

WHAT IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERTARIANISM?

Philosophers have long recognized that the greatest enemy man faces in his search for freedom and prosperity is himself. Having conquered all the natural enemies in his environment long ago, man faces extinction or enslavement by his own species. Nuclear war and the ecological crisis are just two of the more obvious manifestations of the threat created by human irrationality and aggression. More subtle, but just as fundamentally sinister, are the violent and destructive passions of men which impel them to violent crime and authoritarian laws. For centuries men of conscience have protested the injustices of their societies and sought a better world. All too often their ideals have remained unpursued dreams or been corrupted to create doctrines and institutions of human repression. But despite mistakes, progress has been made, and the search must go on if man is not to regress to the cave. It is the force of man's ideals which impel him forward and libertarianism is one of those ideals.

Libertarianism is a modern philosophy of individual liberty. Libertarianism holds that if man is to prosper and be free it is the enslavement of his brothers from which he must first be liberated. The libertarian ideology begins with the moral premise that every individual has an inalienable right to his own life, which he should be able to live as he sees fit, so long as he does not aggress against others. By extension, libertarianism holds that every individual has an inalienable right to the products of his actions, i.e. his justly acquired property, which is morally his to use and dispose of as he sees fit. Libertarianism holds that man's rights to life, liberty and property are ethically part of his nature which cannot be properly violated by any other individual or group. Thus libertarianism holds that any attempt to take any portion of an individual's services or property from him without his free consent is a violation of his rights and a moral abomination, inherently destructive of any free and prosperous society - regardless of whether the aggressor is an individual, a criminal gang, or a government. As libertarians, we hold that the same moral principles which apply to individuals apply to social groups as well - that acts which are immoral for private individuals acting on their own authority are equally immoral for social institutions acting with the support of the majority of their society.

Libertarianism is for any form of human relationship or social institution which is peaceful and voluntary, such as the free market, trade, voluntary

communes, private enterprise, or syndicalism. Conversely, libertarianism is opposed to anything that is violent and coercive - a regulated market, state socialism, militarism, theft, etc.

Libertarianism is politically neither left nor right. Like the political left, libertarians oppose the draft, censorship, the Asian war, the military/industrial complex, laws against recreational drugs, and police repression. Like the political right, libertarianism opposes taxation, anti-trust laws, wage/price controls, and so on. Libertarianism is explicitly anti-political.

Libertarian theorists are quick to point out that the present political-economic system in the United States has very little to do with the ideal of a free society. As Gabriel Kolko has documented in his work "The Triumph of Conservatism", the free market does not inherently lead to centralization, but that monopoly is rather a product of governmental regulatory bodies which protect established big business from new entrants into the market (even while claiming that they are promoting "competition"). Similarly, libertarian syndicalists have little sympathy with Chinese and Cuban regimes with their tremendous centralization of power in the government. Libertarians seek a society in which individuals are free to run their own lives - not one in which men are ruled either by collusion between big corporations and the state or by edicts of ideologues acting in the name of "the people". It is clear that a libertarian society lies in the future rather than in the past.

There are two main libertarian views of the nature of the society which should replace the present coercive ones: One group, limited-governmentalists hold with novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand that there should be a government whose sole function is the protection of individuals from aggressors. They argue that the best guarantee of justice would be in a state restricted to a police force, court system, and armed forces. The second major group of libertarians, the anarcho-capitalists, reject government altogether. They argue that since every individual has the same moral right of action as any other individual there can be no such thing as a social institution with the unique or final authority to deal with aggressors. They hold that a "limited government" cannot morally prevent other groups from offering the same defensive services. Thus, anarcho-capitalists maintain that social defense should be regarded as a service, just like anything else, and that in any given geographic area there may well exist competing agencies of defense. With the exception of this difference, both limited-

governmentalists and anarcho-capitalists are in complete agreement about the nature of a free society: In such a society, everything from education, to the minting of money, to road construction, to welfare would be voluntary enterprises. Libertarians consider taxation and any other form of involuntary financing immoral, inefficient, and unnecessary. (Alternative methods of financing "public services" are presented in libertarian works such as FOR A NEW LIBERTY, THE MARKET FOR LIBERTY, UNCLE SAM THE MONOPOLY MAN, PUBLIC SERVICES UNDER LAISSEZ FAIRE, and SOCIETY WITHOUT COERCION.)

