

Discussion

Reply to Sechrest

On the Origins of Government

Marsha F. Enright

Thanks to Larry J. Sechrest for a very thought-provoking article, "Rand, Anarchy and Taxes." I thoroughly enjoyed both the facts he discussed and the analysis he offered. However, his point that Murray Franck "almost seems to think it self-evident that civilized societies must have governments" (Sechrest 1999, 100) made me realize that my reaction is about the same as Mr. Franck's. So I felt the necessity of communicating why.

First, there is the issue of the consistency of law in a given geographical area. I am not familiar with all the permutations of anarchistic thought on this issue, but those which posit competing defense and judiciary in the same geographical area seem to make very little sense to me. That's because, in order to act—which means acting in a given time and space—men need to have a consistent set of rules within which to do so. Without consistency, who knows what is allowed and what is not, what will elicit reward and what will elicit retribution from which of myriad defense agencies? The mind boggles.

Putting this issue aside, I would like to examine another way of looking at the problem of anarchy versus minarchy. We can easily see the reason and the right by which private individuals and their families wish to protect themselves from the initiation of force. But by what means do public agencies arise? To understand this, first let us speak of private and public defense agencies in more specific ways. A private agency is one which an individual or family engages to protect their rights. A public agency is one which is engaged by a

subset of an area's population to enforce *their* version of law and rights on the general population. By means of force and its threat, or by tacit consent, this limited group causes most other people to submit to their laws and implementation of rights. Since the engaging parties of a public agency are often not a majority, by what means do they gain control? In other words, how do people end up with governments?

There seem to be two general ways. In the first way, those with superior force and the desire to control others for material gain and/or power, organize for these ends and work to dictate their will to all those people residing in their area of power—they become that area's government. The people in these groups specialize in the use of force rather than productivity as a means to live. One individual or family, or even one clan, simply cannot command enough defensive force to protect themselves and maintain peace for long against such men: men who live by force—who specialize in it and spend all their time honing their skills at it and using it. In an anarchic situation, a gang that spends the majority of its time on force and not productivity can too easily become the defense agency of such a family. The movie, "The Postman," illustrates this.

Unfortunately, for thousands of years, the peaceable and productive have had to endure the less than just rule of the forceful, because they did not wrest the means of force from them and put it under the control of rational law. To have even *somewhat* productive lives, men seem to be willing to put up with a lot for even a small measure of peace and order. Hence, anarchy evolved into the pathetic spectacle of feudalism in Medieval Europe. Apparently, men long preferred known tyrants to the unknown. But, especially since the American Revolution, we consider such governments illegitimate because they clearly and distinctly do not protect the individual rights of the citizens. It has been a long, slow, painful process of getting force under control, might under right.

In the second way governments come to exist, those who wish to be productive and generally moral, and to live peaceably with others, band together to form an agency that has superior enough numbers and force to protect them against those who wish to use

force and power to live. Hence, the United States of America.

In the latter circumstance, there is often a large amount of disagreement among the generally moral and productive people over exactly what should or shouldn't be controlled through force by this agency—i.e., should we have gun controls or not? And, as always, the unproductive and power-lusting constantly jockey for the use of agency power for their immoral ends—Hillary Clinton, for example, tried to use healthcare law. This is often how evils arise in good governments.

The brilliance of the U.S. constitution is in its creation of a public agency whose conscious and explicit purpose was to protect the good and productive and peaceful against the evil. The good gathered the power of as many of themselves as they could and instituted a means by which they—we—try to keep as much control as possible. Admittedly, we argue a lot over exactly what the range and limits of the government's functions should be. But we're very free to argue.

References

- Sechrest, Larry J. 1999. Rand, anarchy, and taxes. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* 1, no. 1 (Fall): 87–105.