

Voluntaryism 101: A Simple Explanation



Send him mail.

“Food for Thought” is an original column appearing every other Tuesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Norman Imberman. Norman is a retired podiatrist who loves playing piano, writing music, lawn bowling, bridge, reading, classical music, going to movies, plays, concerts and traveling. He is not a member of any social network, nor does he plan on becoming one. Dr. Imberman has written a fantastic Christmas song which he had professionally recorded as a demonstration record. He is looking for a publisher, or A & R man, or record producer to listen to his song. It deserves to be a permanent member of the portfolio of familiar and favorite Christmas songs. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FFT-only RSS feed available [here](#).

When considering inter-human relationships, there are only two methods of behavior— in principle. This applies whether the relationship is between two individuals, between groups of individuals or even masses of individuals. They are Voluntaryism and Coercionism. Those who believe in Voluntaryism are called Voluntaryists and believe that all interactions should be voluntary or consensual, while Coercionists believe unwittingly, that all or most interactions should be performed under duress or coercively, under the direction and supervision of the State.

All values, such as money, houses, cars, food, clothing, love, friendship and property in general, can be obtained either voluntarily or coercively. There is no third alternative. The history of the world is replete with examples of coercive acquisition of values resulting in financial turmoil, riots, killings, theft, war and chaos. Coercive behavior continues to this day, and will continue unless there is a paradigm shift in the ideology of the masses.

Voluntaryists believe that all exchanges between individuals or groups of individuals should be, as the name implies, voluntary or consensual, while Coercionists use the methods of force, fraud, theft and duress. Most Coercionists believe in a *mixture* of voluntary and coerced interactions as is seen in most of the countries of the globe. In the USA coercionists are constantly embattled amongst themselves over which interactions should be allowed to be voluntary and which should be coerced and to what extent. (“Allowed to be voluntary” is a contradiction in terms.) Such battles are the essence of politics and the cause of domestic turmoil and riots and wars between nations. Politics can be defined as the constant battle between factions of Coercionists, whereby each faction, Left-wing or

Right-wing, wants their extent and form of coercion to prevail.

Although all Coercionists use a variety of methods to be effective, such as the threat of or the actual use of theft, plunder, robbery, extortion, duress, kidnapping, rape, force, and fraud, they can be divided into five distinct groups. First and most powerful are the legal coercers—the State or Government, from the President down to the various bureaucrats and office workers. Because they are “legal” they maintain an air of respectability. Second are those businessmen who pose as free market capitalists but who use the power and force of government to gain special favor and special treatment in order to compete. They are cohorts in the legal apparatus of coercion. Such men do not deserve to be called free-market capitalists. An example are those bankers and businessmen who convince the State to bail them out of financial trouble, or men like Bernard Madoff who bilked thousands of people of their life’s savings. Third are those groups involved in organized crime—the Mafia, Cosa Nostra, Russian Mafia, Chinese Triads and other ethnic criminal factions. Fourth are the individual criminals as bank robbers, store robbers, vandals, rapists, thieves, kidnappers and bullies. Fifth are the voters, who select those who are in charge of the coercive apparatus of the State. Fraud is the method of choice used by the State to coerce the voters into accepting almost any kind of the other types of coercion inflicted by the State. Once the State (legal coercers) withers away, the remaining four groups of criminals will easily be handled through the ingenuity, creativity and productiveness of free individuals.

Voluntaryism is equivalent to peace. In fact, when all exchanges are voluntary, peace becomes a natural consequence. Voluntaryism is also a moral and benevolent position. On the other hand, Coercionism promotes war and war-like conduct since coercive action creates a victor and a victim resulting in emotions such as hate, anger, resentment and desire for revenge. Coercionism is the immoral position, engendering hostility and class warfare.

Voluntaryists believe that when dealing with others, they should strive to make the outcome a Win-Win situation. Coercionists, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, always create Win-Lose situations, where if one side wins, the other loses. In fact, all coercively enforced transactions, whether they demand action or prevent action, are Win-Lose situations by definition. There is no rational position that can be taken that accuses a Voluntaryist of being mean-spirited. By embracing coercive behavior, it is the Coercionists who are mean-spirited when they advocate the application of the various coercive laws upon the public. Coercionists can’t seem to understand that it is they who are creating the hostility and war between the various classes in society.

