

A Conversation Between Voluntaryists: Responsible Voting?

Kenny Kelly's Introduction: One of the best things about voluntarism is you never know who is a voluntaryist. Kentucky is a big-government, culturally-conservative state, where I was born and raised in. Then I found out I have a like-minded neighbor.

Among the radical libertarians who have made the Bluegrass state their home is Kilgore Forelle. Over breakfast we came up with a voluntaryist thesis which we turned into this dialogue here on EVC.

Kilgore Forelle's Introduction: Kenny Kelly and I got together for the first time last Saturday, even though we live just about 30 minutes apart. I finally awoke to the idea that we could meet up. I motored over from Waddy to Kenny's current Bluegrass town. We had a fine breakfast at a place with a history in his downtown.

One of the things we kicked around was the idea of doing a dialogue column in which we bat the *parlez-vous* to and fro about some voluntaryist thesis. So here we go.

The voluntaryist thesis: Many libertarians frequently say that voting in national elections is not a voluntaryist thing to do. To be clear, among the many candidates in any given political race is "Nobody." Many libertarians might argue it is useless, in lieu of it being an act of coercion. Is there not a difference between a voluntary choice and a voluntaryist solution?

Taking the red pill...

Kilgore: I agree that there is a difference between a voluntary choice and voluntarism. Voluntarism is a long term choice made to be responsible in the short term cases. Principles are for the long term. Actions generally affect the cases in the present in the short term, but with long term consequences. The voluntaryist takes responsibility for considering and choosing actions in light of all the consequences.

Let me illustrate with my personal voting principles.

1. I will not vote ... as a duty owed to any state or other collective.
2. If I do vote it will be either
 - a. with respect to loyalty for family and friends, I may vote for someone like Gary Johnson, who does no particular damage to my principles, and whose quest is oxymoronic, or
 - b. for people I know personally, so I can grab them by the lapels, when I see them in town, to learn why things are not going better.
 - c. I never vote for a candidate because he or she is a member of a party

Kenny: Fellow EVC writer, Kilgore Forelle, wrote a thoughtful piece explaining why, as a voluntarist, he votes in political elections. He argues the “voluntarist takes responsibility for considering and choosing actions in light of all the consequences.”

By voting, a libertarian is wanting to reduce or abolish the government. In the case of the voluntarist, he is wanting to abolish it, whether or not he goes down the reduction path. The point is to compromise time, not compromise principles.

Kilgore illustrates “I may vote for someone... who does no particular damage to my principles [or] for people I know personally, so I can grab them by the lapels... to learn why things are not going better.”

This is, by no means, a call for voluntarists to vote for politicians. But a call to understand why they make these decisions and to hold them accountable when they vote for someone who grows government.

It should be noted, many voluntarists first got involved in libertarianism through the works of Dr. Ron Paul, a Republican congressman and twice a Republican presidential candidate and once a Libertarian presidential nominee. Dr. Paul would refer to voluntarism and allude to the deeds of nineteenth-century anarchist Lysander Spooner during his farewell address in front of Congress in 2012.

Since then, many influential members of society have come out as anarchists. From former judge and judicial analyst Andrew Napolitano to the eccentric millionaire and software pioneer John McAfee; from actor Woody Harrelson to entertainer Penn Jillette; anarchists are coming out of their political closets. And some are running for public office, to reduce and abolish much of the government as they can.

It would not be prudent to alienate them, but to understand them, praise their actions when the government is reduced, and to criticize their actions when the government grows.

Kilgore: Kenny, I love your line, “The point is to compromise time, not compromise

principles.” I’ll tell you why right after a chance for a do-over. Kenny wrote above, “Kilgore [is] ... explaining why, as a voluntarist, he votes in political elections.” I was also explaining why I mainly do not vote in elections. In general, according to my voluntarist principles, I find that the least damaging option is to not vote, in a particular race. I will not, with my vote, approve the system or block an evil with a lesser evil. My voluntarist principles, for instance, told me I could never vote for either Trump or Clinton.