The arguments against libertarianism are almost inevitably "practical ones": How would you build roads without eminent domain? Wouldn't people starve without public welfare? How could you defend the country without a draft? Etc. Detailed and specific answers to many such questions are provided in many libertarian works, but one general answer is simply this:

Coercion gives men no special powers or abilities that they do not otherwise possess. All that which is truly worthwhile can be accomplished without aggression. Free men are not idiots - they do not need governments to force them to provide for their education, their sick, their poor, or their old age. Historically, the greatest advancements in human welfare have been made in precisely those periods with the least governmental regulation of human action. The state is the archaic remnant of tribal war lords and witch doctors; the super-parent who tells us that we are not fit to run our own lives. But there comes a time in the life of every man and society when he must leave the stifling safety of a programmed existence, discard the myths of his childhood, and venture forth into the world of an adult. There are, to be sure, risks in abandoning the nest, but no human development is possible without risk. As libertarians we say to the world: Wake up and cut the cord. There is a world of infinite pleasure, variety and adventure open to the man with the courage to be free.

Jarret Wollstein

When it was formed, SIL adopted a "Declaration of Principle". If you find yourself in substantial agreement with these affirmations, and you wish to work to promote awareness and acceptance of the philosophy of Libertarianism, then you belong in the SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY.

S.I.L.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

Adopted October 1969

As Advocates of Individual Liberty We Affirm:

That every man has an inalienable right to his own life, liberty and property;
That the only proper use of force is in retaliation against those who violate man's rights;
That the basic violation of man's rights consists of the initiation or the threat of the initiation of force against the individual;
That all proper social organization can only be a consequence of voluntary association between men;
That the only economic system consistent with human prosperity and happiness is laissez-faire capitalism;
That the ideologies and instrumentalities of coercive collectivism are the basic threat to the rights of man and the existence of moral human societies;
And that both moral men and moral societies have the obligation to act in their own rational self-interest to protect themselves from those who seek to coercively control, direct and enslave them.

With the apostles of coercion increasingly pre-emptive in the councils of man, it is the duty of all those who value their life, liberty and property to take appropriate action - intellectual and social - to preserve and extend their freedom.

We as libertarians resolve to resist all forms of involuntary collectivism and all programs and activities of government which violate our rights and attempt to take from us the ability to set our own goals and to determine our own destiny.

We work for the day when all men are free, and we look forward to a society of peace, plenty and freedom where the individual's rights are truly inalienable. As men of reason and as advocates of liberty, we seek and will settle for no less than:

FREEDOM IN OUR TIME

Society for Individual Liberty

The SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY is a national educational and service organization dedicated to the principles of individualism, rationality and the promotion of personal and social freedoms. The goal of SIL is the creation of a society in America that will practice the principles of laissez-faire with its ethical base of respect for individual rights and non-coercion. Members of SIL, and libertarians in general, believe that individuals should be left to make their own decisions and take their own actions, to trade freely with those whom they bargain with, and to be free of arbitrary force instituted by governments or individuals.

Libertarians are not seeking to impose their ideas or pet schemes on others by force. This, in itself, is a radical departure from most other philosophies on the scene today. As individuals, we seek to leave others alone as long as they leave us alone (laissez-faire). Society today suffers from an over-abundance of busy-bodies who wish to regulate what you read, march you off to war, tell you what to sell to others, or dispose of your income for the latest cause. Where do these people get the supposed "right" to regulate your life?

The SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY is the largest organization of libertarians in the country today working through educational means for a free society. There are approximately 5,000 SIL members and associates working through some 200 libertarian clubs to achieve these ends.

The co-founders and directors of S.I.L. are Donald C. Ernsberger and David K. Walter. S.I.L. was founded in 1969. The distinguished libertarian scholar, Dr. Murray N. Rothbard, serves as chairman of the S.I.L. Academic Advisory Board.

S.I.L. recognizes that the eventual achievement of liberty will occur through three courses of action: through educational activities, activism, and personal liberation by evasion of the coercionists. While S.I.L. prefers to stress education and personal liberation (feeling that many forms of activism are counter-productive at this time) S.I.L. recognizes and works with those whose values or life styles may be different from those of other libertarians. We only demand that they practice and preach the principles of laissez-faire.

Libertarians generally realize that mere talk alone will not create a free society. S.I.L. clubs have a broad range of programs designed to help build a society without coercion. Clubs have worked for abolition of the draft, an end to the senseless Asian War, resistance to taxation, and repeal of victimless crime laws.

One has only one lifetime allotted to him. If one wants FREEDOM IN OUR TIME, one must take those actions most beneficial to creating a free society. Your participation in S.I.L. should be one of those actions.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

SIL has two classes of membership, as described below. Also, as a service to our members, we offer two of the top-rated, independent libertarian journals at 25% off the regular subscription price.

REGULAR MEMBERSHIP - \$4.00 per year

1. INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY, our monthly newsletter, is sent to all members. It covers the activities of the libertarian movement, articles, book reviews and other news of interest to libertarians.
2. SPECIAL BOOK OFFERS are made at least quarterly through the newsletter. SIL members only may receive the discounts offered on the latest libertarian books to be published.
3. SIL sponsors and co-sponsors conferences throughout the country from time to time along with other social events. SIL members always receive discounts on their admission price.
4. Members receive the SIL catalog of issue papers, buttons, posters, etc. that SIL offers for sale at low prices.
5. All SIL members are eligible to participate in the selection of the outstanding libertarian of the year, who is awarded the SIL PHOENIX AWARD.
6. Part of your membership fee goes toward the provision of free literature to campus libertarian groups.

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP - \$15.00 per year

All of the regular membership benefits, plus added book offers and a larger contribution to SIL's campus educational activities.

MAGAZINE SERVICES

You may subscribe to one or more of these top-rated libertarian publications through SIL.

NEW LIBERTARIAN WEEKLY, 50 issues for \$11.25. News of importance to libertarians, science fiction, promotes idea of counter-economy to advance libertarianism. Lists for \$15.

REASON MAGAZINE, 12 issues for \$11.25. Thought-provoking articles which explore the implications and applications of the libertarian point of view. Lists for \$15.

FREE INFORMATION AND HELP TO CLUBS

SIL will be happy to aid libertarians who wish to form libertarian clubs. SIL gives free materials to new clubs and appoints SIL REPRESENTATIVES to start them. SIL also supplies films and tapes for use at campus meetings at a small charge. Use the membership form to secure information.

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Free information:

Send me "SIL REPRESENTATIVE" information.

Send me information on starting a libertarian club.

A membership card will be sent you. Please allow several weeks for processing.

** due to higher postage costs, Canadians must add 75¢ to their dues and other foreigners must add \$1.50.

MEMBERSHIPS:

REGULAR MEMBERSHIP - \$4.00

SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP - \$15.00

INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY subscription only (for those who don't join groups) - \$4.00

EXTRA CONTRIBUTION of \$_____ to aid the educational work of SIL on campuses.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: *

NEW LIBERTARIAN WEEKLY - 1 year - \$11.25 (1st \$15)

REASON MAGAZINE - 1 year - \$11.25 (1st \$15)

* new subscribers only. If you currently subscribe to these magazines, you must renew through them.