

The Ethics of Liberty

T rue champions of the free market assert that people should be allowed to live their lives as they choose, so long as they allow others to do the same. The skeptic asserts, "Impossible! The free society depends on everyone being good. This is fantasy!" But the real fantasy is trusting in the goodness of politicians.

Free market champions recognize that all people have good and bad as part of their character. The danger is when people have great power to impose their will on others. Doing good things for people does not require the initiation of force. Doing bad things does. A truly free society isn't perfect, but limiting power simply limits the damage that people can do to others on a grand scale through politics.

A belief in the goodness of government assumes that politicians will be good. Test this fantasy by asking people the following questions:

1. Do you believe the campaign promises of politicians?
2. Who is more likely to gain popular approval, a politician who deceives or a politician who rigorously tells the truth?
3. Do politicians have higher or lower moral standards than you do?

I have asked my students these questions in dozens of surveys. The result, every single time, is a nearly unanimous opinion about politicians:

1. they are untrustworthy,
2. honest people usually have little chance in politics,
3. politicians are typically corrupt and have little or no moral restraint.

Then I ask the same people if they trust government and if government can improve the moral behavior of society. Most people then say, "Yes!" and they proceed to list a set of laws they want government to implement.

DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS

THIS IS POLITICAL schizophrenia—a common sense malady. People frequently experience this disconnection between what they think about government and what they think about the politicians who comprise government. Perhaps this reflects the effectiveness of government influence through schools, media, and the many exhortations to patriotism.

The voter is not so different from the abused spouse who wishes to believe in an ideal despite endless betrayals and beatings. The abused voter keeps returning to the incumbent at the ballot box just as the defeated spouse crawls back to his or her abuser in a perpetual exercise of self-flagellation.

People are often mesmerized with the idea that government is a kind of god: omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Toss a few hundred of the most sordid politicians into some legislative cauldron and one is often presumed to have the magic formula for a civil god.

Indeed, voters frequently call upon government in the same way that some religious people pray. When they are fearful, when they are needy, or when they want prizes, voters plead for politicians to answer their call for immediate brute, not spiritual, force against their neighbors. Instead of crosses, anthems, priests, commandments, tithes, and obedience the civic believer sacrifices life to flags, national anthems, politicians, statutes, taxes, and conscription.

The source of this widespread justification for government used to be

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known as the Divine Right of Kings. Kings asserted their right to rule by victory in battle—which, it was claimed, must have been aided by Divine intervention. Thus kings assumed complete authority over the life, liberty, and property of every subject in the realm. This superior station in life for royals is still a notion reinforced by ghastly tradition and most of the cute Disney films.

In most of the animated Disney movies someone is trying to get, or to retain, a position of royalty as a king or queen or prince or princess, with the right to rule all others in the kingdom. It is a fantasy taught by every generation since storytelling began.

DIVINE RIGHT OF MAJORITIES

Americans in Hawaii celebrate two other holidays that are just weeks apart. 1) Independence Day memorializes the fight for freedom from England and 2) Kamehameha Day memorializes the forced unification of the Hawaiian islands by Kamehameha the "Great," a man who murdered thousands of fellow islanders to bring

FREE MARKETEERS SEE VOLUNTARY ACTION AND CHOICE AS THE DRIVING FORCE, WITH MARKET ACTION AS A PROCESS OF DISCOVERY--BILLIONS OF INNOVATORS WORKING ON THE NEXT INCREMENTAL STEPS TOWARD IMPROVING THEIR OWN LIVES

everyone under his control.

There is no consistency in these memorials-except victory. Kill one person and you are a murderer. Kill thousands and you become a hero with your name engraved on buildings and idolized by generations of schoolchildren-so long as you win in battle!

With the passing of monarchies, politicians have found a new justification for authority: the Divine Right of Majorities. Normally people do not believe that it is right to kill, to steal, to lie, to covet, or to enslave. But under the mantle of majority numbers, politics has become a kind of purification ritual. With the approval of majority votes, however manipulated, even the worst among us are elevated in status and empowered to kill, to steal, to lie, to covet, and to enslave with impunity. And they can even feel good about it.

Free market champions reject this. Sound ethics are not derived from numbers and votes any more than they are from victory in war.

MINIMAL, NEUTRAL GOVERNMENT

THOMAS JEFFERSON once declared, "That government is best which governs least." As one of America's founding fathers he believed in minimal, neutral government, which was limited mostly to the protection of individual freedom through police,

courts, and defense. Such a government was to give no privileged favors to anyone. These are ideas wonderfully elucidated by Milton, Rose, and David Friedman.

