

The Values of a Voluntaryist



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This article combines two columns written by the editor, Skyler J. Collins, in March 2013. Those columns are “My Reasons for Voluntaryism” and “Voluntaryism as a System of Values”.

As an individual, I speak only for myself. Looking over the last few years, I can see that what has been the primary mover in my evolution toward freedom are the change in values that I hold. And each change was preceded by a conscious, free will decision to accept some new idea. That’s very important; to know that I was never coerced into changing my values. Many of the ideas that I discovered held great intellectual weight for me, but the choice to accept them was completely voluntary. Whether or not I would accept the idea had mostly to do with other, more basic values that I hold, such as *truth, justice, and logical consistency*. From the perspective of “values,” here is what voluntaryism is *to me*.

Peace in Society

I value *peace* because I dislike the death and destruction that results from war. Further, I dislike the pain and suffering that results from one person violently controlling another. In their relations, human beings have the choice to engage others either violently or cooperatively. I want to be engaged cooperatively, not violently, and I think most people do, too. They just have a hard time recognizing the inconsistency (and hypocrisy) of their actions. I think that is more due to misunderstanding the consequences of their actions than it is a lack of ethics. For example, I once believed that “the rich” had the power to enslave “the poor,” so I favored giving the state more power over the rich to prevent them from enslaving the poor. I considered it a defensive posture of the poor. I considered it ethical *because* I thought the rich were enslaving the poor. I misunderstood the nature of the relationship between rich and poor, and so misunderstood the consequences of giving the state more power over the rich. I now understand that giving anybody power allows them to enslave others, rich or poor, but I also understand that I lack the license to give one person power over another. Once I understood that the real problem was an inequality *of power*, I was able to see the error in my ethical reasoning for promoting the state (at the expense of society).

Because I value *peace*, I will not initiate an act of aggression against another human being, nor will I hire an agent to do it in my name. But, also, because I value peace, I will consider and attempt to utilize peaceful and nonviolent action *first* in retaliation to the initiation of aggression against me or my family. Force will be my last resort.

Personal Integrity

I value *integrity* because I dislike people lying or being dishonest with me, particularly about my well-earned money. I also dislike people stealing from me or using violence against me to benefit at my expense. I want others to approach me on equal terms, utilizing persuasion and argumentation to convince me of their cause.

Because I value *integrity*, I will not try to defraud another human being, nor will I use political power, which is based on violence, to control or change the behavior of others. Instead, I will use persuasion and example to influence others to adopt my values.

Moral Consistency

I value *moral consistency* because I want others to treat and relate to me how I treat and relate to them. And because I value peace and integrity, I want others to be peaceful and have integrity in their relations with me.

Because I value *moral consistency*, I will only “do unto others” what I would approve of having done to me. I will not steal from (tangible), kidnap, assault, rape, or murder another human being because I do not want anyone else to steal from, kidnap, assault, rape, or murder me. Further, I won’t hire an agent to do any of these in my name, including anybody calling themselves “government.”

Peaceful Trade

I value *peaceful trade* because (along with the above) I understand the mutually beneficial nature of free exchange. People only engage in trade if they expect to benefit, and they usually do. When it seems that they didn’t, say their product was not quite what they thought it was, they’ve still learnt something valuable, thereby benefiting to a degree. When trade is forced, it’s no longer trade; it’s exploitation. When trade is not forced but one party has secured some sort of benefit or privilege from statist laws, it’s both beneficial and exploitative. I dislike exploitation, and so I want to trade with others on equal footing. That can only be accomplished in the absence of statist laws and regulations.

Because I value *peaceful trade*, I will never try to regulate or prohibit the free exchange of any good or service, no matter how illicit I believe they are, among individuals. And more, I will always trade peacefully and with full disclosure, though not always completely lawfully. The principles of free exchange precede government “laws” and their consideration is done

only as an exercise in risk management.

Peace in the Home

I value *peace* for all of the reasons above, but also because I've learned that engaging my wife and children peacefully makes for stronger relationships. With my wife, we are closer and our love deeper because we are equal in power over each other, chiefly, *none*. With my children, they are more likely to approach me as a companion, an ally, and a mentor if our relationship has been peaceful instead of violent. I don't want to create a feeling of resentment in my children for me. They won't come to me seeking guidance in life if they resent me. I must earn and keep their love if I am to be an important part of their lives. I've also learned that children treated peacefully grow up to treat others peacefully. I want a peaceful world, and so I must cultivate a culture of peace within my own home.

