

Government is Not Abstract

Editor's Pick. Guest post by Connor Boyack.

Government is not abstract.

I find that many people treat it like it is. This is evident in how they discuss a political issue. Here's an example.

"Marijuana should not be legalized."

This sounds so benign, yet it masks a number of disastrous consequences such a position requires. Government, however, is neither benign nor abstract. It is, as George Washington said, force. It is men with guns locking people in cages or killing them outright.

"Marijuana should not be legal" is tantamount to saying:

"I believe that if my neighbor consumes or sells part of a plant he grew in his basement, police officers should kick down his door at 3am, dressed in black, screaming profanities, and armed ready for combat. These police officers should immediately shoot any animal or person that poses the slightest risk to them. If the perpetrator is not killed, he should be forcefully removed from his home, separated from his family, and incarcerated at taxpayer expense, forcing him to lose his job, standing in the community, and personal relationships."

The question is not whether something prohibited should be made legal—the question is why it is prohibited in the first place.

Every opinion dealing with government action must be stripped of its lofty rhetoric and abstractions. Whenever you hear a person say "we should ban X" or "there should be a law against Y" or "we shouldn't legalize Z," you must push back and say "would you be willing to point a gun at your neighbor's head, and pull the trigger, if he were to do X, or Y, or Z?"

Of course, sensible people can't imagine themselves using this type of violence against those whose lifestyles they disagree with. And, frankly, they can't imagine police officers doing it to their neighbor. So they abstract the issue to appease their mind, speaking in generalities and only assuming that those against whom the police enforce the law must be bad guys who "deserve it."

Meanwhile, the law is enforced against people who are not "bad guys" but whose actions are incongruent with the abstraction-loving voting majority. Harmless and peaceful people are caught in a vast net of good intentions and abstract policy preferences.

In all questions of government, we must ask ourselves: “am I willing to have my neighbor harmed or killed over this?”

Originally published on Facebook.com.