

Individual Sovereignty

Individual sovereignty means that it is evil for anyone to interfere with one's honest and peaceful choices. One more element needs to be addressed: the issue of land ownership.

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Individual sovereignty means that it is evil for any other person to interfere with one's honest and peaceful choices. This prescription comes from natural moral law, as expressed by the universal ethic:

1. "Harm" means an invasion into another's domain.
2. All acts, and only those acts, which coercively harm others, are evil.
3. Welcomed benefits are good.
4. All other acts are neutral.


Natural moral law is derived from human individuality and equality, and the premise of equality implies individual sovereignty. For if one is not sovereign, some other person has the moral authority to be a master, and equality does not exist. Individual sovereignty is moral equality taken to its logical conclusion. The concept of "self ownership" is the same as individual sovereignty.

Because individual sovereignty derives from the universal ethic and its premise of human equality, it does not imply that a sovereign individual may do anything he pleases. A self-owner may not impose coercive harm on others. One may do as one pleases so long as one's actions are honest and peaceful. An honest action does not coercively harm others through fraud.

"A person has a functioning mind and the actual or potential ability to make choices based on reason and awareness" (Dictionary of Free-Market Economics). Young children have such minds and are therefore also sovereign. But the ability to use reason is something that develops as children mature, and therefore the parents have a responsibility to exercise some of the sovereignty rights on behalf of their children. Conversely, creating a child also creates a moral obligation of the parent to provide judgment as well as material needs for their children. Upon some age of maturity, the child becomes a fully sovereign human being.

In political theory monarchs have been said to be sovereign, and are called "the Sovereign". But even if the king has absolute legal power, he is a human being equal to all others, and any coercive power he has over others is a usurpation of individual sovereignty.

When republics and democracies replaced absolute monarchs, the state and its government were said to be sovereign. A country is sovereign when there is no other political body above it. In the United States, the federal and state governments have parallel sovereignty, and the native Indian nations are supposed to have some elements of national sovereignty. The US federal government has entered into treaty obligations and has joined international organizations such as the United Nations and World Trade Organization, but it could withdraw from these organizations and treaties, as the UN and WTO have no sovereignty, but only delegated powers.

Power is always exercised by individual persons, not by mental constructs. Governments and states are mental constructs, having no reality other than what people believe. If a government exercises its sovereign power, in reality, it is the president or prime minister applying the forces of government, u police, and prison guards. Arbitrary state power is ultimately the unequal power of some individuals over

others. There is no moral authority or legitimacy for government other than to enforce the universal ethic, which implies that it is immoral for government to interfere with peaceful and honest individual sovereignty. If government makes theft legally a crime, it is already morally a crime, and government simply acts as an agent of the people to enforce moral law, although if it does that, the financing must also be moral.

Therefore individual sovereignty implies peaceful anarchism, with no imposed government, because even if the government confines itself to enforcing the universal ethic, the rulers are human beings who have no greater wisdom, in general, than others, and they could end up imposing their wills to alter peaceful choices. Therefore, pure equality implies that there be no rulers imposed on unwilling persons.

Anarchism, as the absence of imposed government, does not imply chaos and disorder, as connoted by the unfortunate other meaning of "anarchy". Human beings have always lived in organized communities. In anarchism, most people would join associations such as condominiums, cooperatives, and proprietary communities (owners with tenants). These local communities would federate into broader or higher associations, ultimately covering a continent or the whole planet. The benefit of government - a uniform rule of law - would be provided, without its fatal flaw, the denial of individual sovereignty.

One more element of individual sovereignty needs to be addressed: the issue of land ownership. Self-ownership implies the ownership of one's labor, the products of labor, and the wages of labor. But self-ownership does not apply to nature, all that is apart from persons and human action. The premise of human equality implies that all persons have an equal share of the benefits of natural resources, and that can be accomplished by collecting the economic rent of land, its yield when put to optimal use, and distributing that rent equally.

The local site rentals, generated by the local population, commerce, and public goods, would be paid to the community's providers of civic goods. The multi-level federations of voluntary communities and associations would implement the collection of land rent and local rentals, and this geo-anarchism would provide the funding needed to implement the voluntary governance.

Individual sovereignty is therefore feasible and is consistent with, and indeed best generates, peace and prosperity. Wars, such as in the Middle East, would cease if most people recognized individual sovereignty and equal rights to natural benefits, rather than fight over the coercively collective and fictitious sovereignty of states.

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FRED E. FOLDVARY, Ph.D., (May 11, 1946 — June 5, 2021) was an economist who wrote weekly editorials for [Progress.org](#) since 1997. Foldvary's commentaries are well respected for their currency, sound logic, wit, and consistent devotion to human freedom. He received his B.A. in economics from the University of California at Berkeley, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in economics from George Mason University. He taught economics at Virginia Tech, John F. Kennedy University, Santa Clara University, and San Jose State University.

Foldvary is the author of *The Soul of Liberty*, *Public Goods and Private Communities*, and *Dictionary of Free Market Economics*. He edited and contributed to *Beyond Neoclassical Economics* and, with Dan Klein, *The Half-Life of Policy Rationales*. Foldvary's areas of research included public finance, governance, ethical philosophy, and land economics.

Foldvary is notably known for going on record in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* in 1997 to predict the exact timing of the 2008 economic depression—eleven years before the event occurred. He was able to do so due to his extensive knowledge of the real-estate cycle.

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