



# The Most Dangerous Superstition

*Larken Rose*

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## **The Most Dangerous Superstition** Larken Rose

The primary threat to freedom and justice is not greed, or hatred, or any of the other emotions or human flaws usually blamed for such things. Instead, it is one ubiquitous superstition which infects the minds of people of all races, religions and nationalities, which deceives decent, well-intentioned people into supporting and advocating violence and oppression. Even without making human beings one bit more wise or virtuous, removing that one superstition would remove the vast majority of injustice and suffering from the world.

## **The Most Dangerous Superstition Details**

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# From Reader Review **The Most Dangerous Superstition** for online ebook

## **Mad Russian the Traveller says**

One of those paradigm shifting books. If you are tired of being a slave of the State, the path begins with freeing your mind, and freeing your mind could begin with this book. The case is almost overstated, but since I am already starting to see through the mythology that keeps us all oppressed, it may be my subjective impression. Recommended for all who are brave enough to be responsible for their own lives instead of running to mommy or daddy government to settle all their problems.

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## **Frank Mueller says**

The book has some excellent ideas about the expression of politics where one's belief system can form a mode of confirmation bias that creates a shared illusion forming questioning certain beliefs about authority as taboo. This is a creative and positive aspect of the book. The writing also conflates leadership with authority at times and does not differentiate between the two modes of behavior. This create a duplicitous presentation from the author where they attempt to lead the reader while at the same attempting to avert being seen as authoritative.

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## **Steven says**

One of the most important books I've ever read.

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## **Dave Burns says**

In "The Most Dangerous Superstition," by Larken Rose, the author claims that "[t]he distinguishing feature of 'government' is that it is thought to have the moral \*right\* to give and enforce commands. [...] What distinguishes a street gang from 'government' is how they are perceived by the people they control." That communicates the basic insight of the book. Rose denies the existence of authority, defined as this moral right to command, and a corresponding obligation of ordinary persons to obey.

Government is not the ultimate problem, the problem is how we fool ourselves: "the primary danger posed by the myth of 'authority' is to be found [...] in the minds of those \*being controlled\*." "[T]he underlying problem is never the particular people in power. The underlying problem resides in the minds of the people being oppressed." "If the people continue to adhere to the myth of 'authority,' after any upheaval of a particular regime they will simply create a new set of masters to replace the old set." This myth resists efforts to debunk it: "Even the most heinous examples of man's inhumanity to man, committed in the name of 'authority,' rarely persuade anyone to question the idea of 'authority' per se. Instead, it leads them only to oppose a \*particular\* set of tyrants."

The author wants to expose the psychological process that people use to rationalize the status quo and avoid dealing with the truth underneath the myth. "[O]nly a small percentage of the coercion of 'government' is implemented by the enforcers of 'authority'; most of it is implemented by its \*victims\*." Victims "lack the \*mental\* ability to resist" tyranny. We live in a crowdsourced panopticon, a prison where the inmates are the guards. "Large scale oppression [...] depends a lot more on mind control than it does on body control. Those who crave dominion gain much more power by convincing their victims that it is \*wrong\* to disobey their commands than by convincing their victims that it is merely \*dangerous\* (but moral) to disobey." Unfortunately, the book does not reveal any deep psychological principle that can help us avoid such error. Rose cites psychological research such as the Milgram experiment, but gives no hint how to overcome the tendencies he discusses. (Michael Huemer's book "The Problem of Authority" deals with similar topics as Rose's book, but takes a less strident tone, as is appropriate for an academic philosopher.)

He attacks the idea of the "consent of the governed": "If there is mutual consent, it is not 'government'; if there is governing, there is no consent. [...] Whoever has the right to make the rules for a particular place is, by definition, the owner of that place." This "logically implies that everything in the 'country' is the property of the politicians." "If the organization called 'government' stopped using any threats or violence, except to defend against aggressors, it would cease to be 'government'." What if governments took the consent of the governed seriously, allowing them some reasonable way to opt out?

