

As long as (any) society is built on a foundation of slavery, that society has conflict in it inherently and is destined for collapse.

John Lewis said, “The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have.” I rode around southeast Atlanta yesterday, and this quote was featured prominently on signs and billboards everywhere I went. Those signs were intended to appeal, no doubt, to people who do not want to be slaves. The same people, however, are quite happy to have power over others as John Lewis’ quote implies. Having that power over others is a form of slavery. It is a form of slavery producing conflict in this society and will lead, inevitably, to its collapse.

The collapse of this society, it may be said, is not necessarily a bad thing, and I have no real objection to (or argument against) that sentiment. But that is not my point. My point is that it is not enough to dislike being a slave. In order to build a civilized society—a manifestation of civilization, it is necessary to also reject being a master. As long as enslavement of other humans is embraced by an adequate number of individuals in a society, then conflict and collapse, and all that goes with those things, are also being embraced. If you, as an individual, place any value on peaceful and sustainable coexistence with other humans, then you, as an individual, must reject having power over others. The rejection of slavery must start with someone. It starts with me.

Lewis is partially correct about power and the nature of voting. Voting is, at least, an attempt to exercise power (an exercise of power that will be rightly resented and resisted) but he is very wrong to attempt to attach the label “nonviolent” to it. One can try to imagine the actions of a policeman in extortion (collecting “fines”) or kidnapping (“arresting” people) or that the actions of a soldier transporting ammunition or servicing airplanes are nonviolent, but in doing so one is simply fooling one’s self. Those activities support structures which, in the final expression—in the final analysis, are violent. We live in a violent, uncivilized society because of them. Voting, at the very least, even if it is ineffective in delivering the “benefits at the expense of others” which are desired, serves to create the illusion of legitimacy and respectability for these structures of violence.

The provost of Georgia Tech, Rafael Bras, recently wrote to the faculty that he supports efforts to increase voter turnout and participation. He hopes faculty will join in a shared commitment to increase voter participation from students (by providing academic accommodation etc.). Bras represents another thread of the voting dynamic of exercising power over others. The

appeal here is rather more immediate and direct. He wants people to work and have the result of their productive activity stolen and given to him. He needs the structures of theft (“taxation”) in place to support the institutional agenda of “creating the next” element of the technological dystopian nightmare currently unfolding. This is not uncommon among university faculty and administrators whose pathological viewpoint, under normal circumstances, falls by no means short of the psychopathic worldview of politicians. Both are adamantly committed to solving the problems which they are active in creating.

Finally, I recently received an email from a student who posed the question, perhaps rhetorically, “How can we make the world a better place?” Taken seriously, it is a difficult question. Stealing the lives and labor of others (and/or advocating such) does not seem like it’s going to do it. It seems clear to me that the first step, at least, is to think. Think about the resentment you, as an individual, cause in your attempts to exercise power over others. Decide for yourself if the benefit (real or perhaps only perceived) is worth the cost of the fully justified and fully expected resentment which will result. If you are actually thinking, I expect you will conclude human resentment toward enslavement and efforts of self-defense are a rather high price to pay for the imagined benefits. Think about ways to exchange with others for mutual benefit. A couple good signs are that no theft of taxation will be involved and no legal imposition will be required. No conflict will be created. Some philosophers, especially those inclined toward philosophical theories of “economics,” have suggested that conflict is the basic foundation inherent to human interaction and all exchange—even the exchange of ideas. I think they are wrong. Some conflict may be inherent, but making conflict the foundation is simply the result of failing to think.