Statists have their vision of what society should look like and their efforts are spent trying to force people to fit into it. Free marketeers, on the other hand, see voluntary action and choice as the driving force, with market action as a process of discovery--billions of innovators working on the next incremental steps toward improving their own lives.

This isn't a radical new idea. It is a logical idea that has haunted power mongers throughout history. This *laissez-faire* philosophy has deep roots among the classical liberals of Europe as well as in 2500 years of Asian thought. Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, opposed oppressive government and asserted that the best action by government was no action. These precepts were asserted in the book *Lao Tzu*:

17 The best rulers are those whose existence is merely known by the people.

37 Tao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone. If kings and barons can keep it, all things will transform spontaneously.

57 Administer the empire by engaging in no activity.

How do I know that this should be so? Through this:

The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people will be...

The more laws and orders are made prominent, the more thieves

and robbers there will be,

Therefore the sage says:

I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed.

The more laws, the more thieves and robbers? Sure. For every rule that stands in the way of freedom is an opportunity for some official to sell a favor. The favor may be to lift the barrier or to place a barrier in the path of some competitor.

ROBIN HOOD vs. THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM

THOUGH THIS is not what the government teaches in its schools. Government schools are more likely to teach that the government performs as Robin Hood, the hero of the English ballads, taking from the rich and giving to the poor.

I ask my students, "Who has more power, the rich or the poor?" They reply that the rich have more power, of course. So if the rich have more power, is it likely that they are going to use this power to give up their wealth? If they really wanted to give up their wealth, they don't need government to do it for them. They could just do it.

However, free marketeers suspect that the real beneficiaries of government action are those with power. The powerful elite perpetuate the Robin Hood myth in order to gain popular acquiescence to their official robbery. After all, in the legend of Robin Hood the villains were Prince John and the Sheriff of Nottingham, authority figures who used the power of government to rob from the rich (i.e. Robin of Locksley) and poor alike in order to

give to themselves.

I ask my students how much money has been stolen from them in their entire lifetimes. They report that perhaps a couple thousand dollars has been stolen from the whole class of students throughout their lives. "How much of this was recovered by the authorities?" They laugh and reply that the authorities recovered virtually none of this, even though such help is said to be a primary function of government.

Then I ask them how much of the government's spending is wasted. The average estimate of students is that 50% of government spending is wasted. I have them calculate how much money they expect to earn when they start their careers. I ask them to estimate how much the government will take from them in taxes.

Finally I ask them to compute the amount of their own money that will be wasted by government during a typical working year. At this point students realize that the government may throw away more of their earnings in a single year than free lance robbers will take from them in a lifetime.

Why is it that people continue to accept a state of affairs where the government is an institutionalized robber? Is it a proof of the effectiveness of the indoctrination of government schools? As economist Walter Williams likes to point out, the robber is slightly nobler than the politician. When the thief takes your money he goes away and leaves you alone. When the politician takes your money, he stays around to control your life and to bore you with the reasons of why you should be happy about it.

ESCALATING

PENALTIES

A PROUD Dane once overheard a friend of mine, Virgis, say that the government should let him keep his own money. The Dane chastised Virgis saying, "You make such a big deal out of keeping your money. Isn't that very selfish?" Virgis replied, "Far less selfish than the man who wants to take my money by force!"

The Dane says, "Force? Never!"

V--"So what happens to the person who refuses to pay taxes?"

D--"It wouldn't happen."

V--"Suppose someone actually refused?"

D--"Well, he would be arrested!"

V--"And what if he resisted arrest?"

D--"Then, the authorities would take him to jail."

V--"How?"

D--"Well, they would come to his house and take him."

V--"And what if he resisted?"

D--"Then the man would be charged with aggressing against the police."

V--"The police come to take him and his money, yet you call resister an aggressor?"

D--"Well he's threatening the police."

V--"If you come to my home and take my money, am I the aggressor if I try to stop you?"

D--"But the police are different from you and me."

V--"So it is OK for the police to rob me?"

D--"It is society's decision, you are part of society."

V--"So I am aggressing against myself?"

The circular argument will go on endlessly in order to avoid the obvious. The person who resists too much

may be killed, it's that simple. Yes, every resistance to authority is an escalating crime with the penalty rising until the offender stops challenging the authority of politicians. The ultimate penalty for resisting authority is death. It seldom comes to that because everyone is well aware of the final consequence and they have been carefully conditioned not to think of it.