Rose emphasizes the distinction between morality and obedience: "Morality and obedience are often direct opposites." That is, in some cases one must disobey authorities in order to act morally.

Rose denies the possibility of a gradual transition from tyranny to freedom: "If 'authority' outranks conscience, then the common folk are all the property of the ruling class, in which case freedom cannot and should not exist. If, on the other hand, conscience outranks 'authority,' then each person owns himself, and each must always follow his own judgement of right and wrong, no matter what any self-proclaimed 'authority' or 'law' may command. There cannot be a gradual shift between the two, nor can there be a compromise." From the standpoint of a particular person this is true, but society is composed of many persons, not all of whom will experience their epiphany at the same time. And even if we did, we would then face a Hayekian challenge of creating new voluntary institutions to replace the old coercive ones. Some people need more than a book full of interesting ideas before they will be willing to gamble on something new. They need to see examples of people actually cooperating and succeeding without coercion. Supersaturated solution crystallizes, or seed sprouts and blooms?

Rose disregards politics: "Voting is an act of aggression" because elections "are about arguing over how everyone should be \*forced\* to behave" and what they must support financially. "There is a mind-bogglingly huge disconnect between what the average person views as 'civilized behavior' on an individual basis, and what he views as legitimate and civilized when it comes to the actions of 'authority'" and they "demand that 'government' do things they would never dream of doing on their own." "[I]f the goal is individual freedom, 'political action' is not only worthless, it is hugely counterproductive, because the main thing it accomplishes is to legitimize the ruling class's power." Anyone who plays the game of politics will "aggravate the problem by inadvertently legitimizing the system of domination and subjugation which wears the label of 'government'."

But if voting can strengthen statism, shouldn't there be some opposite activity that weakens it? Let's call it Countervoting. What would it look like? It would reinforce a person's conscience, while weakening her desire to obey authority mindlessly. It would provide a way to hack the panopticon. Rose did not mention that idea in the book, Countervoting is my concept, but perhaps he would say reading his book is a form of Countervoting. But I want something just like voting, a ritual that naturally tends to move your mind toward

autonomy, in spite of whatever thoughts you may consciously think while participating, just as I can think "government stinks" while casting my ballot.

Rose's prescription to cure society's illness is vague and negative:

"The ultimate solution is negative and passive: Stop advocating aggression against your neighbors. Stop engaging in rituals that condone the initiation of violence and reinforce the notion that some people have the right to rule. Stop thinking and speaking and acting in ways that reinforce the myth that normal people should be, and must be, beholden to some master, and should obey such a master rather than follow their own consciences." "[W]hen even a significant minority of people outgrow the superstition, and change their behavior accordingly, the world will drastically change." Freedom seekers can "achieve it without the need for any election or revolution."

What sort of behavior change does he mean? He gives us vague hints: "If people truly understood [...] they would simply stop surrendering their property to the political parasites." But the "idea of disobeying 'authority' [...] is more disturbing to them than the idea of being a slave." Rose seems to recommend non-compliance and disobedience. He has demonstrated this himself, and spent time in prison for failure to pay income tax. This has little appeal as a strategy.

And noncompliance can come only after enlightenment. How do we build an alternative paradigm in people's minds? The language and behavior of the dominant paradigm work to reinforce it. How can we resist this indoctrination? Perhaps Rose thinks everyone should read his book and adopt Rose's new paradigm. But many will not read this book, and for reasons he discusses in the book, those that read the book who are not already convinced are not very likely to change their minds. (Jonathan Haidt's book, "The Righteous Mind," gives some theories about why this is true, where it comes from, and what Rose might want to try to do about it.)

