

A Matter of Scale

Imagine that you and five or six of your friends decide to go on a camping trip in the woods. What would your reaction be if one of those friends said the following?:

"It sounds nice, but who are we going to appoint to be in charge? I mean, someone who tells the rest of us how to behave, makes all the important choices and tells us what we can and can't do, and punishes us if we disobey? Because without that—if we each just decide for ourselves what we're going to do—obviously this camping trip will devolve into violent chaos!"

Would you consider such an opinion and suggestion reasonable, useful and necessary? Or would you find it bizarre, irrational and kind of creepy?

To put it another way, in the setting of you and a few friends, would you want authoritarianism, or would you want "anarchy" (no one ruling anyone else)? Incidentally, if everyone *voluntarily* decides to follow the advice of one person in the group—because maybe he knows more about camping, or maybe he knows the area really well—that's not at all the same thing as appointing him as *ruler*, and telling him he gets to *force* his decisions on everyone else.

Now let's suppose that, notwithstanding the weird suggestion of your one uber-statist friend, you all embark on this camping expedition anarchist-style, as a bunch of equals figuring things out along the way by consensus and agreement, instead of by coercion and domination.

After hiking for a while you encounter another group of people, about a dozen of them, out backpacking. You see the other group setting up tents for the night, and once again your anxious friend speaks up: *"Now we definitely need to pick a leader, a ruler to speak on our behalf and represent us in our dealings with this group of strangers, otherwise they might kill and eat us, or enslave us!"*

Now would you agree with him? Or would you still behave like an anarchist, not trying to rule anyone or be ruled by anyone, from either group?

Then suppose you go over and chat with that other group of campers, and they mention that there is some big camping event in the area, and there are many *hundreds* of campers around. Now your uber-statist friend urgently implores you to listen to him: *"With all these people around, strangers whose histories and motives we don't know, how can we afford **not** appoint a master now!? Anything could happen if no one is in charge!"*

You might then ask him if he really thinks that, even if your little group picked a leader

from among you, hundreds of strangers would suddenly obey you. And he might respond, *“Well, no, it can’t just be from our group; all the people together have to choose a ruler!”*

It might then occur to you to ask, if he doesn’t trust that huge group of strangers to behave themselves, why would he trust them to appoint a ruler over everyone? Or, more specifically, if he is scared of an average stranger doing nasty things, why in the world would he trust an average stranger who has *been given societal permission to dominate and control him (and everyone else)*? At this point your paranoid friend is just about frothing at the mouth. *“People acting on their own are unpredictable, careless, sometimes malicious and sadistic! We need **LAWS** to protect us!!! And we need **LAW-MAKERS** to write them!!”*

Aren’t “law-makers” also just people? Aren’t they also sometimes unpredictable, careless, malicious and sadistic? In fact, aren’t politicians universally recognized as being less honest and more power-happy than the general public?

“WELL I DON’T TRUST PEOPLE AND I WANT SOME MAGIC SPELL TO MAKE EVERYONE BE NICE!!!”

Then you might have to tell your friend:

- As unpredictable or nasty as some people may be, there is no magic spell to make everyone be nice, or to always protect the good people from the bad people.
- Giving someone power over you isn’t going to make them less of a threat to you, and isn’t going to make them more honest or virtuous than they were before. (In fact, as the saying goes, “power corrupts.”)
- It’s just a bunch of people out camping. Chill out.

But then the question becomes, at what scale do *you* suddenly think that human interaction and peaceful coexistence requires, or is even helped by, giving some people permission to forcibly rule everyone else? How big does the crowd have to be before you think a coercive ruler is going to make things better? Mind you, organization and cooperation—which occur all over the place, every day, on a *voluntary* basis—are not the same as authoritarian power. In fact, true cooperation and violent domination are mutually exclusive.

So, when you’re finished chuckling at your mentally unstable, state-worshipping friend, make sure you don’t have a touch of the same psychosis he has. At what point, at what scale, do *you* start to repeat the absurd idea that peaceful coexistence requires coercive “government”? How many people, or how big an area, does it take before *you* start asking for politicians and their hired enforcers (tax collectors, police, soldiers, etc.) to extort and

dominate everyone, *including you*, for the “common good”?

Around the world and throughout history, people in positions of “authority” have committed *far* more theft, assault, terrorism and murder than normal people, by a huge margin. To trust people *more* when they have the power to forcibly extort and control you is just plain stupid. Anyone who says that “government” and political “authority” are necessary for, or conducive to, civil society, is merely repeating blatantly absurd lies—lies taught to him by those who want to rule over others.