

What Taxation Means

February 2019: I read this essay and added commentary for Episode 279 of the Everything Voluntary podcast.

There is certainly no shortage of libertarian types who will gladly tell why they believe that the practice of taxation amounts to robbery or extortion. Likewise for those who will tell you why they believe that the practice of taxation is good and necessary. Personally, I side with the former belief that the practice of taxation is illicit and criminal. But let's look at it another way, shall we?

There are a great many goods and services of which I have consumed throughout my life, and continue to do so on a daily basis. These goods and services are mostly not free. Somebody must pay for them. As an adult now going on nearly two decades, I have paid for most goods and services of which I have consumed.

I often pass on purchasing a good or service for a myriad of reasons, often because the price is too high for my liking. For goods and services I desire and are within my budget, I gladly hand over my hard earned money in exchange. It's worth it to me to, for example, to buy groceries and trips to the movie theatre and a new set of tires. If I want a good or service, I will do what is necessary to pay for it.

There are many things today paid for via taxation that I would gladly pay for myself. I enjoy using roads, so I have no qualms about paying for roads. Likewise the fire brigade and other emergency services. I even appreciate a bit of security in the places and areas I frequent and would gladly contribute. Libraries, one of which I am using at this very moment, are also valuable to me.

You see, for the things I value and desire, I have no problem paying my "fair share" to use or to have them. But then there are things of which I don't value and desire. I don't want acupuncture, so I don't pay for acupuncture, and I don't want you to have acupuncture if it means I have to pay for it. You're just not that important to me.

Nor do I want schools or for military units to invade and occupy foreign lands in my name and supposedly for my benefit. There are a countless number of goods and services of which I do not value and desire. But others might. It's none of my business what you purchase with your hard earned money. However, you make it my business when you demand that I contribute to the purchase of goods and services that you, not I, value and desire.

This is what taxation means. It means that some people should be allowed to compel, by threat or force if necessary, the funding of goods and services that they and others value

and desire. Taxation means that my values and desires are less important than yours. You, by virtue of who knows what, should be allowed to force me to pay for the things that you want, and my only recourse is the chance, however small, that I can successfully defend myself from the imposition of your preferences on me.

Taxation is the price we pay to live in a civilized society. This is true, but perhaps not in the way it was meant. Taxation is the price we submit to if we prefer civilized society over prison, or worse. If a good or service is desired, it will be paid for without the use of coercion. That taxation requires coercion proves it has nothing to do with what's good and necessary, and everything to do with robbery and extortion.