

The Proper Role of Government and Electoral Politics



Send him mail.

“One Voluntarist’s Perspective” is an original weekly column appearing every 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](#).

This column was originally intended to give my perspective on current events, but I think I’ll modify it somewhat. I’d also like to use it to expound voluntarist philosophy and ideas in the absence of any current events worth commenting on. This week I’ll be talking about the proper role of government and electoral politics.

The Proper Role of Government

In short, there is none. Government, or the state, is a myth. The power it exercises is philosophically non-existent. Sure, it has guns and can easily compel obedience to it’s laws, but this power is wielded illegitimately. Ezra Taft Benson, former Secretary of Agriculture to U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, wrote,

The important thing to keep in mind is that the people who have created their government can give to that government only such powers as they, themselves, have in the first place. Obviously, they cannot give that which they do not possess. So, the question boils down to this. What powers properly belong to each and every person in the absence of and prior to the establishment of any organized governmental form? A hypothetical question? Yes, indeed! But, it is a question which is vital to an understanding of the principles which underlie the proper function of government.

From this basic principle, we can examine the powers of government and determine if they were legitimately delegated to state actors. We may also look at the powers of the individual and determine if they are legitimately exercised.

For the sake of a basic understanding of the state, we'll forget most the laws it enforces and focus on the root of it's power. The defining characteristics of the state are it's monopoly on the use of "legal" force in a given geographical area, and its power to compel its subjects to fund this monopoly. Applying the lesson above, could I claim a legal monopoly of the legal use a force over a given geographical area? Yes, so long as this given area can also be shown to be my property, meaning I've homesteaded or traded for it.* Can I claim a legal monopoly of the legal use of force over a given geographical area that somebody else owns? Certainly not without their permission. Hence we have the principle that Thomas Jefferson called "the consent of the governed". First, if I am to allow your jurisdiction to extend over my property, I must first have legitimate title to it. And second, only over my own property may I give permission for your jurisdiction to extend. I cannot join with a majority of my neighbors to decide how far your governing jurisdiction will extend beyond our own properties. Yet this is how every democratic or republican state has been established.

Monarchical states are even more blatant violations of the rights of it's subjects, as the king or queen claims to own property (and hence an expansion of jurisdiction) that neither they nor their ancestors ever actually homesteaded. They simply use force to conquer peoples and their lands, and along with a fallacious appeal to heaven, maintain their rule. Thus we see that all states, past and present, exist via an usurpation of the rights of their dissenting subjects. They exercise power they never legitimately obtained, and are thus philosophically non-existent. This brings us to electoral politics and the legitimacy of participation.

Electoral Politics

If it is impossible for me to make legitimate rules governing my neighbor's property, than how is it possible that I can appoint someone else to do it? Electoral politics is the business of democratic or republican states. It's the business of voting for law makers, law enforcers, and dispute-over-the-law adjudicators whose jurisdiction extends everywhere in a given geographical area, originally established via the usurpation of the rights of its dissenting subjects. As one of these dissenting subjects, what power do I have to maintain this arrangement by appointing new legislators, governors, or judges? If I am unable to exercise power over my neighbor's property, how I can put someone else in a position to exercise power over my neighbor's property? What right do I have to maintain the power structure of the state over property that I don't own? The answer is obvious according to the lesson above.

I have no more right to appoint government agents over your property as government has the right to enforce it's edicts over the property of dissenters. Electoral politics is a major engine of creating the perception of legitimacy that the state needs (in the absence of overt violence) to continue the domination of its subjects. As a voluntaryist, I cannot in

good conscience and through a proper examination of the philosophical considerations participate in this engine of the state. I would be violating the most basic of voluntaryist principles.

Final Thoughts

This week and next, I will be publishing articles on the topic of electoral politics from the voluntaryist perspective. It's high time libertarians and anarchists who participate in electoral politics consider what their vote means. Even when absolutely sure "their guy" will only strive to strip the state of its powers, the voluntaryist is absolutely sure that the power he is granted to do so is the same illegitimate power taken to build and strengthen the state. It is impossible to grant this power. Only through the education of voluntaryist ideas will society begin to see the emperor for the naked charlatan that he is, and begin to peel away his power one unpopular, unenforced law at a time.

* For an updated look at private property and the monopoly on legal force, see my column "Private Property as the State?"