

WHAT ARE LIBERTARIANISM, ANYWAY?



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THE LIBERTAS STATEMENT

We, as libertarians, affirm:

That full individual liberty is impossible in any society other than a voluntary one that aggresses upon no one:

That men and women require the full and independent use of their own judgement in order to survive at an optimum level, and therefore have a natural right to do their own thing, providing that they do not physically harm or coercively restrict another individual's life, liberty or property.

That everyone is exclusively sovereign, and is a slave to no one.

That the individual is best served by society when he or she is free from the forcefully imposed controls of others, acting alone or in concert (as a government).

That all forms of coercion, aggression and fraud are always immoral.

That the only system consistent with personal freedoms in the economic arena is one that does not interfere with free trade between consenting individuals.

HEREFORE, we, as libertarians, resolve to oppose all forms of aggression by any State Government, self-organized service, individual or association of individuals. We further resolve to oppose taxation, criminal or civil domain, laws which create victimless "crimes," and all programs forced upon individuals without their consent. It is time that the chains of authoritarianism in economics and morality be broken. Individual rights and coercion cannot co-exist. Liberty cannot be compromised, and we will settle for no less than freedom in our time.

(adapted on May 5, 1973)

libertarianism uphold a free society as a guiding light, a standard for action. He/she may do so by individual effort or by cooperation with others. The total amount of freedom thereby released may not be apparent to all observers, however. Indeed, it is possible that the libertarian and the observer may see the whole in a similar manner, but weigh the alternatives or judge the consequences differently. This is a matter of subjective judgment which in the spirit of freedom should be left for each person to consider. However accomplished, the goal is to free mankind (both the individual and society) from the mad Moloch, the state.

Libertarianism is not a single, unified philosophy. Rather, libertarianism is an umbrella concept under whose cover many approaches and schools of thought blossom forth. Libertarianism embraces all of the philosophies that seek to restrict the sphere of state action and release the free modes of social action. What are libertarianism? *Libertarianism are the philosophies of freedom!*

FOOTNOTE

1. Arthur Eddington, "Philosophy of Physical Science" (Ann Arbor: V. of Mich. Press, 1967), pp. 16-19.

Kenneth R. Gregg, Jr. is considered as one of the most authoritative historians on the early American and English libertarian movements. Gregg presently lives in the Los Angeles area.

"The libertarian is in no sense a utopian. He argues only that in a world in which each imperfect individual was left free to make his own imperfect decisions and to act on them in any way that was peaceful, enjoying the fruits of his successes and suffering the agony of his mistakes, man could at least fully attain to the dignity and tragedy and comedy that comes with being a man rather than a thing."

Benjamin A. Rogge
"The Freeman"
October, 1969

WHAT ARE LIBERTARIANISM, ANYWAY?

Let us suppose that an ichthyologist (fish scientist) is exploring the life of the ocean. He casts a net into the water and brings up a fishy assortment. Surveying his catch, he arrives at two generalizations:

- (1) No sea-creature is less than two inches long.
- (2) All sea-creatures have gills.

An onlooker may object: "...There are plenty of sea-creatures under two inches long, only your net is not adapted to catch them."

The ichthyologist dismisses this objection contemptuously: "Anything uncatchable by my net is *ipso facto* outside the scope of ichthyological knowledge... In short, what my net can't catch isn't fish."

A more tactful onlooker makes a rather different suggestion: "May I point out that you could have arrived more easily at the same generalization by examining the net and the method of using it? The net can never bring up anything that it is not adapted to catch."¹

Indeed, there are many *ichthyologists* of libertarianism who claim that libertarianism is tied to: individualism, Austrian or Chicagoan economics, egoism, utopianism, nihilism, anarchism, a night-watchman state, ... Well, the list is innumerable. For libertarians expound a wide range of philosophies in many different areas: metaphysics, ethics, economics, structure of government, strategy. There are Aristotelians, Kantians, existentialists, Christians, deists, who would agree on little else except restricting the sphere of governmental activity. There are libertarians who are socialists, syndicalists, mutualists, cooperativists, capitalists, and those who adhere to almost every economic policy. There are anarchists, Georgeists, voluntarists, advocates of night-watchman state. There are libertarians who wish to create a free society through education, political activism, creating free-port enclaves, and many other techniques.

