

Undermining the Perception that is the State



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“The Self Owner” is an original column appearing every Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Spencer W. Morgan. Spencer is a husband and father, and has studied History and Philosophy at the University of Utah. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Last week I addressed the act of voting, and political participation in general, from the standpoint of the specific morality of the act. I concluded it to be fruitless (in all but rare convergences of circumstances) and ultimately antithetical to the larger goal of societal liberty, though not an act which contains a specific consent for aggression as many voluntaryists contend. I’ve also addressed in a prior column the question of whether a duty of activism itself is a correct burden or a necessary response to the principles of self-ownership and liberty, and concluded that it is not.

Despite my having concluded that such an obligation is not implicit, many still desire to take steps to hinder the state in more immediate scenarios as well as to apply long-term strategies toward its reduction and/or demise. This week I’d like to address some of these approaches

For overall strategic value, especially from a long-term perspective, tactics like non-compliance, expanding state-evading market transactions (see *agorism*) and obstructive actions in court hold much more potential in terms of reward/effort ratio. This is especially true when one understands that the result to be sought is not necessarily the immediate reduction of state interferences, but the undermining of the perception of legitimacy that the state enjoys. Along those lines, I favor Marc Stevens’ “double-bind” approach in courts or public questioning of agents of the state, and jury nullification efforts.

What About a “Liberty Candidate” Like Ron Paul?

Ron Paul has been, from an enactments point of view, a complete failure both during his career in Congress and in his presidential campaigns. His greatest value has been as an instrument for exposure to a larger philosophical tradition. He is often referred to as the “gateway drug” for liberty. This value must and should be accounted for, but all too often it is mixed with an internally praised and self-reinforcing form of activist self-delusion

regarding the viability of achieving liberty through a political candidate.

Putting together mass movements every four years just to have a *possibility* at getting someone who won't increase the tyranny, much less pull together the sweeping consensus required for congressional change to begin rolling it all back, is *not* going to be how a voluntary society or any prevailing condition of greater liberty is achieved.

What is the “Plan” for Accomplishing Liberty?

This question, posed often by those both sympathetic and hostile to full human liberty and its implications, is one that sadly reveals to a great degree the success of our societal collectivist conditioning. Even after the realization of the moral incumbency of free action by each individual, we still habitually think in terms of imposing such a condition through hierarchical edicts from the top down. Since liberty is, itself, the *absence* of any such coercive external imposition, this makes going about it tricky and counter-intuitive.

Undermining the Perception

It is important to understand that the operating capability of the state does not rest purely on implemented or threatened force. If it did, it would be very limited in the scope of its effective control and it would have to operate out of the public eye. The real “lynch-pin” for the state is that it rests on the widespread perception of its legitimacy, and the expectations of the people all around us in our churches, businesses, and families. They spring into its service as enforcers (knowingly or not) with social reprisals against anyone who questions not just a particular government action, but the validity of our being subject to its rule at all.

That's why the path to complete liberty is to undermine this concept and perception. We can do so slowly until it becomes the same as a “flat earth” idea. Like the truth-based advances in human progress that preceded this one, it is a huge uphill battle against all of the weight of tradition and institutional inertia.

That understanding presents a much different long-term strategy. The point at which, in society, when the average person faces more social backlash from agreement with state aggression than they do for openly questioning it will be a major tipping point and one which we all have in our power to hasten in small ways.

To move the evolution of humanity forward toward liberty in a lasting way, we can all do a great deal without ever stepping in a voting booth or holding a campaign sign. People's relationships with others are incredibly important to them. We can point out tactfully and calmly the reality of government force in a very personal way. We can explain to them that the schemes of state solutions with which they agree, are being imposed upon millions who do not... at the barrel of a gun. We can point out that among these millions is the person

with whom they are speaking at that moment and profess to care for. Does this friend or family member *really* believe men with guns should be permitted to force you to fund their solution to a problem, or to put you in a cage if you refuse?

Historically it is usually external pressure and economic reality that collapse these huge parasitic empires, and that's ultimately the opportunity I anticipate. When that window of opportunity comes, things will get very fluid. The less pervasive the perception of the state's legitimacy (meaning government *in general*) is at that point in time, the better. For small examples of this, we can look at what is happening in Detroit right now. As local government and services shut their doors, will people turn to private, voluntary cooperative efforts or market solutions, or will they clamor for a larger more solvent governments to assume control? The reaction in that critical moment, played out across what may be dozens, hundreds or thousands of instances of government failures, will be the critical thing.

Convincing someone in an immediate conversation is rare and antithetical to human nature, so don't measure your efforts by that goal. Exposure to voluntarism, or the non-legitimacy of the state, is an effort in "shifting the window" of acceptable ideas. It will produce an emotional backlash 20 times for every one time that it produces a thoughtful acknowledgement or agreement. This is because of the way the person has been presented in their inner psychological dialogue with a contradiction of a deeply-held emotional investment. Take this as a sign that you have succeeded, because now that they are aware they will be constantly recognizing the manifestations of that contradiction and may later choose to begin reconciling them.