

power elite the delusion that they are better than they actually are while making everyone else think that they are less than they actually are. Thus involuntary socialism and other forms of slavery prevent the achievement of *both* human prosperity and human happiness.

#### Rights and Force

Rights are violated in essentially one way: by the use or threat of force against a peaceful individual. This is called *the initiation of force*.

To *initiate* force is to use it for the first time against another who has not used it; for example, to attack an innocent victim. The main categories of initiatory force are the principal aggressions: murder, theft, kidnapping, rape, embezzlement, fraud and war.

The initiation of force robs an individual of his right to control his own destiny and hence undermines the basis for rational and humane society. Initiatory force or aggressions should thus be denounced by men whenever they occur and prohibited by all societies.

However, while it is a violation of an individual's rights to initiate force against them, it is no violation of rights to defend oneself from an aggressor. Hence libertarians are not pacifists and extol the concept of self-defense or *retaliatory force* although they are very careful in distinguishing between aggression and self-defense.

Rational and moral self-defense in essence constrains you to (1) not harm innocent bystanders, (2) use the minimal amount of force necessary to defend yourself and/or recover any property that was stolen, and (3) abstain from inflicting further damages upon your assailant.

This means that libertarians oppose such things as police dragnets, the brutalization of prisons, massive retaliation and vengeance.

#### Freedom and Rights

So long as men deal with each other voluntarily, respecting each other's rights and abstaining from initiating force against each other, they are free.

The free society is ruled by one cardinal principle: "Respect the rights of others, then do what you please." To the extent that this principle is observed by men, they and their societies are free. To the extent that it is violated, they and their societies are enslaved.

In a practical sense, this is what human rights mean: You are morally free to run your own business your own way, dress as you please, sleep with whom you please, take LSD or rat poison if you like and keep 100% of your income. You may be wise or foolish in your actions, but any man who tries to run your life for you, whether he is your next door neighbor or the President of the United States is an aggressor, pure and simple.

#### The Decline of Rights In America

It is obvious that human rights in America today are violated in many ways. Your right to life is violated when the government compels you to spend 12 years of your life in schools it runs, studying subjects it decrees. Your right to liberty is violated by the petty bureaucrats who tell you that you cannot smoke marijuana or sleep with your girlfriend or boyfriend. And your right to property is violated by all of the politicians who think that they have the right to spend 45% of your income (the present average amount paid in taxes) for you, simply because they donate a few pennies from each dollar to "the needy".

But *morality is not statistical*. If it is wrong for one man to enslave you or to steal your pay check, then it is also wrong for one million people calling themselves "the government" to do so. The grouping of men into a collective does not endow them with rights which they do not otherwise possess or endow them with an authority that they would not otherwise have. If your next door neighbor does not have a right to force you to live as he pleases at the point of a gun, then neither does a Supreme Court judge or a policeman. A peaceful and beneficent social order does not depend upon unthinking obedience to laws which tell you to surrender your freedom and property upon demand. Social peace and prosperity depend rather upon the mutual respect of all men for each others' rights.

#### The Promise of Human Rights

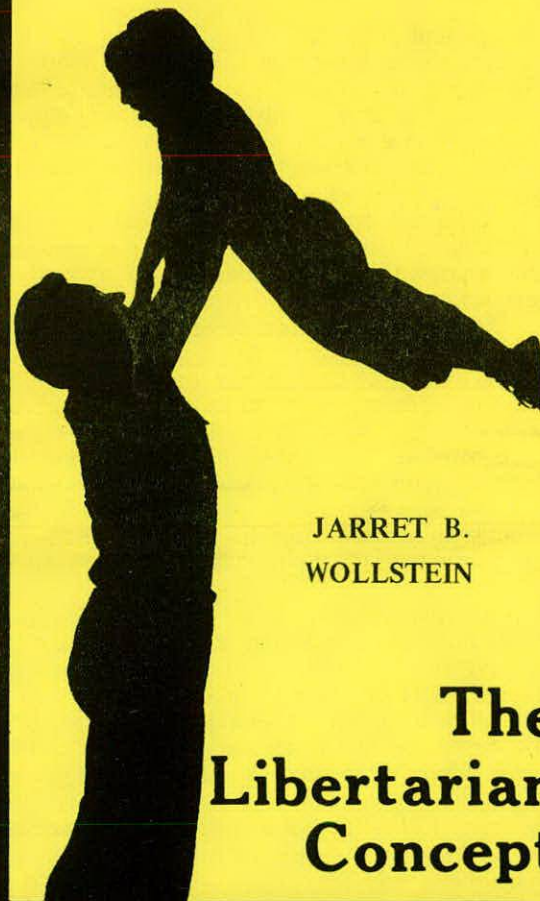
If you study history and the world about you you will discover that human beings live in the greatest misery and poverty in precisely those countries in which human rights are not respected or have never been discovered. Principally these are socialist and communist countries—despite their rhetoric of "social rights" and justice. Consider the evidence.

The worst dictatorships in the history of the world—Nazi (or "National Socialist") Germany, Communist China, Soviet Russia, Socialist Cambodia, and so on—have all been socialist countries. Throughout the world—in Britain, in Italy, in Uganda—societies tetter on the brink of collapse because they have sacrificed the rights of the individual to the so-called "good of society".

Freedom and prosperity are inseparable. Only by upholding and respecting the right of all individuals to their own life, liberty and property can humane and just societies be achieved upon this earth.

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# HUMAN RIGHTS



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## The Libertarian Concept

**SOCIETY FOR  
INDIVIDUAL  
LIBERTY**

## HUMAN RIGHTS

The most fundamental ethical issue for our time or for any other time is that of "human rights".

