

What Voluntaryists Believe And Why

Written by Carl Watner, as published in The Voluntaryist, August 1992.

[Editor's Note: The following was written by Carl Watner in fulfillment of a request by a private retail company to print their principles on their shopping bags. SJC]

We believe that the following principles of ownership are self-evident:

1. Every person, by virtue of being human, owns (controls) his* own mind, body, and actions. No other person can think with your mind nor order you about unless you permit them to do so; and
2. Every person owns those material things which he has made, earned, or acquired peacefully and honestly from other people. From these premises, it follows that:
3. No person, or group of people, has the right to threaten or use physical force against the person or property of another because such coercive actions violate the rights of self-ownership (see #1 above) and property ownership (see #2 above).
4. Each person has the absolute right to do with his property what he pleases (this being what ownership means), as long as it does not physically invade another's personal property, without the other's consent. People can inter-relate in only two ways, peacefully or coercively, but only the former is compatible with the principles of ownership (see #1 and #2 above).
5. It is right to make a profit, and right to keep all you earn.
6. A pure free market is right because it is the only socioeconomic system in accord with the above precepts.

Some Moral Implications

7. We believe if an activity is wrong for an individual, then it is wrong for a group of individuals. For example, majority rule cannot legitimize taxation. If it is wrong for an individual to steal, then it cannot be right for 51% of the voters to sanction stealing from the 49% who oppose it.
8. We believe in the voluntary principle (that people should interact peacefully or not at all.) Just as we must not force our ideas of 'better' on other people, so they may not impose their idea of better' on us.
9. We believe the superior man can only be sure of his liberty if the inferior man is secure

in his rights. We can only secure our own liberty by preserving it for the most despicable and obnoxious among us, lest we set precedents that could reach us.

10. We believe that power of any sort corrupts, but political power is especially vicious. "A good politician is about as unthinkable as an honest burglar."

Some Economic Implications

11. We believe that actions have consequences; that there is no such thing as a free lunch. Somebody *always* pays.

12. We believe everything that comes into existence in this world is the product of human energy, plus natural resources multiplied by the use of tools. Invariably, men and women will produce more if each controls what they produce.

13. We believe the voluntary principle provides us with an opportunity to improve our standard of living through the benefits resulting from the division of labor. However, it does not guarantee results. Nature will always be stingy and perverse regardless of what kind of social structure we live under.

14. We believe taxation is theft. The State is the only social institution which extracts its income and wealth by force. No government possesses any magical power to create real wealth. Whatever it has obtained, it has "taken " (stolen) from us, our ancestors, and, unwittingly, from future generations.

15. We believe the only way to know what value people place on things is to watch them voluntarily trade and exchange in the unfettered marketplace.

16. We believe an individual's right to control his own life and property does not depend on how much he earns or owns.

17. We believe the economic marketplace is all about *self*-government. You govern your own life. You make choices about what to eat, what to wear, when to get up, what job to take, how to budget your money, where to live, and what to do in your free time. A majority of others doesn't do this for you. By not subjecting their personal lives to political decision-making, millions of Americans are able to live together in peace and prosperity.

18. We believe all the material wealth in the world is useless if its possessor has neither freedom of spirit nor liberty of body.

Some Political Implications

19. We believe that freedom and liberty are not bestowed upon us by government. Liberty is the absence of physical coercion among human beings and comes about naturally when

no one does anything to forcefully interfere with another. Some people use violence toward others out of frustration because they cannot control them, but violence never really works in the long run.

20. We believe that “the man who truly understands freedom will always find a way to be free,” because freedom is an attitude of mind. Although a prisoner loses his liberty, he may remain free so long as he realizes that no one can control his mind/spirit except himself.

21. We believe that each one of us is the key to a better world. The only person you can actually control is yourself. Light your *own* candle! Labor in your own “garden,” doing your best to present society with one improved unit. Live responsibly and honestly, take care of yourself and your family. Don’t waste your time waiting for the other guy. If you take care of the means, the end will take care of itself.

22. We believe common sense and reason tell us that nothing can be right by legislative enactment if it is not already right by nature. If the politicians direct us to do something that reason opposes, we should defy the government. And we certainly don’t need politicians to order us to do something that our reason would have told us to do, anyhow. This being the case, who needs coercive government?

23. We believe that although certain goods and services are necessary for our survival, it is not essential that they be provided by coercive political governments. However, just because we do not advocate that governments provide these goods and services (for example, public education) does not mean that we are against that activity (education) itself. Just because we recognize that people have a right to engage in certain activities (for example, drinking alcoholic beverages) does not necessarily mean that we endorse or participate in such activities ourselves. What we oppose is compulsion in support of any end; what we support is voluntaryism in all its many forms.

24. We believe the power to do good to other people contains the power to do them harm. A government strong enough to help you is also strong enough to harm you. What the legislature may grant it may also revoke.

25. When all is said and done, we agree with H.L. Mencken, who wrote: “I believe that all government is evil, in that all government must necessarily make war upon liberty; and that the democratic form is at least as bad as any of the other forms...”

“But the whole thing, after all,” as Mencken concluded, “may be put very simply. I believe it is better to tell the truth than to lie. I believe it is better to be a free man than a slave. And I believe that it is better to know than to be ignorant.”

(* Please note that for purposes of simplicity, the generic words his/he are used to mean both male and female gender.)