We need more than disobedience, and less. We already have plenty of disobedience, in the form of black market participation, drug use and sales, illegal gambling, prostitution, and other victimless crimes. What we need is a way to get all those "criminals" to understand Rose's idea. But they won't read his book, they have political biases, and they are unlikely to act on an untested idea. We need a way for them to participate directly, to create temporary autonomous zones, to protect each other from violence, and then turn the TAZs into permanent autonomous zones. We need to sell them safety and freedom, show them examples of people living peaceful, cooperative lives without coercion. We need to crowdsource the free zone. Rose's book gives us little help with that, it is all theory, no practice.

Authority has already lost, according to Rose, because it is an illusion. "If the alleged 'authority' upon which the entire concept of 'government' relies is merely an illusion [...], then saying that society cannot exist without 'government' is exactly as reasonable as saying that Christmas cannot occur without Santa Claus. Society \*already\* exists without 'government', and has from the beginning." This sounds absurd, so what does he mean? He means that we have lied to ourselves about how society works, what society is. He means that the organization we call government is actually something else, a polite Mafia with good public relations. He means that when enough of us are willing to give it a try, we may find that cooperation beats coercion.

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**Britta Heinitz says**

This is a fantastic book. I was a "libertarian before I read this book. This book pushed me over the edge to full blown anarchist.

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### **William Kiely says**

Insightful, but poorly argued.

Much better is anarcho-capitalist Prof. Michael Huemer's book *The Problem of Political Authority*, which argues for the same thesis that governments lack political authority, but in a much more rigorous and persuasive way.

Huemer's book is my favorite book defending libertarian anarchism.

More detailed review on Amazon and my blog:

[https://peacerequiresanarchy.wordpres...](https://peacerequiresanarchy.wordpress...)

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### **David says**

If nothing else, this book will make you think. It is a must-read for every government employee and law enforcer! Are you doing what you know to be morally right, or are you blindly obeying what you perceive as authority, even though it is telling you to do what you know to be morally wrong? That is the question which each of us must answer for ourselves. But, do we realize we need to \*ask\* that question?!

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### **Ron Shoemaker says**

This may be the best non-fiction book I have ever read. I will just give you one excerpt from it:

“In truth, if anything is a sin, it is blind obedience to "authority." Acting as an enforcer for "government" amounts to spiritual suicide—actually worse than physical suicide, because every authoritarian "enforcer" not only shuts off the free will and ability to judge which make him human (thus "killing" his own humanity) but also leaves his body intact, to be used by tyrants as a tool for oppression. To be a "law enforcer" is to willingly change one's self from a person into a robot—a robot which is then given to some of the most evil people in the world, to be used to dominate and subjugate the human race. Wearing the uniform of a soldier or the badge of a "law enforcer" is not a reason for pride; it should be cause for great shame at having forsaken one's own humanity in favor of becoming a pawn of oppressors.”

“I have rights that you don't. You must do as I say, submit to my commands, and treat me as your superior, because I am not a mere human being. I have risen above that. Through my unquestioning obedience and loyalty to my masters, I have become a piece of the superhuman entity called 'government' and act on its 'authority.' As a result, the rules of human morality do not apply to me, and my actions should not be judged by the usual standards of human behavior.”

“Mortals cannot alter morality any more than they can alter the laws of mathematics. Their understanding of



## **Dabooda says**

The book's title is not an exaggeration. It exposes a superstition that virtually all of us are taught from our infancy, and few of us ever outgrow. Do you think you have put all the fables of your childhood behind you, along with Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny? Have you grown up to become an independent-minded adult? Reading this book is a good way to find out.

Little children learn morality from their parents: things are good or bad because Mommy and Daddy SAID so. A little later, they may be taught that things are good or bad because God SAID so, in some Holy Book. And still later, when they are taught "civics" in government schools, they will be taught that things are good or bad because "It's the law." (And it's GOOD to obey the law, BAD to break it.) But "the law" is just whatever politicians SAY it is.

A person becomes an adult when outgrows the need to be given moral commandments from people he thinks of as "authorities," and learns to judge for himself what is right or wrong.