Now, why do I like the idea of compromising time? Kenny paints a beautiful picture which shows that a short term compromise can be a choice that is hopeful about the future. This would be unlike many compromises which are actually retreats. For example, I revile the NRA (National Rifle Association) type of compromise, in which we ratchet away from the pure essence of the Second Amendment. The NRA gives up ground in every encounter in hopes of keeping a piece of the original ground, and a piece of the very lucrative pie — worse, they are doing this with the money and proxy of some of, but only an immediate gratification tending part of, affected citizens. They claim to have the same interests as citizens, yet they gamble, poorly, with Constitutional guarantees that belong to someone else. Their compromises are with the principles. They cannot be compromising with time because the ratchet effect takes them farther and farther from the proper goal — a situation in which there are NO “infringements” on the right in question. The NRA defends the slippery slope, where retreat is recognized as strategy.

Kenny refers, I feel, instead to compromising time in order to let our principles grow. Nothing permanent, and hardy, was made in a day. If we have motives concerning improvement, it cannot be an error to accept a step, an increment of better, to keep the momentum going toward the objective. Whereas we started, in the case of the Second Amendment with the freedom to defend ourselves (the goal), we cannot approach the goal again without retreating from it. The NRA is ransoming our guarantee by turning it into their cash cow. In another example, the Russian retreat from Moscow, against Napoleon in 1812, did achieve the subsequent retreat of Napoleon, but at the cost of the burning of Moscow.

Fight your battles, but win your endeavors.

Kenny: Exactly. I would point out that in mainstream politics, the false dichotomies are manufactured to manipulate the people. They do it with guns, drugs, immigration, abortion, taxes, and marriage, as well. They want people to fight within these artificial industries as to prevent free market solutions.

Kilgore: Distraction is the nuclear weapon of the oligarchs, whom I often refer to as the manipulators. But distraction is also fraud when it is used to boggle our longer term vision. As you suggest, Kenny, the natural and free marketplace is where the solution resides. We don’t need central planning, we need incentives to behave in a simple and natural way.

For instance, if we want a true freedom from infringement, we don't need hired thugs to coerce the coercers. We just need to embrace the freedoms we want. No state is powerful enough to shut down exchange. How did Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity, in *The Matrix*, understand, at some level, that defeating the Matrix involved the maintenance of exchange and interaction, despite the Matrix. The Matrix was masking isolation with artificial comfort. To escape, the protagonists had to preserve the longer term options by operating across the matrix structure.

It can be done easily by the voluntaryist. Stay in touch, exchange, communicate. If many of us reject the state's faux life support (actually life taking), there is some level of voluntaryism that will collapse the state.

Why not just have our guns, our markets, our property, and our freedom. The state may have some short term pushback, but in the long run, it cannot manage its own micromanagement schemes.

Kenny: So true. The government, or the manipulator, relies on the majority being complacent. The minority who prefer natural freedom go the way of voluntaryists and agorists. Agorists actively compete against the state much in the same fashion as the protagonists in the movie, *The Matrix*. By showing people there is another way, an alternative, they could be persuaded to unplug themselves from the system. The more and more examples of peaceful, voluntary exchange there are, the more power and influence the government loses.

Kilgore's Conclusion: How refreshing it was to have a real time exchange with an intelligent guy who is as well-versed in voluntaryist matters as Kenny.

Here's what I take from this exchange:

- I would vote for Kenny, even if he showed the unexpected desire to seek public office.
- Voting (or not voting) is only a small part of being a voluntaryist.
- Those of us who claim to be principled voluntaryists do well to revisit those principles every day, not just during political seasons.
- Our apolitical actions speak as loudly as our political actions toward long term thinking.
- Hazlitt's *Economics in One Lesson*, that we should consider actions to have both short and long term outcomes and that there are many types of effects for different individuals and groups, applies not just to economics, but to the full range of human actions.
- Voluntaryism is a 24/7/365 undertaking.
- We need to be aware that the established order wants us to think only of the short term and only with our narrowest interests at heart.

- The manipulator can only assert the influences that you grant to the state.
- Break out! Follow one's interests but broaden them, think longer term, and think freedom of choices.

Kenny's Conclusion: It was amazing to have such a dialogue with a fellow voluntaryist Kentuckian. Having a back-and-forth like this would have only been better if we were sitting on rocking chairs on a porch with glasses of smooth Kentucky bourbon between us.

The takeaways from this discussion would be I would vote for a voluntaryist for any public office, so long as they pledge to reduce or abolish any program of the government they have a chance to; such votes would not violate the non-aggression principle; practicing what you preach goes a long way, and is illustrated by your words and deeds; every action, from counter economics to political discourse, has its reactions; and Kilgore himself said it best when he declared, "Voluntaryism is a 24/7/365 undertaking."