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Ideological Positioning

A colleague mentioned to me the other day that I'm "pretty conservative" on some state and local government issues, with reference to some recent posts on occupational licensing. Someone on twitter asked if I'm trying to score a date with a Cato staffer. I'm not. And I'm not. And I think that whole framing represents a bad way of understanding the whole situation.

I think it's pretty clear that, as a historical matter of fact, the main thing "the state" has been used to do is to help the wealthy and powerful further enrich and entrench themselves. Think Pharaoh and his pyramids. Or more generally the fancy houses of European nobility, the plantations of Old South slaveowners, or Imelda Marcos' shoes. The "left-wing" position is to be against this stuff—to be on the side of the people and against the forces of privilege. It's true that *some* useful egalitarian activism over the past 150 years has consisted of trying to get the state to take affirmative steps to help people—social insurance, the welfare state, infrastructure, schools—but dismantling efforts to use the state to help the privileged has always been on the agenda. Don't think to yourself "we need to regulate carbon emissions therefore regulation is good therefore regulation of barbers is good." Think to yourself "we can't let the privileged trample all over everyone, therefore we need to regulate carbon emissions and we need to break the dentists' cartel."

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