The great conflicts in history—revolutions against tyrants, civil wars, and world wars—have been fought in the name of human rights. And the battles still continue. If man is to ever live in peace, it is imperative that the concept of "human rights"—proclaimed by all, yet understood by few—be precisely and rationally formulated.

### The Concept of Rights

The basic libertarian concept of rights is as old as man and in essence it is quite simple. Rights are simply *the principle* that to be happy and prosper each individual should be secure in his person and property from violence by other men, and should be free to live his own life as he sees fit.

There are three fundamental and inter-related rights: life, liberty and property—rights proclaimed and espoused by humanitarians and advocates of reason from Aristotle, to Thomas Paine, to Thoreau.

The *right to life* means that each individual should be left alone—to think, believe, and act as he sees fit—so long as he respects the same right of others.

The *right to liberty* means that each individual should be free to act in pursuit of his own chosen ends, to move freely and unimpeded, and to associate and trade with whom he pleases.

The *right to property* means that each individual should be free to enjoy the fruits of his labor and the products of his thought, without interference by others.

It is important to point out that one's human rights mean *the freedom to engage in those actions* one chooses to sustain one's life and achieve goals. The principle of rights are not a guarantee that one will be successful in that endeavor. Thus the right to life means the right to sustain one's own life without being subject to violence by others. It does not mean the right to force others to provide the necessities and luxuries of life. Rights are essentially the freedom to be left alone to act; they are not a sanction for coercing others.

Because man is a material being, he requires material objects for his sustenance and support. Thus the concept of human rights necessarily includes the concept of *property rights: the right to acquire, use, and dispose of material objects*. As many others have observed, freedom of speech is meaningless without the right to rent auditoriums, publish newspapers and sell books. Freedom of association is meaningless without the right to form clubs and organize businesses, and travel without restriction. And the right to life itself is virtually meaningless without the right to own clothing and houses, grow food and own tools.

The rights to life, liberty and property are said to be inalienable because rights are a *principle*—not a possession—and the principle of rights is always true, regardless of how people actually behave.

### The Justification for Rights

Libertarians are individualists and espouse the principle that the primary concern for each individual should be the achievement of his own happiness. Thus libertarians argue for rights *not* on the basis that they are values for other people, whom one has a duty to make happy, but that the observance of rights and recognition of them by society is in *one's own* enlightened self-interest.

Rights are in fact based upon man's nature (and thus said to be "natural"). The distinguishing fact of man's nature, what separates man from the animals (his species identity, as it were), is his *rationality*.

Unlike animals, who compete for a static food supply and for survival in an often hostile environment, men have the capacity first to understand nature and then to use their knowledge to create tools and to productively work to transform the raw materials of nature into wealth for their use.

But to learn and produce, men must be free from the violence of their fellows. Men cannot create and produce if they are imprisoned or killed for unconventional ideas and if the fruits of their labors are confiscated from them by robbers or tax collectors. Human society and the bounty it provides all men are dependent upon social peace, and it is to men's common interest to respect each others' lives and property.

Further as a rational being, the values of human existence are not simply material, but psychological and social as well. Men value not just food, clothing and shelter, but also the admiration of their fellows, friendship and love. Admiration, friendship and love can only flourish when men do not perceive each other as threats to their lives and property. To the extent that an individual engages in aggressive activity, like theft or murder, he makes honesty and openness with other men impossible, and thus estranges himself from the benevolent society of peaceful, mutually trusting men.

There is also a natural relationship between an individual and his property. A man naturally comes to own property when he causes changes in previously unowned objects, creating a relationship between himself and the object by "mixing his labor with it". Individuals who engage in theft are violating this natural relationship, which explains why most thieves feel, without being taught, that they are "doing something wrong" and unconsciously try to get caught.

Finally, to be fully human means being as fully conscious of the nature of the world and other human beings as possible. Aggressive violations of the rights of other human beings are only possible

if one denies the value and hence the humanity of others. But human beings have a common species identity (in addition to individual characteristics) and by denying the value and humanity of others, one effectively denies the value and humanity of oneself—a sure formula for mental illness.

### Rights and Human Action

The principle of rights provides an unequivocal guide to proper human action.

All that which an individual possesses by right (including his own life and property) are morally his to use, dispose of and even destroy, as he sees fit.

If I own my own life, then it follows that I am morally free to associate with whom I please.

If I own my own ideas and labor, it follows that I may *ask* any compensation I wish when trading them with another.

If I own my own property, it follows that I may decorate it as I please and live in it with whom I please; if I own my own business, it follows that I may charge what I please for my products and services, hire whom I please *on my own terms*, and keep all of my income.

It is important to recognize that rights are a relationship of *exclusive* ownership or control, and therefore for anyone to attempt to limit my ownership or control of my own property in the slightest degree is for them (to that extent) to prevent my exercise of my rights.

This is the crucial dividing line between my human rights and yours. I have a right to control *my own* property—you do not have a right to control my property. Whether I am rational or irrational, fair or unfair, wise or stupid in the disposition of my property, it remains *my* property.

The only alternative to *individual* control of property, is collective control of property, but this is tantamount to the abrogation of all rights. If some committee or collective controls where I work, what I wear, whether I can travel, what I may say, whether I can contract or trade with others, what I study at school, what is done with my income, and so on (as is the case in communist and socialist countries) it is clear that I have no freedom whatsoever and I am, in fact, a slave. If I am subject to only some of these restrictions, then I am a *partial slave*.

Libertarians oppose slavery on the grounds that (1) no man has a right to control the life or property of another, (2) the individual can most effectively pursue his own happiness, (3) slavery keeps men in an essentially juvenile state by not allowing them responsibility for their own lives and freedom, preventing their psychological and social development, (4) by centralizing power and decision-making, slavery is economically inefficient, and (5) slavery is psychologically debilitating since it allows the