aggression by other people and groups. The opposition to coercion is the lynchpin of identifying as a voluntaryist. The use of coercion in society, beginning in the home, is the root cause of people being unable or unwilling to settle conflicts over scarce resources peacefully. All of the world's social ills can be traced back to the use of coercion (unjust, by definition).

Bias against government: Voluntaryists typically have a bias against considering government "solutions" to social problems and a prejudice against people working for the state. Government is, factually, "a bandit gang, writ large." Most criminals hide behind a veil of being a regular person, but public criminals wear badges and insignia to make their willingness to initiate violence against peaceful people clear, making it easier to identify them as people that should be avoided, if it can be helped.

Aside from the above, voluntaryists come in many stripes. Some are business executives while others are off-grid survivalists. What they have in common is [mostly, but not always entirely] the voluntaryist ethnicity as broadly outlined above. Meeting new people of the voluntaryist ethnicity is like being reconnected with old friends and family. There has always been an immediate feeling of kinship and connection for me, personally. If you have the opportunity from time to time to gather with other voluntaryists, I think you'll find what I've written to be accurate. And I highly recommend doing so as much as you can.