

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERTARIANISM

By Jarret B. Wollstein

Philosophers have long recognized that the greatest enemy man faces in his search for freedom and prosperity is himself. Having conquered most natural enemies in his environment, man faces extinction or enslavement from his own species. Nuclear war and ecological catastrophe 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 the most advanced and consistent of those ideals.

Life, Liberty & Property

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 fellows from which he must first be liberated.

The libertarian ideology asserts 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 respects the same right of 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 principles of proper social organization which should not be 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 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.

Libertarians also insist 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 supports the rights of individuals to engage in any form of human relationship or association which is peaceful and voluntary, including the free market, trade, voluntary communes, private enterprise and syndicalism. Conversely, libertarianism is opposed to anything that is violent and coercive—a regulated market, state socialism, militarism, the corporate state, theft and war.

Anti-Politics

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

Libertarian advocates of the free market point out that the present American political-economic system is far removed from their ideal of *laissez faire* capitalism. The free market means no government redistribution of wealth, no subsidies for industry, no minimum wage laws, no government maintained franchise monopolies, and no protection from foreign competition—evils all endemic in America today.

Similarly, libertarian syndicalists have little sympathy with Chinese and Soviet 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 government or by edicts of ideologists acting in the name of "the people". It is clear that a libertarian society lies in the future.

The Libertarian Society

There are two main libertarian views of the nature of the society which should replace the present coercive ones: One group, the limited governmentists, 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 through 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 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, 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.

(Methods of organizing and financing "public services" without government are discussed in detail in a number of libertarian books, including *For A New Liberty*, *The Machinery of Freedom*, *Society Without Coercion*, and *Public Services Under Laissez Faire*.)

Is Libertarianism Practical?

The arguments against libertarianism are almost entirely "practical ones": How could you build roads without eminent domain? Wouldn't the poor and elderly starve without public welfare? How could you defend the country without a tax-supported military? And so on. Detailed and specific answers to all of these questions and many more appear in the many libertarian books and magazines, but one general answer is simply this:

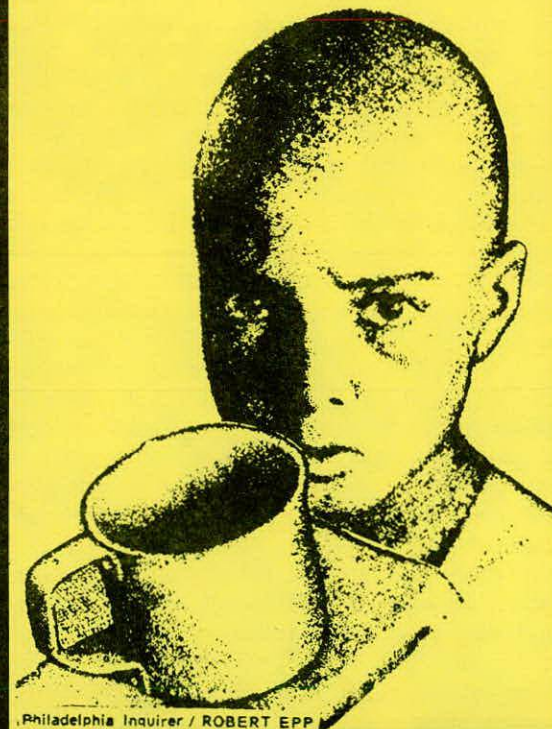
Coercion gives men no special powers or abilities that they do not otherwise possess. All that which is truly worthwhile can be accomplished without aggression. Free men are not idiots or brutes—they do not need governments to force them to provide for their education, their sick, their poor, or for 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 omnipotent state is the archaic remnant of tribal war lords and witch doctors; it is 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 they must leave the stifling safety of a programmed existence, discard the myths of childhood, and venture forth into the world of self-responsible adults. There are, to be sure, risks in abandoning the nursery, 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 person with the courage to be free.

THE INHUMANITY OF WELFARE

DAVID K. WALTER



Philadelphia Inquirer / ROBERT EPP

SOCIETY FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY

THE WELFARE QUESTION

Now that foreign adventurism is rapidly fading as the number one cause celebre, domestic problems are likely to become more important, more talked about, and more subject to governmental "corrective" action.