By definition, Republicans, Democrats, Liberals, Conservatives, Independents and small government Libertarians are all Coercionists, believing that their particular method and degree of coercion will create a prosperous and peaceful society. However, as previously

described, Coercionism spells hostility and war—not peace. Most Conservatives fall back on the Bible and the Constitution as their excuse to support coercion since both documents gives the State the power but not the right, to coerce, thus abrogating the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Liberals embrace the argument, “the ends justify the means” right out of the *Communist Manifesto*, but also embrace the Constitution to excuse their degree of coercion, thus abrogating those same rights. Both treat their political beliefs like a religion—on faith. The only abrogation Voluntaryists wish to see is the abrogation of the State through peaceful means.

Coercion exists in many forms. When Voluntaryists point out coercive acts to Coercionists, the latter deny it while some do agree that it’s coercion but that it’s “good” coercion. (See previous article entitled, “Good Coercion vs Bad Coercion”.) How can “good” and “coercion” be bound together as a concept? It’s like calling a geometrical form a square circle. If it’s coercion or duress, it’s either by physical force, threatened physical force, fraud, theft, rape or kidnapping. (Self-defense is not coercion). Surely those means are not “good.” In fact they are immoral. When a hoodlum coerces protection money from the corner grocer it’s considered by most as criminal and immoral, especially when the hoodlum carries out his threats for non-payment. Demanding payment is an example of threatened harm, while punishing the grocer for non-payment is an example of direct physical force. However, when the State does the very same thing in the form of taxes, Coercionists take pride in the act and never consider it to be the same extortion as when the hoodlum does it. Why—because it’s in the Constitution or because it will be used for a “good cause”. The “good” cause argument is sophistry. One can use the same argument to excuse a bank robber who uses the stolen money to build an orphanage for orphaned children or a killer who kills and removes the victim’s heart so that it can be used in a heart transplant for a child. Crying that taxation is voluntary is useless. Ask most people if they would pay taxes if it were not in fear of punishment. Most would respond in the negative. Even those who responded in the affirmative would eventually stop paying as they observed that the rest of the population was not participating.

Many individuals will never be convinced that Voluntaryism will work because, as some of them have told me, they don’t trust anyone. They have a very negative and dark opinion of mankind, as if Man is born evil. (Although Original Sin is a Catholic concept, many non-Catholics believe that Man is born mean, evil and untrustworthy, which is the non-Catholic version of Original Sin.) They falsely believe that greed is evil. Their concept of a greedy person is anybody who has “enough” but continues to strive for “more.” However, they fail to define “enough.” Of course, what they fail to realize is the contradiction between their professed belief and their support of the coercers (politicians), since the coercers they support are people and therefore are greedy and should not be trusted either. They see only the dark side of what they believe to be human nature because for decades they have been living in a world of *institutionalized coercion* alongside of a coercive economic system

called State Capitalism. They fail to see that it's the institutionalized coercion that is the cause of the evil character flaws that they observe in others. So they conclude that free men can't be trusted to rule themselves and they would rather cast their lot with the State coercers. What an insane reasoning process. The truth is the exact opposite. It is the rampant institutionalized coercion that is responsible for the very character flaws which they abhor and mistrust and instead they should embrace the ideology of Voluntaryism. "Nature has not saddled humans with coercive character traits; rather, humans have saddled themselves with coercive paradigms of causality," wrote Jay Stuart Snelson in *Taming the Violence of Faith* (p. 138). They also never consider that since they choose the side of the State coercers, some day the State may coerce them into a situation of involuntary servitude out of which they can never be rescued. It can expose its ugly head in many ways, such as, devastatingly high taxation, internment camps for minorities or even for dissenters like me, extreme unemployment, equalization of results laws, equalization of profits laws, abolition of private schools, laws against all religions except the official State religions, or laws that mandate that people must share their home with others, as has occurred in many Communist countries. These events are not far-fetched, as history will attest. There is no law of nature that can prevent it from happening here in America. When one casts his lot with a den of thieves don't expect a moral outcome. Eventually you will become a victim yourself.

The economic system that rules America is actually what is called State Capitalism, where the State, is the new god. Backed by the gun, it rules the roost through its various rules, regulations, favoritism and taxation. Under such a system all live by permission. Those who condemn Capitalism, which is actually State Capitalism, have much to complain about, since the State's coercive capitalistic mechanism is responsible for all of the evils of which they complain.

