

The Four Elements of the Coercive State

1. Taxation

Taxation is the ability of an organization to charge and collect fees which have no connection to any clear good or service, with or without the consent of the taxed.

Generally, taxation is justified in several ways:

- 1) Implicit consent due to location
- 2) Existence of a more or less nebulous “social contract”
- 3) Nebulous defense and law-and-order services, which may or may not actually be provided
- 4) A subscription fee for a general servant or agent, whether or not such services are provided
- 5) The “price of civilization”

The first and second can be disposed of by simply refusing to accept “implicit consent.” The third and fourth collapse when it is made clear that the fee will be charged and collected regardless of the success of the services claimed to be provided. The fifth collapses by inference when one realizes that the absence of any such benefit to the taxed, that is, expecting a person to pay for his own oppression or to believe such to be his obligation or civilized, is the opposite of civilization.

The fact that one generally cannot subscribe to competing organizations, or, even if he does so, he will still be charged the fees, is another nail in the coffin of taxation’s legitimacy.

The realm of taxation also includes money monopoly, legal tender laws, inflation, and borrowing (when already in a system with taxation.) All of these expropriate wealth from the people without their consent. Money monopoly and legal tender laws force individuals to delineate contracts in terms of State currency. Inflation provides the State with the unearned means to expropriate real resources from the voluntary sector, and damages all savings held in the State currency. Borrowing, in the context of a system of coercive taxation, allows the State to pretend it is obligated to keep taxing, instead of abolishing the coercive system immediately and completely.

Alternatives

- Privatize existing tax-funded organizations
- Fee structures
- Crowdfunding
- Actual, legitimate contracts
- Subscriptions with specified services to be provided

Conclusion

Any body that levies taxes is a band of robbers.

2. Conscription

Conscription is the ability of an organization to force labor from certain individuals. Typically that labor is used for military personnel, but that is by no means the only use of conscripted people.

Conscription is generally justified as “serving one’s country,” deliberately confusing nation with State. State-run educational organizations typically promote a sense of duty toward the State, arguing that since the State protects the people, it is the individual’s responsibility to protect the State.

The obvious counter is that a State based on the evils of taxation, conscription, etc. does not deserve defense.

Conscription, once allowed, is rarely contained to purely defensive measures. Members of the military are seen as largely fungible on some level, and so conscripted forces are also often used to fight wars of aggression against other States, for the sake of territorial borders, which is to say territory that the States claim jurisdiction over, regardless of the wishes of the actual inhabitants of that territory.

Conscripts can also be used to replace intransigent employees of industries deemed essential by the State. Usually such industries are intimately connected to the State and its enforcement of norms/laws/etc.

Conscripts can be forced to work and die, without their consent and without remuneration to their next of kin. This is often done to criminals, but generally the proceeds of the criminal’s labor go to the State, and not to his victims as restitution.

Conscript militaries can also be used to oppress the people ruled by a State.

Alternatives

- Mutual-defense contracts
- Vigorous cultural support of self-defense
- Voluntary defense organizations: Militias, etc.
- Trade agreements
- Letting coercive institutions fail and collapse

Conclusion

Conscription is slavery. Any body that conscripts is a band of slavers. Conscription also typically is used to commit mass murder. Bodies that conscript for military or “defense” services are likely to be bands of mass murderers.

3. Legal Positivism and Malum Prohibitum Law

Force can be justified in self-defense, or in reasonable defense of others. Therefore, no special authority is required to defend against imminent aggression, or to deter perpetrators of aggression.

Generally speaking, in order for the use of force to be justified, i.e. to not be aggression, there must be an individual or individuals who are victims, and an identifiable act or acts of non-defensive violence.

A voluntary government or security firm can post notice around the perimeter of some agreed-upon property and provide defensive violence services against any aggressors found on or attempting to enter the property.

It is even true that groups of individuals can make voluntary agreements and associations that prohibit certain types of activity on a particular piece of property. For example, a group of ten warehouse owners might agree not to store cocaine, with certain contractual penalties applicable if one or more of them is found to violate the agreement.