Do politicians reserve this ultimate threat only for the most heinous of actions, such as aggression or violence? No. They use this threat for every conceivable whim of fancy-- whatever gets them the votes to remain in their positions of power.

Some politicians barter power for immediate bribes of various sorts. But the real rewards of power are control, status, and fame. These ethereal benefits permit politicians to defer valuable payoffs until far into the future.

A DISEASE MASQUERADING AS ITS OWN CURE

And what do these pretenders of altruism do with all this tax money? Do they accomplish good deeds without doing harm? Do they solve problems of food, clothing, and shelter that people cannot resolve spontaneously by themselves in the market? No, they create problems.

Whenever there is a problem in society most people ask politicians for a solution. And political solutions usually increase, rather than decrease, their political power.

Instead of asking how the govern-

ment can solve problems, I ask if the government has done anything to create these problems in the first place. From my perspective as a free market economist, the government behaves like a disease masquerading as its own cure. If people cannot afford the high prices of food and clothing, the politicians plan a welfare distribution of money from producers to non-producers.

I ask my students, "Suppose there is a government building with some people forced to put money into the building on one side while others are taking money out from the other side. On which side of the building will people prefer to be?"

My students always reply that

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people would rather be on the "taking out side." So, in time, there will be fewer and fewer producers putting money in and more and more takers on the other side taking money out. There is less and less being produced and, eventually, "nobody gets it if there ain't none." It takes a few decades for this reversal of incentives to undo centuries of traditional productivity and self-reliance, but the collapse will come sooner or later.

While the mainstream economist is

focused on redistribution, my eye is focused on production and the causes of high prices for things like food and clothing. Has the government done anything to bring about these high prices? One obvious cause of high prices is taxation and a costly bureaucracy. But there are other causes that are often invisible to the ordinary citizen.

GOVERNMENT MONEY

One major source is the government's monopoly over money. If you or I printed money we would be charged as counterfeiters, thieves who robbed other people by reducing the purchasing power of their wages, savings, and pensions. When the government prints money it has the same effect, but it's not called "counterfeiting." It is called monetary policy and inflation.

Through the creation of money--money that legal tender laws require people to use--the government secretly confiscates a portion of citizen wealth every year by reducing the purchasing power of that money. This is the primary cause of rising prices. This not only benefits the authorities, but it serves as a great transfer of wealth every year from lower income people who live on wages, savings, and pensions to higher income people who own the properties that rise in value during times of inflation.

The biggest winner of all from inflation is the government itself: spending the new money; decreasing the value of its massive debt; and increasing the value of vast government holdings in land, gold, foreign

currencies, and collectibles. And as people have to earn more to buy the same number of goods, governments take a higher percentage in taxes through "tax bracket creep." There are rich people and poor people everywhere, but there is no such thing as a poor government anywhere.

If a thief took a percentage of the income of everyone in the country, the public would be outraged. But the very same behavior, when practiced by politicians nearly every year, is ignored by all.

Free marketeers might call for the repeal of legal tender laws. When people are allowed freedom of choice, they look for quality. This is true of all goods and services, including money. When users give up unstable currencies for stable currencies, competitors have a strong motive to stop inflating. This happens on the international market where choice in currency is allowed--and it should also be allowed in every domestic market.

MANIPULATED KNOWLEDGE

A MORE obvious form of robbery, but tolerated just the same, comes in the form of agricultural programs that raise the prices of food and clothing. Billions are spent every year to stop farmers from producing, to take land out of production, to store vast surpluses off the market, to destroy food, and to prohibit food imports. For more than half a century this has been routine in America, worse in Europe, and still worse in Japan.

Welfare for the poor, therefore, pales in comparison with corporate welfare to a very wealthy and power-

ful farm bloc that exists in all industrial nations. Paying farmers not to produce food is not practical, not humane, and certainly not ethical. But these subsidies are pervasive, except in New Zealand.

Farmers in New Zealand were once more heavily subsidized than farmers in any other OECD nation. When foreign credit ran out in 1984, the government ended farm subsidies virtually overnight. Farmers didn't think they could exist without the subsidies. But today there are more farmers on the land than ever, producing more income than ever, and producing more food for consumption than ever before. They are now farming smart instead of farming for the subsidies.

Elsewhere in the world, the farm lobby depends on getting fabulous returns from political contributions and influence peddling. The return in subsidies is so valuable that it is worth currying the favor of various political parties, just guaranteeing to be on the victorious side regardless of the election outcome. Indeed, there is no better investment in the world than a well-placed politician.

