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# The Voluntaryist

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*"If one takes care of the means, the end will take care of itself."*

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## Only Freedom Breeds Excellence

*One voluntaryist's reaction to a reading of THE DISSENTING TRADITION IN AMERICAN EDUCATION, by James C. Carper and Thomas C. Hunt (New York: Peter Lang, 2007. ISBN 978-0-8204-7920-0. See [www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com).)*

By Carl Watner

It is often said that the victorious side in a war gets to write its history. This observation is no less relevant to philosophical disputes than military confrontations. In the case of schools and schooling, the dominant, winning side in the struggle over control of the education of the young in the United States has been American governments, at all levels. This is evidenced by compulsory school attendance laws and government-run schools supported by local, state, and federal taxation.

In their book, *THE DISSENTING TRADITION IN AMERICAN EDUCATION*, James Carper and Thomas Hunt point out that education was either church or familial throughout most of the early American colonies and states. "[T]he colonial approach to education continued virtually unchanged throughout the late 1700s and early 1800s." Much of colonial and pioneer America was so far from the seat and power of governments that there were few compulsory attendance laws or taxes for the purpose of supporting what few government schools there were. It was then accepted as a common law right that parents were responsible for the educational, moral, and religious upbringing of their children. Anyone trying to assume control of the children against the parents' wishes (at least on the frontier) would have probably been shot peremptorily. This was the attitude of the rugged individualist whose schooling was "unsystematic, discontinuous, and unregulated" by the State. [241]

So how is it that people who rejected government schools, objected to paying taxes for their support, and opposed compulsory attendance laws are today called "dissenters"? How and why is it that Americans have moved from the acceptance of parental responsibility for their children's schooling to a position according the State the major decision-making power over their children's education? In short, why aren't the "dissenters" those who called for State control? The short answer: the State so legitimized itself in the eyes of its citizens that they readily acceded to the State's philosophical position. Thus, the new

norm became State control and those who opposed it became dissenters, even though parental control has been the naturally accepted way throughout much of human history.

The "dissenting tradition" in England and the United States traces its roots back to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 in England. Anyone who refused to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church found themselves labeled as a "dissenter" or "nonconformist." Every schoolmaster and every private school had to "conform to the liturgy of the Church of England." In order to avoid both persecution and prosecution, much of "Nonconformist education went underground, so to speak." The Dissenting Academies became well-known for "their innovation and scholarship." "No one, indeed, in eighteenth-century England, could claim the title 'friends of liberty' ... with more justification than the Dissenters, for they were enamoured not only of their own liberty in matters of religious conscience but also of secular causes resting on the inherent rights of human personality, wherever they were in question." [Smith 114]

The main theme of *THE DISSENTING TRADITION IN AMERICAN EDUCATION* is that

As was the case with the traditional established churches in Old Europe and early America, however, individuals and groups have expressed objections to [both government control and support of religion and schooling]. Since ... [public schooling's] inception in the mid-1800s, they have dissented on religious, cultural, philosophical, and/or pedagogical grounds. [4] [D]issenters have claimed that tax-supported, state-regulated, compulsory public schooling violates the rights of conscience and religious liberty. Specifically, they have objected to the prevailing orthodoxy, purveyed by the state through its public schools in a given era, to paying twice for mandated education (taxes and tuition) in order to exercise their right to educate their children according to their beliefs, and to intrusive state regulations of alternative educational arrangements that embody worldviews that differ from ... [the] public orthodoxy. [266-267] The present volume focuses on episodes of religiously and/or culturally motivated dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy of public [school] education, universal taxation for public schools, government responsibility for schooling, and state attempts to control nonconforming schools. It is not a

*continued on page 3*



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## The Obviousness of Anarchy

By John Hasnas

[Excerpts from Roderick Long and Tibor Machan (eds.), ANARCHISM/MINARCHISM (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008); ISBN 0 7564 6066. Found at <http://faculty.msb.edu/hasnasj/GTWebsite/AnarchyDraft.pdf>. Permission granted by Lilly Chesterman of Ashgate Publishing in email dated September 12, 2007. For other penetrating articles by John Hasnas see the Short Bibliography below.]

## LOOK AROUND!

By Carl Watner

*Lector, si documentum requiris, circumspice.*

Sir Christopher Wren, the famous English architect, died in 1723, and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a building which he had designed. His son, Christopher Jr., memorialized his father by placing on a wall near his father's tomb, "one of the most famous of all monumental inscriptions: *Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice* ('Reader, if you seek a monument, look around')."

John Hasnas has done the same thing. He writes that "A wise man once told me that the best way to prove something is possible is to show that it exists." Well? If proof (*documentum*) is required, LOOK AROUND! There are countless examples of voluntaryism in everyday life and in American history. We know that "a stable, successful society without government can exist" because it "has, and to a large extent, still does" exist. This, in fact, is one of the ongoing purposes of THE VOLUNTARYIST and my anthology, I MUST SPEAK OUT: to document the historical instances of non-political cooperation among human beings.

The State cannot be everywhere, nor can it be all things to all people, and as John Hasnas points out there had to be a peaceful community before there was a State. As I have written before, every service provided by the State and paid for by compulsory taxation (with one major exception - world war) has been provided at one time or another in history by people. Private schools, private coins, private libraries, private charitable aid, private roads, private post offices, private arbitration and mediation, private courts, time zones, weight and measure standards, our English language - all these are examples of

voluntaryism, not statism.

In an article footnoted in "The Obviousness of Anarchy," Professor Hasnas writes that "Anglo-Saxon and early Norman England ... offers a wonderful test case of how human beings behave in the absence of central political authority." [pp. 127-128] The result was the English system of common law, on which most of English and American jurisprudence is based. The evolution of the common law demonstrates human beings need rules and regulations to govern their interactions; but it also proves that centralized government authority is not a prerequisite to their existence. Most of the formal and informal institutional arrangements of human society reached their zenith before the advent of the modern nation-State.

This brilliant and magnificent essay directs our attention to what should be an obvious fact. Readers: LOOK AROUND! The evidence to prove that anarchism is a viable, sustainable way of life exists, if we can only recognize it.

### The Obviousness of Anarchy

I am presenting an argument for anarchy in the true sense of the term - that is, a society without government, not a society without governance. There is no such thing as a society without governance. A society with no mechanism for bringing order to human existence is oxymoronic; it is not "society" at all.

... I am arguing only that human beings can live together successfully and prosper in the absence of a centralized coercive authority. ...

There are, of course, certain rules that must apply to all people; those that provide the basic conditions that make cooperative behavior possible. Thus, rules prohibiting murder, assault, theft, and other forms of coercion must be equally binding on all members of a society. But we hardly need government to ensure that this is the case. These rules evolve first in any community; you would not even have a community if this were not the case. ...

Societies do not spring into existence complete with government police forces. Once a group of people has figured out how to reduce the level of interpersonal violence sufficiently to allow them to live together, entities that are recognizable as government often develop and take over the policing function. Even a marauding band that imposes government on others through conquest must have first reduced internal strife sufficiently to allow it to organize itself for effective military operations. Both historically and logically, it is always peaceful coexistence first, government services second. If civil society is impossible without government police, then there are no civil societies. ...

When government begins providing services formerly provided non-politically, people soon forget that the services were ever provided non-politically and assume that only government can provide them.