The economic or financial system under Voluntaryism requires a new name since Capitalism (really State Capitalism) has become synonymous with inequities, greed and evil. For the purposes of this article let's call it *Voluntradism* which is a combination of Voluntaryism and trade. I define it as a system of coercion-free voluntary exchange whereby buyers and sellers are free to bid for products and services or free to abstain from bidding for those products and services, where the ownership of private property and freedom of choice is sacrosanct. By now the reader should see that Voluntradism is a peaceful system that can harm no one—where the consumers are the bosses. When all exchanges—economic, social, inter-personal, religious—are voluntary, social contentment and peace prevail. So let's remember to think of the term Capitalism as State Capitalism, which is synonymous with government protectionism, force, fraud and theft and think of Voluntradism to be synonymous with coercion-free interaction, peace and harmony.

Most of the time, whenever a private coercer avoids penalties for perpetrating a true crime,

the coercers in charge of the State mechanism have either sanctioned it, overlooked it or were too inefficient to prevent it or prosecute it. Jim Crow laws were State-sanctioned laws. Often, due to some insane State law, a business may try to get around the law in order to survive, so they “cheat.” Then the State administrators vilify those “cheating” businessmen in the media and prosecute them in the courts, while in reality they are just seeking out freedom to survive. The very misbehavior of which the businessmen are being accused should never have been against the law in the first place.

For example—and this is just one example—in the nineteenth century, factories in England were subject to a new law, which taxed each window. Before the tax was imposed factories supplied the workers with a sufficient amount of lighting and fresh air. Once the tax was imposed the owners found a way to avoid the tax by eliminating most of the windows. Of course the owners were subjected to all kinds of public ridicule for such greed and were accused of purposely and with malice of forethought, placing their workers in a hostile environment. The public almost always falls for the lies expounded by the State. The reputations of entrepreneurs and industrialists have been tarnished over the centuries for simply trying to survive the wrath and malevolence of the State’s insane laws, rules and regulations like that example.

Most “crimes” (the breaking of a law) should not even exist because most activities that are considered to be crimes by the State are not crimes in reality. They’re manufactured crimes by those in power in order to maintain greater power and control over all of us. Think of what a proper crime is. It’s an interference with private property. There’s a reason why almost everybody become stirred to anger against individual acts of murder, robbery, rape, theft, kidnapping and fraud. It’s natural to feel that such acts are an anathema to the survival of all people. We don’t need a law or the Bible to tell us that it’s wrong. Even the perpetrators know it’s wrong. However, the State apparatus also creates “white collar” and “victimless” crimes and manufactures all kinds of malevolent stories about those who transgress and the rest of the gullible population falls for the fraud.

“Conquest by plebiscite and cooptation differ from military conquest only in the sense that the former are bloodless and volitional. The result is the same. The victims sanction their own servitude and then cooperate in their own regimentation and exploitation. Ideally, the only violence that occurs in politics in the normal course of affairs is to truth and logic. Physical violence is concealed under the rubric of “rule of law” administered by the so-called criminal justice system.” – Alvin Lowi

“The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.” – H.L. Mencken

One of the great travesties of justice, where a government-created crime was invoked, involves the Alcoa case in 1937. Alcoa produced a superlative product at a price that people were willing to pay so that all competitors could not match their excellence and pricing. The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 was invoked against Alcoa. After spending millions of dollars defending itself and after battles in many different courts, and after printing 40,000 pages of records and 10,000 pages of exhibits and transcripts weighing 325 pounds in 480 volumes with an estimated word count of 15,000,000, Alcoa lost for the “crime” of being a monopoly. Here is what Judge Learned Hand said in the decision:

“[Alcoa] insists that it never excluded competitors; but we can think of no more effective exclusion than progressively to embrace each new opportunity as it opened, and to face every newcomer with new capacity already geared into a great organization, having the advantage of experience, trade connections, and the elite of personnel.” In other words excellence and efficiency have become a crime. In fact any price charged by a seller can be considered by the authorities to be a crime. If a price is too high it’s against the “price gouging” law. If it’s too low it’s against the “unfair competition” law. If it’s the same as all of the other sellers it’s considered collusion, which is also a crime and of course, if the company is so efficient that others cannot successfully compete, it’s considered a monopoly, which is the worst crime of all. All that is needed for charges to be brought up against the perpetrators is a complaint brought about by a competing entrepreneur who is failing due to his own inefficiency.