I ask my students to take a survey of any hundred people passing through the downtown, urban area. Ask how many people can describe welfare programs for the poor and how many can describe agricultural programs for the farmer?

One Swedish student, Geo Olsson, took me up on this challenge and actually conducted the survey. He found that 100 passersby knew of welfare for the poor and only 2 people knew anything at all of the agricultural programs that make life expensive for the poor. It turned out that those 2 had

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been students in my classes. No doubt the survey would be very different if conducted in a rural town in Kansas where nearly everyone expects to benefit by farm handouts.

The selectivity of this knowledge is no accident. Welfare is always always part of the social science curriculum in government schools. However, government programs to make food and clothing scarce and expensive is never never part of that same curriculum.

EXTREMES OF RICH AND POOR

SKEPTICS OF the market assert that the government is necessary to control greedy businessmen who want to eliminate their competition and take as much money as possible from the consumer. What is normally taught in government schools is that a free market leads to concentrations of monopoly power and that the government stands as guardian against those powers.

It is true that greedy businessmen would like to eliminate their competition and would take as much money as possible from consumers if given a

chance. Economic history bluntly demonstrates that it is government favor, not a truly free market, that gives greedy businessmen the best chance at eliminating worthy competitors.

The force behind government licenses, patents, charters, franchises, tax breaks, subsidies, regulatory privileges, trade barriers, and wars have always served to concentrate monopoly power into the hands of an influential few. Those who achieve extraordinary wealth without these advantages, deserve their wealth through voluntary transactions. Where the favors of government are more numerous, there also are greater extremes of wealth and poverty.

Government has been the indispensable handmaiden of a powerful elite throughout history. Behind virtually every case of extraordinary wealth is some political favor. And it is these same political favors that are behind every case of extraordinary poverty. It is a plethora of political interventions that cripple the incentives for innovation, production, and choice. The greed of politicians is to control the life, liberty, and property of every man, woman, and child in the nation. I assert that in a truly free market the extremes of wealth and poverty are much less pronounced. The wealth of individuals consists of choices. Wealth is choices.

The socialist believes that the power of government can be used for good, if only the right person holds that power and substitutes their choices for the choices of others. It is an understandable impulse to look for a human god whenever insecure and in doubt. But there is no "right person."

This impulse to play the human

god is reminiscent of the J.R.R. Tolkien story, *Lord of the Rings*. Each person who holds the ring of power is tempted to use it for his own perception of good, but power corrupts and destroys each and every bearer of the ring and those around him. The conclusion of Tolkien's story is that the inhabitants of Middle Earth can only find salvation by destroying the ring of power, tossing it into Mount Doom—a fiery volcano. *That* is a free market message.

Every year there is some new discovery about the abuse of power in politics and politicians answer the popular call for reform with many new rules. But no matter what rules they make for themselves, they will always find ways to get around the rules so long as they have valuable favors to sell. The solution to the corruption of authority is the one solution that politicians are loathe to propose or accept: the drastic reduction of their authority.

WHAT LIMITS?

"But," says the skeptic, "you need political authority for many things that cannot be provided by the market—postal services, schools, utilities, the environment, courts, fire departments, ambulance services, military defense, and stop signs on roadways."

Despite inefficiencies or failures in these areas, it is to the government that abused voters continue to return. The tactic of the skeptic is frequently to argue the most difficult cases first. If a concession can be won for a single function of government, then the premise exists for any and all justifications for government. The degree of government, then, is just a matter of

EVENTUALLY, WE MAY FIND THAT THE COMPETITIVE INCENTIVES OF THE MARKETPLACE MAY ALSO IMPROVE OUR PROTECTION AS WELL, WITH BETTER PRICES, BETTER SERVICES, AND MORE INNOVATION THAN UNDER GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIES.

opinion.

Most free marketeers acknowledge this premise and accept that government is useful for some basic functions, but these must be limited to protection, not aggression. Each of us has a right to defend ourselves. So we may ask others to do this for us. But none of us has a right to aggress against others, so none of us has a right to ask other people with official hats to do this dirty work on our behalf.

Eventually, we may find that the competitive incentives of the marketplace may also improve our protection as well, with better prices, better services, and more innovation than under government monopolies.

The full possibilities of voluntarism should be open to exploration. A great portion of the police, prison, and court functions in America are being provided by innovative and cost efficient security, corrections, and dispute arbitration companies. This is also happening for mail delivery, education, and fire departments. If incentives and consumer choice are powerful motivators for improving prices and quality of service, then the market should be tapped for everything that people truly value. The more important the services, the more important it is to allow competition and choice.

