The Challenging, Radical Anti-Statism of the Ancient Israelites

Editor's Pick. Written by Kevin Vallier.

I've recently finished reading the great political theorist Michael Walzer's book *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*. Walzer's thesis is that the Biblical writers were "not very interested in politics" in contrast to the ancient Greeks. In fact, "there is a strong anti-political tendency in the biblical texts." There is no suggestion that the good life involves politics and no claim political participation is a good. The Biblical writers believed strongly in law and created and sustained one of the most complex and subtle legal cultures in history. But kings and leaders were rarely political legislators. Instead, *God* was the legislator and anonymous rabbis issued various, competing interpretations and extensions of that law. Law was interpreted and extended by men, but it was not their creation.

Walzer has convinced me that the ancient Israelites were radical anti-statists, but in a *very different sense* than many libertarians. The ancient Israelites did not support the abolition of the nation-state (though many did believe that a move to the monarchy was a rejection of God; see 1 Samuel 8). Instead, they were radical anti-statists because they *didn't care* about politics. Libertarians are anti-statists in virtue of our politics, whereas the Israelites were anti-statists because they didn't have a politics at all. For them, there were things far more important than getting rid of the state or even limiting it.

In this post, I shall argue that the ancient Israelites pose a challenge for libertarians. It is this: if you hate politics so much, why do you like talking and arguing about it? If you really want the state to go away, why do you tie your ups and downs, your joys and sorrows, to what it does? The ancient Israelites, on Walzer's view, teach us that the best way to beat the state may be to learn to ignore it.

Read the full thing at BleedingHeartLibertarians.com »