People believe that in order for a businessman to prosper he must be doing something immoral and use as an example the “immoral” cutthroat competition used by the so called “robber barons” of the past. They have been taught in school that the successful businessmen of the past like Henry Ford, John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie and Cornelius Vanderbilt attained their wealth by exploiting workers. However, they offer no definition of “exploitation,” or “cutthroat competition.” Too many people think of exploitation as the condition that exists when workers labor for an employer for a salary. In other words, simply “laboring for a salary” is exploitation, which comes right out of the *Communist Manifesto*. Exploitation has become a pejorative word. How does that make the employer evil? If employers actually beat their workers or forced them to labor involuntarily, exploitation would not be the correct appellation. I would call it assault, which in a voluntary world would be handled by the justice system. Competition has no pejorative meaning although the government authorities have inserted the word “cutthroat” before the word “competition” in order to incite anger. In fact, the public, upon hearing the term

“competition,” automatically thinks of it as “cutthroat competition,” this giving it an evil or mean-spirited connotation. It means that competing businesses lower their prices in order to obtain a larger share of the market. It creates a consumer’s paradise when businesses lower their prices in order to compete, even if some businesses are driven out of the market place. No business has the divine right to endure, including the various banks and automobile manufacturers that have been bailed out of their impending failures by the State. Remember that “bailout” is a euphemism that simply means that the taxpayers have to pay for the failures of those entrepreneurs and bankers.

Most of the famous industrialists of the nineteenth century were born extremely poor, but with great intellectual abilities. They didn’t invent or create poverty, since poverty is a natural condition of all life. They helped cure poverty for millions of people by creating jobs. Where the average person sees no opportunity, these great benefactors of mankind saw opportunity and were willing to take extreme risks that most of us are not willing to take. Nobody should deny them their profits and amassed fortunes. They are the true humanitarians of our society. The “robber barons” of the past did more for the human race than all Mother Teresa types combined.

People who worship the political (coercive) method of solving society’s most urgent problems believe that profit, although necessary for a business to survive, must be limited via the coercive mechanism of the State, especially if the profits are indefinitely “excessive.” That mistrust is firmly imbedded in the minds of most of the population. They mistrust all monopolies, even natural monopolies. They don’t see the difference between a natural monopoly (a business that supplies the consumer bosses with products or services that are so excellent and affordable that no other business has been able to compete with them, but is still *not prohibited* from trying) and a State-granted monopoly. A State-granted monopoly is a business to which the State grants monopoly power and by law (coercion) *prohibits* any other person from competing against them. They don’t see the contradiction when they mistrust all natural business monopolies while they have faith in the coercive monopoly that the State maintains on the activities of all of us, and then they don’t understand that the problems about which they complain came into being, because of the very State monopoly they support.

Voluntaryists are not conservatives, liberals, libertarians or independents. We are non-statists, and non-voters for the simple reason that all State activities involve the use of or the threat of the use of force against some individuals for the benefit of others. We don’t recognize the legitimacy of the State. We are law-abiding people who don’t support violent overthrow of the State, since violence is not part of our philosophy. Our basic philosophy can be found in what we call The Non-Aggression Pact or Principle. Simply stated—“never coerce, force, rob, commit fraud against another person or group of persons.” You can see how such a belief is not political (it’s neither left nor right). It suggests a benevolent course

of action, promoting win-win exchanges.

One should be able to see now that in a Voluntary Society, people are truly free and in a Coercive Society, people are actually slaves to each other and especially to the coercive leaders and the system.

While it's true that the different factions of Coercionists prefer different means of coercion, they all have the same hidden agenda. That agenda is what places all of them in the same category. Their main agenda is to preserve Coercionism. They are all "Preservationists." Every year, in November, those Coercionists who want to be the leading coercers encourage the masses through advertising and campaigning, to choose them as leaders. Their mantra is, *"no matter to which side of the political spectrum you belong, it is your duty, right and privilege to pull a lever and make your choice."* That mantra is spoken not only by the politicians, but also by the media, the teachers and professors, the unions, and almost every citizen. Once that mantra is implanted and accepted by an individual, he/she becomes a signed, sealed and delivered preserver of the status quo—a fellow "Preservationist," and an unknowing participant in class warfare and the hoax.