The mainstream reply is that some things are "public goods" and enjoyed

by everyone. It is argued that the market won't provide public goods because private providers cannot exclude people who don't pay voluntarily--i.e. the "free riders." To the mainstream economist, this free rider problem is the justification for a myriad of taxes and government monopolies.

Unfortunately, the citizens suffer tragically from this state of affairs. What is supposed to be a public good becomes a "public bad." More than 40,000 people die on poorly managed government highways in America every year. Yet few people question this management because we have grown accustomed to this government monopoly.

But suppose that a private transportation company was responsible for that many deaths? It wouldn't be long before the owners were lynched. But when government officials operate such a deadly transportation system year after year, people shrug because there is little or no choice--thus, little or no accountability.

Lack of accountability is also a serious problem in the area of environmental pollution. If I dump garbage on you or on your property, then I should be held accountable for damages and compensation. If I dump on you or your property by putting my garbage into the air first, then I should still be held accountable. There should be no defense against this aggression because of limited liability laws or public interest laws.

As for defense, we have come to expect that government military services are wasteful and inefficient--and too frequently offensive rather than defensive in nature. As pointed out by Rudy Rummel's book, *Death By*

Government, governments in this century have killed a hundred and seventy million people. Ninety percent of these people were killed by their own governments-institutions that supposedly exist primarily for protection of the citizenry. And yet mainstream economics textbooks categorize this carnage as a "public good" instead of a "public bad."

This does not even begin to count the suffering from other kinds of civil war that governments conduct against their citizens, i.e. drug wars and trade wars. People have grown accustomed to these tragedies and think of them as inevitable-inevitable like a volcano.

And what of the "free rider" problem? Is the free rider problem solved once the government uses taxes to pay for public "goods" or "bads"? Hardly! Nations still abound with free riders. Governments have simply found new free riders, those with the greatest political influence.

ETHICAL ROOTS

GEORGE WASHINGTON once declared, "Government is not reason; it is not eloquence. Government is force. And like fire, it is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."

Political actions entail forced payment, forced consumption, and forced monopoly. The use of force is not an ethical means for the achievement of our personal goals any more than it is for the achievement of our social goals. The use of force, other than purely for protection, assumes that the end justifies the means.

Free marketeers may start with the opposite assumption--that an ethical solution to problems is also the

NOLAN CHART

A sampling of issues presented in the Nolan Chart:

1. Should businesses and farmers operate without government subsidies?
Yes. People have a right to choose what to do with their own money.
2. Should people be allowed to practice free trade without tariffs?
Yes. People have a right to decide business partners for themselves.
3. Should people be allowed to receive pay below the minimum legal wage?
Yes. People have a right to decide what they will accept for their own labor, even if it is to volunteer to work for nothing.
4. Should voluntary means of funding be sought for government services?
Yes. Numerous alternatives to coercive funding are practical and just.
5. Should governments stop protecting commercial interests of their citizens abroad?
Yes. The free market offers far more hope for the world than political intervention. Commercial interests across borders come with risks.
6. Should military service be voluntary?
Yes. Free men and women should be hired to perform professional services for a career.
7. Should the media be free of government control?
Yes. Radio, television, and the press are free speech and a check on tyranny.
8. Should consenting adults be free to practice their choice of sexual conduct?
Yes. The right to decide personal lifestyle should not be limited to politicians.
9. Should people be allowed to consume harmful substances?
Yes. People have the primary right and responsibility for their own bodies.
10. Should people be allowed to cross borders?
Yes. People have a right to flee oppression and to hire the oppressed.

most practical and humanitarian. I see a free and voluntary society producing more of food, clothing, shelter, health, safety, and a beautiful environment--all of the things we value--more effectively than a coercive society that determines morality by the counting of hands.

It is natural for human beings to strive, to cooperate, and to improve life for themselves, for their families, and for their neighbors. Personal rewards and penalties for success and failure in the marketplace, challenged by innovation and competition is a clear path to greater knowledge, wisdom, and prosperity. Without the burden of a coercive government I see people motivated to produce great wealth and to disburse that wealth according to their own values--including values of great personal generosity and compassion.

Freedom, competition, innovation, and responsibility are all part of an incredibly complex market formula for achieving all that people in society value. It takes more effort to explore voluntary solutions to social problems than just passing laws, but the results can be much more satisfying.