However, this agreement cannot bind those who are not signatories. The signatories must either keep their hands off non-signatories, close off their properties to non-signatories, or inform non-signatories prior to their entrance of the specific rules, and find a way to record their positive consent to operate under those rules. Market forces will make excessively strict, lengthy, or confusing rule sets unprofitable.

Coercive States take these several steps further, forbidding vast swaths of activity on people who have not agreed to them, including many victimless activities. They typically make these rule sets so self-contradictory and complicated that a parasitic class of law-interpreters arises to deal with the system. Moreover, the size of the rule set is so large that no reasonable person can be familiar with all of the rules, yet ignorance of the rules is frequently described as “no excuse.”

The coercive State attempts to eliminate, minimize, or obscure the negative incentives of a convoluted rule set by monopolizing as much of the “justice” system as they can get away with. State police are bound to “follow lawful orders,” and the rules surrounding what is a “lawful order” typically lean in favor of subjecting a victim to a long and expensive ordeal rather than simple fine, exile, and/or confiscation of the forbidden goods.

The proliferation of malum prohibitum laws is also frequently used by the coercive State to “nudge” people into various “preferred” modes of behavior, generally without their consent.

Alternatives

- Voluntary “vice prohibition” agreements
- Walled city areas restricted to signatories
- “Market square” areas on outskirts of territories with smaller/simpler rule sets
- “Rights of way” across or around areas with complex rule sets
- Exile/confiscation, rather than fine/imprisonment schemes
- Separation of methods for aggressive versus non-aggressive vices
- Procedural requirements for enforcement of rule sets, e.g. “no searches without a warrant issued by arbitration company X”

Conclusion

Many cultural groups wish to promote and/or preserve their own prejudices. Malum prohibitum laws is a way for them to do so at the expense of those outside their cultural groups, but living alongside them already. The desire to preserve one’s culture is one’s own responsibility and is not a justification for using force against strangers who have performed no aggressive act.

4. State Propaganda/Moral Dualism

The coercive State is interested in avoiding self-defensive violence against its arbitrary and non-consensual decrees. It will often aim to control information in such a way that resistance is strongly discouraged.

This information control can take a variety of forms: Media/news control, compulsory education or compulsory education requirements, coercive establishment and funding of public schools, promotion of ideas such as the “social contract” or “civic duty,” propaganda to the effect that the agents of the State are subject to different moral rules than non-agents, co-opting of research and development efforts by the State, etc.

These efforts can be seen most clearly as an attempt to nullify the strong natural moral instincts toward mutuality, in the sense that even monkeys will react negatively to inconsistent treatment by handlers. The State wishes to cultivate a sense among the people that actions for which normal citizens are fined/imprisoned/punished are legitimate when undertaken by State agents. The tax man may demand your money, but your neighbor may not, etc.

One other common element is one of using resources stolen from the rich to fund education for poor children. By accepting this bargain, the poor make themselves accomplices to theft and give up their childrens’ minds to creatures with no greater moral authority than Hitler or Stalin. A Faustian bargain if ever there was one.

This system also allows the State to promote or censure various cultural norms, choosing winners and losers. This process can have consequences just as dire and far-reaching as choosing winners and losers in the economic sphere. Modern people got so used to States defending their local cultures that they were caught completely flat-footed when States decided instead to destroy their local cultures in trade for cheap workers with foreign cultures. The buildup of arguments and defenders of culture took decades and much was lost in the interim.

Alternatives

- Private, decentralized funding of education, research, journalism
- Self-reliance in the defense of local cultural norms
- Clear, logical thinking without the creation of arbitrary double standards

Conclusion

The State’s role in information control and dissemination is a method by which it keeps new technologies secret and within its sole control; teaches children to venerate a class of robbers, slavers, and murderers; misinforms the public of current events; shifts cultural norms in its favor; and encourages systematic logical fallacies in moral thought.

5. Prerogative

If a government is to exist as a voluntary body, there must be an agreement between it and its clients. This agreement describes the actions which a government may take, and may also give some examples of actions it may not take. It will describe the costs incurred by the clients and the services provided.

However, even voluntary contracts between two individuals are liable to be tested by one or both parties. One party will interpret some clause in the most positive possible way for himself, or in the most restrictive possible way for the other. Some of this interpretation may even be done in good faith.