Throughout the ages the lines that have been drawn between the various political factions have been lines of false alternatives, i.e. the Left vs. the Right, the Democrats vs. the Republicans, the Whigs vs. the Tories, the employers vs. the employees, males vs. females, unions vs. non-unions. In many cases, the claims that the Left and the Right have against each other are real. However, because most of the dissatisfactions and inequities of our society came about through coercion, trying to fix them through more coercion is insane. Presently, since the coercive "left" passed National Healthcare legislation, the coercive "right" will attempt to repeal it. If they are successful, the coercive "right" will replace it with their own form of coercive National Health legislation. Incidentally, the present administration vehemently denies it when the "Affordable Healthcare Act" is called a Socialist scheme by the opposition. The defenders of the act call it a free enterprise law because it gives more choices to a vast number of people. Such a claim is proof that its defenders have no idea of the meaning of "free enterprise." In addition, there is an entity that is totally overlooked and forgotten by both parties—the physician. Everyone overlooks the fact that the new healthcare act has made a government employee of every physician. If that isn't socialism I don't know what is.

All of the classes in society belong on the same side of the line since they are all Coercionists. On the other side of the line lie the Voluntaryists. The only true alternatives are Coercionism or Voluntaryism, not left vs. right and not more Statism, as professed by liberals vs. less Statism, as professed by conservatives. It's important to understand that just because a Voluntaryist is against a law that provides a free service or a free product to someone in need, does not mean that he/she is against that person having that service or product. I want the homeless to be sheltered and the starving to have food and the sick to

have healthcare and the poor to be rich and the ignorant to be intelligent and live in a society where equality is at its maximum. However, the State sponsored coercive mechanism is the underlying cause of all of those social problems since it steals from one group and gives it to another group or gives special privilege to one group at the expense of other groups. Isn't it reasonable to conclude that since coercion is the cause of those problems it can't be fixed through more coercion? Individual charity is a noble act but charitable giving under duress is still coercion. It's Coercion that has created the ills of society that we are now witnessing.

Suppose it had been an everyday occurrence for centuries that the State supplied shoeless people with shoes. Then one day someone suggested that it's not the job of the State to supply shoes to the shoeless. The public would be up in arms. They would cry, "what? Are you denying shoes to the shoeless? How and where would they get shoes? Are you proposing that they go shoeless? You sir, are mean-spirited."

Once the stealing and fraud reaches the tipping point, all hell will break loose. The signs and symptoms of the disease called Coercionism (it is a disease) are around us everywhere but the public is blind to it—shootings, raping, lootings, property transgressing, foul language, unemployment, fear of monetary crises, poverty, homelessness, religious intolerance, vandalism, starvation, intense feelings of insecurity, fear, irresponsibility and the threat of war are increasing at the fastest pace in history. Yes, there is a correlation between those ills of society and Coercionism.

Just like Isaac Newton partially unified the physical sciences, scientists exist today and have existed in the past, who have unified the social sciences through the marvel of Voluntaryism, but the philosophy has to be spread throughout the land. Since we Voluntaryists are committed to abstaining from the initiation of any form of coercion, the only way we can spread the word is through education, which is what I am doing when I write this article. The basic message is that Freedom and Voluntaryism is the only path out of the quagmire into which the human race has dug itself and it all must start with the individual.

Chose—the enslavement, insecurity and eventual devastation caused by coercive Win-Lose interactions or the security, freedom and everlasting peace of Win-Win interactions—Voluntaryism.

It's not the intent of this essay to demonstrate the cause and effect relationship between all of the ills of society and Statism (Coercionism) or how a voluntary society would function under freedom. That involves a deeper study of the subject of Voluntaryism. The information is available online for those who are interested. Two URL addresses where one can find this free information are Everything-Voluntary.com and Voluntaryist.com. They both contain a wealth of information on the subject. One of the early books about the

subject was published in 1870 and is entitled, *No Treason*, by Lysander Spooner (1808–1887). The entire book can be found for free [here](#).

Another fantastic source of information is the set of the V-50 CD recordings available [here](#). On the top of the page, see the word “store” and click on it. Scroll to the bottom where you get to the section called V-50. It’s a full course of over 35 hours of lecture material and Q & A sessions. I listened to it 5 or 6 times, sometimes when it was presented live and sometimes on the CDs I bought. Click on “buy”. It can also be found on Amazon. Purchase, listen and learn. Be a cause for good instead of evil.

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