

How Can a Free Market Provide What the State is Doing Now?



Guest post by Spencer Morgan.

It's a trap! The question "show me how the free market will do this" is usually just a desperate attempt to create a diversion from the moral issue surrounding the use of force, and it is most likely not being presented to you by a sincere person likely to accept the idea of free markets if you answer these questions effectively. I have seen a few exceptions to this, so use judgment. Here is the essence of what I've found to be the most effective way of responding to this.

If "the state" is undertaking something now, it's probably not accomplishing that goal at all and is even, as is very often the case, perpetuating the problem. This results from the built-in incentive for them to do so. Good examples of this are the "war on drugs" the "war on poverty" or the education system. The actions that result in the achievement of whatever goal is being undertaken by the state are still carried out by real, individual people. The difference between a government-managed system and a free market has nothing to do with whether people would come together to achieve their desires, but why they would do so. To set up a choice between the shoddy way the state is providing something and the total absence thereof, is not a choice among of options that has any relationship to reality. In a free market people come together voluntarily out of mutual interests or to provide a product or service to fill voluntary economic demand that exists. **If the good or service in question is desired enough by people, it will be accomplished in a free society and most importantly it will be accomplished in the optimal way** instead of via outdated models of bureaucratic planning. When people ask me some variation of this classic question, I just say "people will do it, just like they do now" and go back to the moral issue surrounding the use of force involved in anything undertaken via government action.

One can spend hours learning historical examples of these things being provided without government, and developing complex prognostications of what would arise in the absence of government, but nobody who is too insecure about the idea of freedom is going to be convinced by that. They don't want the inherent risks of liberty, which are just the risks of life and which the existence of the state does not actually remove. What the state does for them is it gives them a purely conceptual security blanket in their mind against these risks. **What they're reacting to is the removal of that fictional security blanket, but it is that very concept that needs to go in order for free markets and a voluntary society to be achieved, so it's useless to try to package the free market as a replacement** for this security blanket.

The factors that make free markets more effective at resolving problems, are the very same factors which make them harder to predict. That is their dynamic and fluid capability brought to bear not by some distant bureaucratic committee, but by the millions of free, individual humans able to act on individual priorities. The reality is that if humans want it and are willing to work and pay for it, it will happen in a free market. If something doesn't get accomplished in an environment of free economic decisions, this is not to be seen as an indication of a "failure of the free market system" but as a market signal that the goal against which it is being measured was not worth holding as a goal because not enough desire for it exists among free human beings. If the person you're talking to doesn't value freedom as an end, but merely as a means to achieve something that the planned economy is (or claims to be) providing to them now, move on or help them understand the basics of what liberty is first.