

Voluntaryism Transcends Anarchism

Post by Skyler J. Collins: I wanted to share some thoughts I've had, and some ways that my mind has compartmentalized concepts and ideas relating to voluntaryism. Watch a video exploration of these ideas here.

In my humble opinion, voluntaryism is more than just a *political* philosophy, as I explained in the introduction of my book. It concerns all arenas of our lives. How we interact with our neighbor is just as important to the voluntaryist as how we interact with our children. In order to facilitate what it is I want to convey, I'm going to call what I've heretofore separated into arenas or spheres of life as the *horizontal plane* of voluntaryism. It guess it looks like this:

politics – market – religion – education – parenting

Though I've separated politics and market, in a free society politics would not exist because there would not be a centralized, monopoly producer of law and order. I've differentiated it here because the philosophical arguments for voluntaryism are categorically different than the consequentialist, free market arguments that I've found to be just as exciting, important, and necessary for grasping the benefits of a free market. Ethical arguments are important and primary, but what got me initially excited about liberty was economics and what sound economic theory can teach us about the real costs of government intervention in the economy.

If we merge anti-state and pro-market thought together, we have what Murray Rothbard called "anarcho-capitalism". This comes from anarchism, which means "the absence of rulers," or as I prefer "the absence of the state", and capitalism, which means "the private ownership of the means of production, of capital." Some prefer the term "market anarchism". There's really no difference between the two, other than the concerns some have with the word "capitalism" and it's propensity to be confused with "corporatism" or "state capitalism". I don't mind the term. I understand what it really means, and it provides an easy contrast to "socialism". So, whatever. For now I'll stick with "anarcho-capitalism". Our horizontal plane now look like this:

anarcho-capitalism – religion – education – parenting

With religion, it's probably more accurate to consider it as not only concerning the afterlife, or eternity. "Religion" may not be the best word, but within this sphere of life I would put such things as self improvement, personal mastery, spiritual enlightenment, becoming a better neighbor, practicing the virtues, things like that. How about instead of religion I call it "culture". Yes, I like that.

anarcho-capitalism – culture – education – parenting

Education and parenting, because compulsory education is mostly concerned with children, they must also be combined. Unschooling concerns both academics and personal development. I'll make this easy on myself and just combine them as "radical unschooling". I added *radical* to differentiate it from academics-only unschooling. Now our completed horizontal plane of voluntarism looks like this:

anarcho-capitalism – culture – radical unschooling

Each of these still sort of bleed into the other, but that's because they are all concepts or ideas that fall under the voluntarist umbrella. Let's explore now what we'll call, to be consistent, the *vertical plane* of voluntarism. This where we'll really begin to see why voluntarism transcends anarchism, or "the absence of rulers".

Anarcho-capitalism

This area of voluntarist philosophy covers anything outside of our friends and family, our inner circle. We'll simply call it "the marketplace". This can be the marketplace of goods, of services, or even of ideas. We trade with others because it benefits us in some way. We wouldn't trade if we didn't expect to gain. This is the economic lesson that was pioneered by Austrian School economist Carl Menger. Value is subjective. It doesn't matter what it is we are valuing; time, goods, services, ideas, all have different levels of worth to different people. And because we come into this world with literally nothing, everything we accumulate we've either stolen, produced, received as a gift, or traded for.

Anarcho-capitalism gives us the concepts of self-ownership, private property, and the non-aggression principle. These are important and necessary principles to understand and accept in a world of not only scarcity, but of difference. Different wants, different needs, different means, different skills, different aspirations. As Auberon Herbert summarized Herbert Spencer's ideology, "progress is difference". If mankind wants to improve its lot, wants to make progress, then the anarcho-capitalism philosophy shows us the best *and* ethical way to do that in a world of scarcity and difference (individuality and individual autonomy, contrasted with collectivism and conformity).

But voluntarism expands anarcho-capitalism in an important way. Because anarcho-capitalism asks and answers "when is the use of force ethically justified?" it's an important branch of voluntarist thought. Understanding when we are justified in using force helps us gauge the legitimacy of not only our own actions, but of the actions of others. I want to know if you have the moral authority to use force against me for such and such reason. If you don't, and you use it, I'm justified in meeting it with force. Knowing my use of force is justified removes any ethical dilemma I'm facing.

Once the ethical dilemma has been removed, I'm still faced with the question of strategy. This is where voluntarism comes in above basic anarchism. Sure I may be ethically

justified in hitting you back after you've hit me, but would doing so really benefit me? If I desire and want to promote peaceful, nonviolent solutions to problems, then maybe hitting you back isn't in my best interest. As a voluntaryist, my first reaction to your use of force should not be force, but something that doesn't use force. Perhaps I should "turn the other cheek" in hopes to convince you that I am innocent and undeserving of your aggression, or to pull at your heartstrings by telling you with my actions that you can hit me all you want and I won't retaliate. Or perhaps I should simply flee, run away, leave the situation, maybe to return later with a peace offering or something else in hopes of convincing you that I am a peaceful, nonviolent person, that I adhere to the voluntary principle and the use of nonviolent means to settle disputes. These are all strategic considerations that voluntaryism encourages. It transcends anarchism by first removing the ethical dilemma to the use of force, and then encouraging the considerations of peaceful and nonviolent means to solving problems.

