

Libertarian Corruption



Send him mail.

"One Voluntarist's Perspective" is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

Walter Block has argued that taking money from the government, in whatever form, is a libertarian virtue. If we were simply breaking into the government's vaults and making away with the loot, we would indeed be acting virtuous. However, most forms of obtaining funds from the state involve cooperation. While cooperation is the *modus operandi* of voluntarists, I think cooperating with the state should be regarded as "libertarian corruption."

Public Corruption

There are two primary kinds of corruption for the public "servant." The first is the acceptance of private money or bribes for the purpose of turning a blind eye to illegal activity; the second is the acceptance of private money or bribes for the purpose of supporting legislation that would benefit special interests. Both are considered corrupt because they harm either the state's mission (enforcing its laws, just or not) or perceived legitimacy (that it serves "the people").

Like Block in his book *Defending the Undefendable*, I too consider the corrupt police officer to be a hero (chapter 13). When he allows peaceful though illegal activity (drug trade, prostitution, gambling) to flourish under his watch, he's increasing **social power** at the expense of state power. What is considered corruption by the state in this regard, then, is virtuous to the libertarian. Does this hold true for special interest corruption? In a way, yes, but also no. The free market is severely distorted when laws are passed favoring one group of people at the expense of others. For that it harms social power. But when these dealings serve to paint the state in a bad light, to expose its propensity to serve itself, the educational effect can be very much in the libertarian's favor.

Private Corruption

This brings me to my thesis. If a public official taking private money can be considered corrupt, cannot a private individual taking public money also be considered corrupt?

Corruption is relative, after all. The state is harmed by public officials failing to enforce its laws or aiding in the dismantling of its perceived legitimacy, thus such activities are considered corrupt by the statist. Likewise, then, society is harmed by private individuals cooperating with the state, obeying its laws, following its guidelines, selling it goods and services, and working for it by contributing to its power and promoting the perception of its legitimacy. Further, by sticking out his hands and asking the state for money, the private individual is trying to cooperate with an institution whose very foundation is the antithesis of cooperation, ie. force. When one actively cooperates with the state, he tells everyone that the state can and should be cooperated with. When the state is dealt with, cooperated with, it is strengthened. This is so because to ignore the state, its laws, its edicts, its regulations, its pronouncements, is to weaken it.

Final Thoughts

I would very much like to someday expand on the above. I think this analysis can go further. In any event, taking money from the state, depriving it of its ill-gotten gains, is indeed a virtue for the libertarian. Taking the money is not what I question, but the *means*. The state is strengthened by our acquiescence and cooperation. True, I obey most laws. I have a family to protect and raise and can't do that from a cage. To some degree, then, I am corrupt in the libertarian sense. I recognize this and would be ashamed of it were it not for my family. They deserve a husband and father. As a human being I have many sins. This is merely one more. Perhaps my efforts here and elsewhere will earn me the forgiveness of my compatriots.