Each of these; libertarian socialist, free market economist, objectivist, Christian libertarian, anarcho-capitalist, and others who regard themselves as libertarians have **only one point** in common: opposition to an expanded sphere of activity by the government. They identify the focus of harm in society with the government. All of the different schools within libertarian thought interface in one area: opposition to the government (although *not necessarily* total rejection of

government, which would be anarchism--one subset of the wider umbrella concept of libertarianism) and a demand for the limitation of state activity.

SOCIETY VERSUS THE STATE

For libertarians, statist intervention constitutes the ultimate source of both stratified class relationships and the consequent economic exploitation of one class by another. Statist intervention inevitably transforms a free society from a matrix of purely economic means for the acquisition and preservation of wealth to a system infused with the principles and institutions of the political means. The economic means involve the acquisition of wealth through one's own labor and all subsequent voluntary exchanges, while the political means covers all other methods of acquiring wealth. The latter, therefore, encompasses the direct or indirect expropriation of previously produced wealth either through direct coercion or threat of coercion. The prevalent method of expropriation (and hence exploitation) is taxation. Taxation is also the source of other indirect forms of intervention which, in turn, leads to even greater exploitation.

While a free society represents the institutionalization of the economic means, the government is the organization of the political means. The introduction of the political means into a society creates a system of statism, i.e., a society with increasing elements of monopoly and class privilege incorporated within it. The state is antithetical to society and statist intervention produces a hampered social structure: a system of monopoly privilege, the systematization of exploitation and class antagonisms.

As long as the use of the political means continues, social evolution will be shaped by a process of class conflict. The state, as the institutionalization of the political means, necessarily generates a process of continuing class conflict since the political means, by its very nature, creates a series of negative sum relation-

ships. That is, one individual or group gains only at the expense of another. This is in comparison to the economic means where all exchanges lead to increased benefits for all participants entering into them, otherwise the exchange would not be consummated in the first place. Antagonistic interests, therefore, emerge from the application of the political means and between those who gain from the use of the political means and those whose wealth is expropriated.

The beneficiaries of the political means in a society are dependent on the existence of the economic means in order to survive and prosper. The political means presupposes the economic means since the political means alone is unproductive and parasitic, whereas the economic means can exist and, in fact, thrives best in the absence of the political means. In this sense, there is always a conflict between society and the state.

LIBERTARIAN THEORY VS LIBERTARIAN SENTIMENTS

There is an important distinction to make at this juncture between libertarian theory and libertarian sentiments. For there are many philosophies which, while opposing the current state, would, if the opportunity came to pass, enable their exponents to seek to take over the state apparatus or become successful in establishing their own state mechanism, and not only fail to minimize the sphere of state activity, but seek to entrench the state into every realm of human action.

A litmus test is available in the form of a question. Do the proponents of a given school of thought justify *any* statist intervention? If the answer is yes, then the exponents are *not* libertarians, although they may have libertarian sentiments. *Only* if they oppose all statist action, could they be considered proponents of a libertarian theory.

Once the Pandora's Box of statism is opened with a single intervention, it sets in motion a process of retrogression from a free society to a system characterized by an increasingly statist set of relationships. The political means inevitably distorts the social mechanisms necessary for the successful operation of the economic means in a society. Distortion of the decision-making processes produces dislocations which necessitate one of two actions: either the initial intervention through the political means must be eliminated or additional intervention will be introduced in an effort to remove the existing dislocation. Rather than attempting to remove the original causes of these distortions, the response of governmental policy makers is normally to expand government intervention in the society, thereby aggravating the original distortions even further.

WHAT ARE LIBERTARIANISM?

Libertarianism is a direction, a movement toward freedom and away from statism. Those who uphold