The "most dangerous superstition" referred to in the title is the idea of "authority," which includes all belief in "government." No, that's not a "spoiler;" this is something Rose lays out on Page 2 of the book. He doesn't deny that all the legislators, police, bureaucrats and soldiers exist -- they clearly do. But the thing that makes "government" something more than a gang of thugs is the respect -- even reverence -- in which it is held by the people it rules. "Government" is commonly believed to have a RIGHT to rule us, and we commonly believe ourselves to have a DUTY to obey their commands (which are called "laws.") Rose unleashes a ferocious array of arguments proving that neither that RIGHT nor that DUTY can logically -- or morally -- exist. If that sounds silly to you, YOU need to read the book.

This is a remarkable book, remarkable for its honesty, its logic, its passion and the profound importance of its conclusions. There is also much to admire in Rose's clear, concise writing. He discusses important ideas in clear, everyday language, without bogging down in philosophical technicalities or becoming boring. It is an exciting book, filled with purely brilliant insight -- but don't be surprised if you find yourself fighting the relentless logic of his conclusions so that you can't read more than a few pages at a time.

It is also a very important book, important the way Atlas Shrugged -- or Tom Paine's Common Sense -- are important. The most dangerous superstition IS dangerous because it enslaves our minds, which leads to the enslavement of our whole lives. This is a book to set us free.

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## **Clay says**

I received this book as a gift from an online acquaintance with the agreement that I would read it and give it to someone after finishing it.

Rose is an anarchist, and a passionate one. I found his arguments engaging, polemic, and in the end unconvincing. His entire premise is that "authority" does not exist, and he is right. If everyone stopped believing in authority, it would vanish. However, I think that some paradigms, even though not 100% true, are useful. We wander through life with half truths all the time and many times these half truths benefit us.

Larken uses the words violence, tyranny and other such terms with wild abandon and I think they are a



misrepresentation of reality.

Even though I do not agree with Larken end vision, I feel like he forced me to confront some very important ideas, but I was left feeling unsatisfied.

I need to complete the second part of this agreement and give it to someone. So - if someone is willing to read this book and then give it to another person, let me know, and I will give/ship it to you.

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### **Tomas says**

It seems that author of this book and I are living in a different worlds. I have never experienced that kind of oppression or abuse from "authority" that he talks about. I never felt that my taxes are going to waste or many other things that author talks about. Maybe things are different in America, but down here in liberal Europe things are not so grim therefore many of his points are moot.

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### **Michelle says**

This book could literally change your life. Larken Rose argues that 'authority' is a figment of our imagination. More than that, is it a superstition (the most dangerous superstition) which has allowed governments to form and undertake all manner of atrocities. Consider for a moment that all people were actually equal, literally. No person, be it a police officer or other government authority, had the right to kidnap you (detain), rob you (tax) or otherwise forcibly coerce you into anything you felt was morally wrong. In fact, Rose presents many examples where just because an authority (the government) decrees something (laws) is illegal that it is therefore wrong or immoral, e.g. prohibition of alcohol. But when the opinion of 'government' shifts and a law is repealed it is no longer wrong or immoral. Alternatively, he very effectively uses slavery as an example where it was actually legal (and therefore moral) to 'own' slaves and illegal (and therefore immoral) to help slaves at that time. He goes further and argues that those in 'authority' have no more rights than you as a human being. If you do not have the right to rob, restrain, imprison or murder someone, neither does anyone else, even if some 'authority' says they do. It sounds simple, right? But it is a real shift in thinking when you apply it to our everyday life. This book is not perfect. It is at times repetitive and the free on-line copy I read was riddled with typos, but that is not the point. This book is designed to challenge you, to make you angry and to make you question everything you have been taught as a 'good, tax-paying, law abiding citizen'. You might not agree with Rose's premise, but if you read this with an open-mind you can't help but view the world in a different manner after reading it. After all, if you don't trust your neighbours to act in a decent, moral manner when given actual free will (anarchy), why would you trust a group of people (government) to act in a decent, moral manner when they have the 'authority' to do whatever they choose?

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