

Toward a Voluntaryist Praxis

Guest post by Nicholas Hooton.

“When philosophy dies, action begins.” – Casey Maddox

The overwhelming resurgence of interest in voluntaryist philosophy over the past five years has been inspiring to witness. It enjoyed a brief spotlight in the early 1980s with Carl Watner’s publication of *The Voluntaryist* newsletter; but the communication technology of the early 21st century, combined with the unprecedented social and political upheavals of the same time period, have given rise to a veritable renaissance of the philosophy of peace.

Unfortunately, this philosophical renewal has not yet borne an accompanying praxis. No sociopolitical philosophy is complete without a matching process by which its aim is realized. Without praxis, voluntaryism is just flowery speech, letters to the editor, and juvenile arguments on internet forums.

The importance of praxis cannot be overstated. The great philosopher and revolutionary Karl Marx stands as one of history’s greatest examples of successful strategy – and utter failure. I say successful because not many men have had entire philosophies named after them, and had men so boldly enact those philosophies in vast regimes. However, I say failure because Marx chose his praxis poorly, and history stands as the undaunting and bloody witness of this failure.

Marx’s vision was clear: a classless, moneyless, stateless society with communal ownership of the means of production. He tainted this lofty and noble goal with his proposed means of attaining it: the dictatorship of the proletariat. Basically, he proposed the formation of a vanguard party made up of the working class that would seize control of the state and implement socialist systems that would eventually lead to communism, thus eliminating the need for a state.

In other words, Marx sought to use the state to eliminate the state, to use class oppression to eliminate class oppression, to use money to eliminate money. In contrast, the father of anarchist theory, Mikhail Bakunin, argued that while Marx’s communists “imagine they can attain their goal by the development and organisation of the political power of the working classes,” anarchists “believe they can succeed only through the development and organisation of the non-political or anti-political power of the working classes.”

Bafflingly, this same struggle exists today, even within the voluntaryist movement. A few days ago, I was a sad witness to a debate among agorists over whether or not it is okay to

accept state welfare. Agorists, the supposedly hardcore, counter-economic vanguard within the voluntaryist movement who are so disgusted by the state that they break the law to defy it, arguing over whether to suck at the state's teat!

Those in favor of participating in state welfare promoted a strategy of "whittling the state away from both ends, revenue and expenditures" as a means of financially strangling the beast. In other words, it may sometimes be effective and permissible to use the state apparatus to accomplish an anti-state end. Funny, because I saw the exact same argument being used by one of my fellow leftist anarchists as a justification for taxing the rich! They saw it "as a form of limited temporary concession won against the ruling class."

If voluntaryism is an anti-political philosophy, it can only obtain its ends through anti-political means. It cannot be accomplished by voting for a third party candidate as a writer on this very blog suggested, nor can it be accomplished by "[s]it[ting] on your ass and wait[ing]" for the market simply to step in as an anarcho-capitalist recently suggested. True to our philosophy, voluntaryists must be actively, anxiously and always engaged in peaceful, voluntary action as our praxis.

We must best our enemy, the state, in its world-renowned capacity for propaganda. We must speak with others, write blog posts, send letters to the editor, talk with family and friends, and agitate on internet forums. We must produce promotional media, informative podcasts and educational videos. "The State is ... an idea which cannot be harmed by violence," Carl Watner wrote. "Ideas can only be attacked with better ideas."

We must live our own lives in accordance with our principles. Gandhi wrote, "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change." We must practice peaceful parenting, radical parenting and unschooling. We must practice counter-economics by avoiding taxes as much as possible and seeking self-employment. We must barter and use alternative currencies and use cryptography to hide our communications from those who would harm us. We must become self-sufficient and not reliant on the coercive system we oppose.

But we can't stop there. We must begin building the new society within the shell of the old. We must join together with like minds in building organizations and institutions that voluntarily support society with services only ostensibly provided by the state. We must start barter networks, local exchange trading systems, mutual aid societies, credit unions and worker cooperatives. We must build and support dispute resolution organizations and neighborhood watch programs and security firms.

In short, we must withdraw our consent from the state. We must recognize that it is a criminal organization and start engaging in crime prevention tactics instead of reasoning with and even joining the criminals. We must begin living today as if the peaceful evolution of voluntaryism has already occurred. And, most importantly, we must abandon this notion of means and ends being separate. The means are the ends in progress. If our movement

is successful, there will be no rest. There will never be an “end” to our struggle. We will have to continue living as we have lived all along, always watchful for the next coercive threat, always ready and willing to stamp it out with our proven means. We must wake up to the fact that this, our struggle, is eternal. Might as well start living it today.