

How Can Free Markets Guarantee Freedom?

Guest post by Spencer Morgan.

How Can Free Markets Guarantee Freedom in the Absence of a Strong Central Power?

Freedom can't guarantee anything. It's not a top-down system or a mechanism that we can evaluate by a comparison to the various models of centralized control. By definition, it is the absence of that control. The "system" in a totally free society is nothing more or less than the cooperation of millions of free individuals acting voluntarily with one another. It is not a blueprint for Utopia. Conflicts and mistakes will arise, just as they do now. The difference in a free society is that, in theory, conditions of liberty have already been reached. One of these is the absence of the widespread perception that holding a badge, a title or a written edict from a bunch of people in a fancy white building conveys automatic and implicit morality to the actions of the person taking them.

Yes, until the validity of that concept is largely destroyed in society, a sudden absence of state institutions would be very tumultuous and likely to lead to a new and possibly more abusive state. People would simply act on that concept and empower a new group of rulers. Since the state is merely a conceptual abstraction by which people mentally assign validity to the actions of certain individuals, then anarchy (being the absence of the state) is also merely the prevailing absence of such a perception. For a more detailed treatment of this line of thinking, I highly recommend Alfred E. Cuzan's essay "Do We Ever Really Get Out of Anarchy?"

If groups of people try to rise up and control everyone once a condition has been reached where the state is seen as an illegitimate concept, and where people live their daily lives in the absence of the state, they may have some success in imposing their will by force and fraud. That success, however, would be extremely limited in such a society because it would only be of effect among those whom these criminals could employ or threaten with force. The key component necessary for any group of them to become what we know now as a government, and maintain ongoing control over society will not be available to them. That element is the widespread perception of their legitimacy. This is the primary difference between our state institutions and the Mafia. The Mafia knows they can't accomplish the accepted control over all of society in a given geographic area. In a free society, the realities which prevent that now would prevent any group of humans from doing so.

As for the question of how to have armed defense in a given locality without an authoritarian system in control, a lot of intellectual work has been done so there's no need

to reinvent this wheel. The drafters of the American Constitution, while they weren't fully applying the philosophy of liberty, did recognize that centralized military institutions were *more* of a threat to freedom than a protection. This is why they preferred to place more trust in a militia system comprised essentially of the entire armed populace. A voluntary, self-armed militia could, in a given situation of need, come together to accomplish a defensive objective. One guy you may not have heard of from this era, because he got the 2nd most votes to head the colonial Army (behind George Washington), is General Charles Lee. He was a former British officer who was exiled for his vocal support of the colonists and wrote extensively on a theory of military strategy consistent with individual liberty. Private security companies would, no doubt, also play a role and would have a motive to fill any need for which there is demand from voluntarily paying customers.