

Re: A Moral Challenge

I am getting increasingly frustrated because so very few seem to comprehend my moral argument that taxation is theft. Even members of my own family don't seem to get it.

It appears to me that there are two components to the argument that taxation is theft.

First is the moral argument: If you define theft as the taking of a person's property against their will, it ought to be perfectly straightforward to conclude that unless taxes are voluntary, it must be theft when the government collects taxes under penalty of imprisonment or confiscation of property. It might be plausible to argue that taxes are theft, but that they require an exemption from the general social prohibition against stealing. But so far, no one I have argued with has explained why taxation is a morally justified form of theft. They simply argue that taxes are not theft because the government is owed the money. Government is owed the money because it has provided some sort of protection service. Thus, when the government coercively demands taxes from its citizens, it is simply being reimbursed for the service it has provided.

Second is the practical argument: Most people believe that if taxes were voluntary, then government would shrivel up and die. If they are religious, they argue that God couldn't have willed thievery. If they take a secular view, they simply believe that government wouldn't have the money to support itself. "But government," they argue, "is a necessary component of human society." Since government "must" have money to exist, its income (taxes) can't be theft.

One way I have tried to approach the general argument that "taxation is theft" is to admit that human beings "need" protection services,

just as they “need” food, shelter and clothing. The question that then must be answered is: How is that protection to be provided In the case of food, shelter, and clothing we have ample proof that the voluntary provision of these goods and services is possible. Why must the provision of protection be an exception?

It appears that most people cannot get past “what is seen and not seen.” They “see” only what exists. They cannot even begin to imagine the free market provision of protection services because they have been indoctrinated by both Church and State to believe that these services must be (and can only be) provided by a coercive, monopolistic government. What they don’t stop to think about is that if people weren’t forced to pay taxes, they (the people, the citizens) would have ample funds to supply themselves with protection. If people were not coerced into paying for government’s high-priced and inefficient monopoly protection they could turn to alternative sources of protection. I am sure that variants of protection would come into being which we cannot even imagine or dream of now. Witness all the other miracles of the free market. Who could have dreamed of, a hundred years ago, all the ways electricity is utilized today, or the advent of plastics, nylons, or computers. Imagine what protection services might be offered if government was not there to monopolize its production and stifle both invention and competition. But really the practicality of the market provision of protection is irrelevant to the moral question. Was plantation slavery in the South justified because slaves were the only means of harvesting cotton?

Many people admit that much of what passes for taxation today is theft, but they still cannot get past the idea that some amount of taxation is “just and proper.” It reminds me of the argument for the “just” price on the market. The only fair price is what a willing buyer and seller agree on; and it is only fair at the time and place where

they decide to trade. The only possible way to determine a “just” tax is in the same manner. How could government know how much protection people “need”? Let market purchasers of protection services buy what services they want, at what prices they deem advantageous to themselves. This is the only way to truly determine how much protection we (as a society) should have. The only way to find out how much government is necessary is to see how much government people are willing to pay for – which means making their contributions to government voluntarily. When people and citizens are ready to apply the general social prohibition against stealing to the government itself, then we (as a society) will have truly reached the realization that “taxes are theft.”

Written by Carl Watner.