This is not a fault of the system of voluntary contracts on its own. Any contract longer than a few clauses will have at least one phrase which invites interpretation. In a voluntary contract, neither of the contracting parties will interpret those phrases. Rather, an arbitrator freely agreed to by both parties will make those decisions.

In the case of coercive States, even small ones, there will be a tendency for the State to create and/or rely upon arbitrators that it chooses and funds, or one with which it shares a large number of professional relationships.

States and their captured arbitrators will then interpret their contracts as widely as possible in their own favor. Phrases like “necessary and proper” will be interpreted to mean “convenient.” “Regulate interstate commerce” will be interpreted to mean “Regulate anything potentially affecting interstate commerce.” “General welfare” will be read as “the State may do anything it thinks might benefit one of its subjects, including subjects who are members of the State apparatus.”

Sometimes, a State will even decide to do something that is completely outside the bounds of its contract with its subjects. It will then demand extra payment, service, pledges, etc. from those subjects, as if that action was somehow part of the contract and therefore the subjects have consented to repay any costs related to that action.

This is not to say that charity is irrelevant, or, to go even further from the mark, a problem. However, the giver of charity does so without a contractual agreement for repayment, or with a presumption that any torts he commits along with his charity must be forgiven without restitution. He may even give charity without a contractual assurance that his donation will be used for some specific purpose.

To give an example, imagine someone drives a boat out into the middle of a lake to save a drowning child. If he, while doing this, kills a \$10,000 koi fish, the fact of his act of charity does not automatically absolve him of paying restitution for the dead fish. This may be worked out as a mutual charity-in-response-to-charity later on, but the owner of the koi fish is not bound to forgive him because the fish was killed during the commission of an otherwise charitable act.

Likewise, a property owner might wish his accountant had stuck around to help fight a small house fire. However, he has no claim on the accountant’s labor in firefighting without a preexisting agreement. As long as the accountant didn’t set the fire himself, his defense that “You aren’t paying me for that” is ironclad.

Along the same lines, a voluntary government or even a hypothetically limited coercive State is bound to follow the terms of its contract with its clients. Any interpretation of vague clauses in the contract should be done by arbitrators, and the default method of interpretation should be as restrictive of the government’s powers as possible. To interpret those clauses in such a way that the government is given new powers is a road to converting a voluntary government into a coercive State (by taking on duties not agreed to), and a limited State into a totalitarian one, and no totalitarian State has any legitimacy with respect to its subjects, who are no better than chattels.

Alternatives

- Narrowest-possible interpretation of State contracts
- No expectations of charity outside the contract
- Reciprocal charity, mercy, forgiveness as cultural norms

- Clearest possible language in State contracts

Conclusion

Prerogative is a method for agents to become masters, and limited governments to become unlimited. The State doing something “nice” but outside its contract does not obligate its subjects to pay for that niceness, and it does not absolve the State or its agents of any torts it might commit in pursuit of this nicety.

6. Dominion

We arrive here at the surprising main pillar of the problem. Of all the other problems discussed earlier, many of them gain their special status compared to voluntary interaction because of this one. Taxation without dominion is a subscription fee. Conscription without dominion is a plea to sacrifice oneself to serve one’s friends, in hopes that your way of life will survive an aggressor. Malum prohibitum law without dominion is just a set of agreed-upon rules. Information control without dominion is a voluntary cult. Prerogative without dominion is charity without immunity.

In short, the main problem with the first five problems is that the average person cannot escape from his association with a government without losing most of his property, in the best case, or his life and the lives of his family, in the worst. It connects certain pieces of land with one particular government, and makes it very difficult for the borders that government claims as “its” territory to fluctuate. This props up bad governments and prevents the growth of good ones.

As time goes on, people may discover that their opinions have drifted away from some of their countrymen. They may discover that the agreement which formed the government no longer serves them, but rather is a parasite upon them. They may find themselves a permanent minority, bound to follow the orders of a group diametrically opposed to their culture.

Getting rid of dominion allows these people to exit the contract and take back whatever custodial rights the government claims over their land, and their bodies. It allows them to form or join new contracts that actually serve their purposes.