For those who panic by the mere mention of non-government alternatives in these areas, don't worry. There is a vast array of mainstream universities, mainstream economists, and mainstream textbooks that are largely

paid for by a mountain of tax dollars to defend the *status quo*. So any change that comes along will happen only after long consideration and trial in various regions of the world.

I'm not worried. In the battle of ideas between coercion and freedom, I am convinced that ideas propped up by force cannot be worth much compared to ideas based on freedom.

CHECK YOUR PREMISES

FREE MARKET ethics have many roots, but for some they are based on a principle of self-ownership. You own your life. To deny this is to imply that another person has a higher claim on your life than you do. No other person, or group of persons, owns your life nor do you own the lives of others.

You exist in time: future, present, and past. This is manifest in life, liberty, and the product of your life and liberty. To lose your life is to lose your future. To lose your liberty is to lose your present. And to lose the product of your life and liberty is to lose the portion of your past that produced it. In the broadest sense, your ability to exercise choices for life and liberty over time is your prosperity.

A product of your life and liberty is your property. Property is the fruit of your labor, the product of your time,

IT IS NATURAL FOR HUMAN BEINGS TO STRIVE, TO COOPERATE, AND TO IMPROVE LIFE FOR THEMSELVES, FOR THEIR FAMILIES, AND FOR THEIR NEIGHBORS. PERSONAL REWARDS AND PENALTIES FOR SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN THE MARKETPLACE, CHALLENGED BY INNOVATION AND COMPETITION IS A CLEAR PATH TO GREATER KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, AND PROSPERITY

energy, and talents. It is that part of nature which you turn to valuable use. And it is the property of others that is given to you by voluntary exchange and mutual consent. Two people who exchange property voluntarily are both better off or they wouldn't do it. Only they may rightfully make that decision for themselves.

At times some people use force or fraud to take from others without willful, voluntary consent. Under normal conditions, the initiation of force to take life is murder, to take liberty is slavery, and to take property is theft. It is the same whether these actions are done by one person acting alone, by the many acting against a few, or even by officials with fine hats.

You have the right to protect your own life, liberty, and justly acquired property from the forceful aggression of others. So you may ask others to help protect you. But you do not have a right to initiate force against the life, liberty, or property of others. Thus, you have no right to designate some person to initiate force against others on your behalf.

RESPONSIBILITY

YOU HAVE a right to seek leaders for your life, but you have no right to impose rulers onto others. No matter how officials are selected, they are only human beings and they have no rights or claims that are higher than those of any other human beings. Regardless of the imaginative labels for their behavior or the numbers of people encouraging them, officials have no right to murder, to enslave, or to steal. You cannot give them any rights that you do not have yourself.

Since you own your life, you are responsible for your life. You do not rent your life from others who demand your obedience. Nor are you a slave to others who demand your sacrifice. You choose your own goals based on your own values. Success and failure are both the necessary incentives to learn and to grow. Your action on behalf of others, or their action on behalf of you, is virtuous only when it is derived from voluntary, mutual consent. For virtue can only exist when there is free choice.

This is the basis of a truly free society. It is not only the most practical and humanitarian foundation for human action, it is also the most ethical. This is not coincidental.

Problems that arise from the initiation of force by government have a solution. The solution is for people of the world to stop asking government officials to initiate force on their behalf. Evil does not arise only from bad people, but also from good people who tolerate the initiation of force as an expedient to their own ends. In this manner, good people have empowered tyrants throughout history.

Having confidence in a free society is to focus on the process of discovery in the marketplace of values rather than to focus on some imposed vision or goal. Using governmental force to impose a vision on others is intellectual sloth and typically results in unintended, perverse consequences. Achieving the free society requires courage to think, to talk, and to act—especially when it is easier to do nothing.





CENTRE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

THE POWER OF IDEAS

The Centre for Civil Society is an independent, non-profit, research and educational organisation devoted to improving the quality of life for all citizens of India by reviving and reinvigorating civil society. India got her political independence in 1947 from the British state, but we still do not have complete social, cultural and economic independence from the Indian state. We aim to limit the domain of the state and make more space for civil society.

We champion limited government, rule of law, free trade, and individual rights. We are an ideas organisation, a think tank that develops ideas to better the world. We want to usher in an intellectual revolution that encourages people to look beyond the obvious, think beyond good intentions, and act beyond activism.

We believe in the individuality and dignity of all persons, and their right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. We trust their judgment when they cast their vote in a ballot box and when they spend their money in a marketplace. We are driven by the dream of a free society, where political, social, and economic freedom reigns. We are soldiers for a Second Freedom Movement.

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