In this re-ordering of priorities, the question of providing for the material comforts of all Americans is looming once again. The question of Welfare is back in the news as politicians, academics, journalists, recipients and the long-suffering taxpayers rush to lock horns over it. "Welfare is an absolute right and there is no stigma attached to those who receive it," argues one side. Another counters with, "Welfare for those who need it but let's cut out abuses." Some demand various minimum amounts of cash and no questions asked while others would rather provide expensive job training, free child care centers or "make work" employment. That Welfare—the government dole—should exist is never questioned, thus demonstrating the intellectual and moral state of affairs in our society.

Welfare involves the taking of resources from one segment of society and giving them to another segment of society that supposedly needs these resources. The agent of this involuntary transaction is government. Welfare cannot be confused with charity or with any other "noble, love-your-fellowman" activities because it is collected unwillingly, by force, from those who are to provide the resources. While charity comes from a desire to help those unfortunates who one believes to be deserving of help, Welfare is based upon no such motivation. Welfare is motivated by fear and greed.

Why fear? Because politicians fear the voting power of organized groups of recipients and their followers. They fear disturbances in the streets, more crime and riots if poor people are not appeased. (The government's role in keeping segments of society poor is ignored.) None of this is surprising because politicians generally make all moves out of fear. For those who genuinely believe that the poor are deserving of help in the form of Welfare, their motivation for choosing Welfare schemes over charitable activities can only be greed. They observe a segment of society they believe to be deserving of aid and, not being content to provide such aid out of their own resources, they attempt to get their hands on the resources of others. This is greed in the very real sense that they wish to get their hands on the resources of others without their consent in order to indulge their own feelings.

This greed is accepted by most Americans as proper. The resources of all individuals are commonly lumped together in one pie and the argument proceeds along the lines of who gets how many slices. Why are the wishes of those who want to consume resources given precedence over those who produced the resources?

Welfare is an explosive and emotion-laden topic which, at its heart, deals with the question of *rights*. Who owns the resources gained through free trade of goods and services? Does the person in need have a moral claim to the resources earned by others? Does the right to life imply the right to sustain life through coercion of others? In each case, rights extend only so far as voluntary agreements with others permit. When voluntary agreement is given up and force enters then rights end. There can be no right to violate the rights of others. The central question of freedom vs. force is the choice the Welfare advocates must make. Those who advocate or even give tacit approval to the Welfare system choose force over freedom.

The question of Welfare transcends the ethical question, "Should one help those in need?", and instead focuses on "Should one use force on those who do not accept the obligation of help for the poor?" Those who take the position of greed—that others should be forced to help the poor—view their fellowman as nothing better than a sacrificial animal to be led, controlled and coerced by those self-appointed guardians of ethical behavior, namely themselves. It is understandable that people of this mentality—the busybodies who are always trying to impose their ethical code on others in society—support Welfare. But why do others support Welfare? Why do people who advocate individual freedoms, personal liberties, the end of a controlled society, and free trade advocate Welfare? Is it that their talk of individual liberty cannot escape the mundane materialistic concerns, the greed, of actual governmental policy? Is it that individual liberty only applies to them and controls are the proper way of life for everyone else? It must be for those who exhibit these characteristics to answer.

The individuals who opposed the draft, or the war in Asia, or controls on personal behavior do not say much for the depths of their beliefs or motives when they now endorse Welfare as the goal of government in the eighties. Conservatives with their long standing lip service to free enterprise and aversion to big government do nothing to attack the principles of Welfare by decrying waste and fraud. Each side,

carrying the banners of liberty above them are really marching for the further enslavement of the producers to the Welfare recipients and the Welfare recipients to the politicians and bureaucrats and social workers.

Welfare is an attack on the working man by those who wish to force him to support what they conceive as noble ends. Noble ends or not, the means used—force—is ugly and not compatible with a free society. The only moral alternative for a free society is to give up Welfare and renounce the use of force against the working man. Those who can conceive of anything less are not friends of a free society. The free individual is responsible for his own actions or lack of actions. He does not impose his will on other free individuals. He does not force others to support his charities. He does not renounce his humanity.

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