It also serves to create a fine line distinguishing mere complaint from dissent. A person in a voluntary agreement, say a subscription for some service, might complain that the subscription fee is too high. And yet he pays it. He pays it because, even though he is close to the point where the service is no longer worth what he’s paying for it, it’s getting close. Or he might simply be an inveterate complainer. Getting rid of dominion allows us to separate mere complaint from real dissent.

It creates a non-violent outlet for serious dissent, as well. The only way for a trapped minority to escape a State with dominion over them is to plead for release or to overthrow the system which traps them. One small law may be the line for some numerous but politically insignificant group. They can protest that law by seceding, which is preferable to them deciding that they are at war with the State.

It creates an incentive structure by which States can see when they have made a bad decision.

It is worth noting that States could allow secession in theory without allowing it in practice, which does not solve the problems of dominion. For instance, they could allow secession of land, but only at a cost of 10,000 times the market value of the land. In general, some small transaction may be justified. The

person joining a State is giving that State partial jurisdiction over his land, i.e. to enter it with a warrant that meets certain requirements and provide protective and crime-fighting services. These partial rights, like mineral rights, have some value that must be determined on a market. In the near term, one may observe that through mechanisms like eminent domain, the State already “owns” the land, which puts a maximum price on secession of the market value of the land. Since the rights the State gets to the land are, under the hypothesis that the State is an agent and defender in service of the landowner, small compared to real ownership, the pressure should be toward making the cost of secession a small fraction of the market value of the land. The higher the price for secession, the more likely there will be people who are trapped by that price.

The common objection is that many people would suddenly secede if secession were suddenly allowed, and that this would be chaotic. This is a symptom of the fact that dominion is like a wound spring of political unrest, and a system of springs may indeed be chaotic, to borrow from the natural world. Over time, more and more pressure builds as more and more people see the State as an enemy. There are only two ways forward: let the pressure release as gently as it can, or keep letting it build until it releases explosively. Non-violent, temporary chaos is preferable to chattel slavery, and also preferable to violent revolution.

If States really are the servants of the people, then people leaving their jurisdiction is just an expression of changes in market conditions. Other industries are expected to adapt to the changing tastes of their customers or else lose customers; States with dominion are not.

Dominion encourages a feeling of entitlement among State agents. “These are *our* people to tax, conscript, regulate, indoctrinate, and constantly grow our powers against.” This feeling is anathema to the hypothetical position of the State as servant. In a similar way to the growing, simmering dissent of the people is a wound spring, the unfamiliarity of secession to State agents makes them feel more and more in ownership of the territory and people they are supposed to be serving, to the point that a simple customer cancellation is seen as an unforgivable act of violence. Nowhere else in human interaction is this acceptable.

Conclusion

Under the hypothesis that States are servants of the people, they can improve themselves, i.e. make themselves less coercive, by reducing the amount of taxation, conscription, regulation, indoctrination, and prerogative they exercise. However, they can actually make the complete conversion from coercive State to voluntary government by doing away with the tradition of dominion, and allowing full secession down to the individual level, including secession of land, and making the cost of secession small or, at worst, comparable to the market value of the land.

Extra. War-making (as a corollary)

The above points are about things that the State mostly does to its own subjects, as they are the ones that live within the area where the State claims monopoly on aggression.

I was unsure whether to include war-making as its own separate category, as it can be seen as a combination of the other internal pillars:

- The State taxes to fund wars
- The State conscripts people to die as soldiers

- The State makes laws and regulations about how its subjects must deal with “enemies”
- The State convinces its subjects that it is the “good guy” in the fight, and that the enemies deserve death
- The State acts as an individual, taking “offense” at “slights” by other States and reacts to “insults” when no actual subject has been “insulted” or “offended”
- The State wages war to increase the size of its dominion

War-making is all the worst things that a State can do, directed through its own subjects at the members of some other organization, usually another State.

States in war minimize the value of their own subjects and the subjects of other States, but heads of State rarely participate directly in war, either as combatants or victims.

Top five flaws in Lockean government

1. Dominion
2. Prerogative
3. Taxation
4. Conscription
5. Anti-Secession (same as dominion)