Once again, because I value *peace*, I will not initiate an act of aggression against anyone in my family, adult or child. I will only use peaceful and nonviolent techniques to raise my children into healthy adults.

Family Love

I value *love* because it brings me joy and happiness; both in receiving and in giving love. Love begets feelings of excitement, appreciation, and security. I want to feel secure and appreciated as much as I'm sure my children and wife do. But I also want to feel like I have someone who will lift me up when I am down, who will give me my space when I need it, and who will feel joy and happiness with me. My family are in the perfect position to do all of these things and to receive all of these things from me.

Because I value *love*, I will show my children unconditional and unceasing affection in order to maintain connection. I will play with them and do my best to meet all of their needs, physical, emotional, and mental, as developing human beings. When they are sad, I will comfort them; when they are angry, I will give them time, space, and the sure knowledge that I am here for them; and when they are happy, I will laugh and smile with them. Also, I will show my wife unceasing affection and do my best to meet all of her needs.

Natural Consequences

I value the idea that *consequences should naturally* instead of arbitrarily follow actions. I dislike being smacked in the face because I dropped my pen, and many other arbitrary and seemingly unjust consequences to action. If I am to learn proper, intelligent behavior, my actions must beget not only natural, but inevitable consequences. Likewise, I feel that everybody, including my children, should also have the privilege of making their own choices about, well, everything. If we are to learn the value in various consequences, we must be free in our choices because natural consequences vary for each person.

Because I value *natural consequences*, I will not punish nor reward my children for their behavior. I will help them to understand the natural consequences of their actions, both good and bad. I will encourage finding intrinsic reasons for “good” behavior and against “bad.”

Personal Respect

I value *respect* because it makes me feel worthwhile *and* like an individual. My interests are important and have value to me. My interests include a sound mind, healthy body, liberty, and a myriad of other things that help me to become and remain *me*. It follows, then, that I value the same things for my wife and children.

Because I value *respect*, I will show my children and wife respect, meaning, I will not handle, hold, or touch them against their will. I will respect their protestations to my interpersonal actions and seek to remove them by re-gaining their favor with peace and love. Likewise, I will respect their decisions on what to eat, how much to eat, what to wear, when to sleep, how to spend their time, and so forth. This does not mean that I will always finance or encourage their interests, however.

Free Inquiry

I value *free inquiry* because I want to be able to think and believe what *I choose* to think and believe. I don't want somebody else's knowledge and opinions crammed into my mind. I don't want anybody to threaten me with violence if I don't accept their religious, philosophical, or political beliefs, nor do I want my wife and children threatened with violence to accept another's beliefs.

Because I value *free inquiry*, I will not force knowledge into my children's minds. I will allow them to pursue their own educational and intellectual interests while facilitating and mentoring them in every way that I can. Likewise, I will not force my children to adopt my religious, philosophical, or political beliefs and practices. I will encourage them to thoughtfully discern truth and error in all religious, philosophical, and political claims.

Clarity of Thought

I value *clarity of thought* because only then are we truly free. With faulty information we are handicapped to make faulty choices, thus our freedom to choose has been compromised as much as if our minds were taken over by psychoactive drugs and the like. Our freedom resides in clarity of thought and control of our faculties.

Because I value *clarity of thought* I will not lie to my children or otherwise manipulate their little minds. When they ask me a question, I will give them as honest an answer as I can (speaking to their level of understanding) with full disclosure of any ignorance I am sure to

have. As an example, my son, now 8, understands where babies come from, because he asked me and I told him. Further, I will train them on *how* to think, not *what* to think.

Final Thoughts

These are not the total of my values, but they are the values I hold and promote as they relate to voluntarism. My adherence to the non-aggression principle on the basis of self-ownership and private property does not depend on the age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation of those I interact with. My values are *mine*. They govern *my behavior*.

Three things stood out to me as I wrote this column. The first was the compatibility of each value with every other value. It seemed that I was repeating myself again and again. The second is the self-interested nature of my values. Every value I have benefits primarily *me* in some way. That's completely normal and natural, I think. We are self-interested beings and that's nothing to be ashamed of or feel guilty about. Rather, understanding the consequences of our values, through our actions, will help us see whether they benefit not only ourselves, but everyone else too, family and society. And third, the golden rule. I don't want horrible, unfair, and unjust things happening to me, therefore, I won't do them to anyone else. Voluntarism makes sense for many reasons, but primarily because I believe it's *in my best interest* to be a voluntarist. In any event, voluntarism is working *for me and my family*.