Each concept on the horizontal plane really has it's own vertical plane. This plane isn't an axis that represents a scale of value, but a (non-comprehensive) list of ideas that the voluntary principle (voluntaryism) encourages us to think about within this particular realm of life. Here's the vertical plane for anarcho-capitalism under voluntaryism:

non-violent resistance
civil disobedience
nonviolent communication
"turn the other cheek"
strategic pacificism
preach repentance
pleading for the return of stolen goods
working out peaceful solutions to violence
discovering unmet needs and finding ways to meet them
anarcho-capitalism

Culture

This area of voluntaryist philosophy is all about the virtues and self-improvement in relation to the use of force. Sure I'd be ethically justified in using retaliatory force as we discussed above, but what will wielding that force do to *me*? What changes will it make in my character? What ideas will I get? Will it corrupt me? Will it give me the taste of something that I'll find later harder to resist? For anyone concerned about improving themselves, becoming a better person, a better friend, a better neighbor, how will using force, even when justified, affect my own spiritual development? These questions go beyond political philosophies like anarchism, but in my opinion the voluntaryist wants and needs to know their answers.

Our vertical plane for culture under voluntaryism includes these ideas:

character building
practicing the virtues
being charitable
assisting the weak
discouraging an entitlement mentality
encouraging responsibility and accountability
nonviolent communication
finding enlightenment
strength in being principled
self-realization
culture

Radical Unschooling

This area of voluntaryist philosophy cover everything inside the home and family. It starts with “the absence of compulsory education,” but it goes beyond that. Unschooling is the absence of academic compulsion, but it’s also the presence of academic encouragement, of sharing ideas, introducing concepts, assisting in learning, and most importantly (at least to me), mentoring through challenges of all kinds. Unschooling parents are not only *not* making their kids learn things they don’t want to learn, they’re actively introducing them to new things and new places, promoting exploration of new ideas while at the same time respecting their children’s interests, proclivities, passions, desires, etc. Unschooling is *living*, and if you’re living you can’t help learning.

Radical unschooling is concerned with academic learning, but it’s also concerned with everything else. Kids need to learn to listen to their bodies natural queues for eating and sleeping, so the radical unschooling parents won’t enforce a set bedtime or force their kids to eat when they’re not hungry. They’ll give their children the freedom to learn what they need to do to get the food and rest they need to grow up strong and healthy. Sure parents would be ethically justified in setting rules in their house, it’s their property after all, but voluntaryism and radical unschooling considers the short-term *and* long-term consequences of arbitrary household rules. Voluntaryism reminds the parent that their child is an individual with individual rights to control his own education, his own eating habits, his own clothing style, his own hobbies, etc.

The child is also interested in being respected and unmolested by his parents. Parents can be pretty damn scary to someone a fraction of their size. Parents are often violent and mean with benevolent intentions, but all kids see is the violence and meanness. All kids receive is that this bigger person is a real danger to my safety and comfort. They develop feelings of fear, hate, and ultimately resentment. These feelings fade in short order, only to flair up again the next time they find themselves the object of their parent’s wrath.

Voluntaryism brings the concepts of self-ownership, non-aggression, and individual autonomy into the home and family. Not only are parents on ethically shaky ground for being mean, ugly, and violent with their kids (considering the children's rights debate), their actions are counter-productive to their own goals of raising kids into self-actualizing and compassionate adults, with whom I assume they want a relationship with based on love and (true) respect. I say true because what many people call respect, I call fear. When I don't make you angry because I know you'll be mean and violent with me if I do, and assume that I've learned "respect", what I've really learned is to fear you. True respect is love-based, not fear-based. What you interpret as respect is really fear, backed by resentment.

Our vertical plane for radical unschooling under voluntaryism includes these ideas:

mentor-based parenting
unconditional love
nonviolent communication
children's self-ownership
academic freedom
respect for autonomy
leading by example
connecting and reconnecting
absence of fear and resentment
absence of fear-based manipulation/control
radical unschooling

Final Thoughts

I've managed to put down a lot of ideas here that have been swimming around in my mind, jumping out here and there. I like this. I hope it all makes sense. I personally need a lot of work, especially in (but not limited to) "culture", but I'm making progress. I'm different now than I used to be in a lot of ways. I hope to be different, better, tomorrow.

Voluntaryism is beautiful. What started as an interest in economic freedom has pushed me into becoming a better person, a better husband, and a better father. I want a better relationship with my kids than my parents have with me. I want to be their mentor, but I've got to be a good one. I've got to humble myself to learn more. Voluntaryism is very humbling because it tells us that we can't resort to force. We *must* come up with peaceful solutions to problems inside and outside the home. And that's difficult, especially in a statist world. We're taught as kids not to question authority and to accept the state and its coercion and violence; in a lot of ways that, yes, might *does* make right. We must teach and show our kids the opposite. We can't do that if we don't take voluntaryism seriously in every area of life.

The study of anarchism, anarcho-capitalism, the absence of the state, of rulers is important, but it's time to understand and improve beyond that, and voluntaryism shows us how.