

A Non-Libertarian FAQ.

[Part of the "Critiques of Libertarianism" site.
http://world.std.com/~mhuben/libindex.html](http://world.std.com/~mhuben/libindex.html)

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INTRODUCTION

Many USENET readers encounter libertarianism for the first time on USENET. Such unfamiliar claims might be quite difficult to judge if we haven't had the time to think of reasons why the claims might be false. This FAQ is intended to review a few common libertarian claims that seem wrong to newcomers, and present some arguments in opposition that show their shortcomings.

ABOUT THIS FAQ

The purpose of this FAQ is not to attack libertarianism, but some of the more fallacious arguments within it. That done, libertarians can then reformulate or reject these arguments. This is also needed to help people place libertarianism and its arguments in context. It is very hard to find any literature about libertarianism that was NOT written by its advocates. This isolation from normal political discourse makes it difficult to evaluate libertarian claims without much more research or analysis than most of us have time for. Compare this to (for example) the

extensive literature of socialism and communism written by ideologues, scholars, pundits, etc. on all sides. Libertarianism is scantily analyzed outside its own movement. Let's fix that.

This particular FAQ is mostly a personal view of libertarianism. It is impossible to have an objective view of something like libertarianism, and it would be a mistake to presume this FAQ is. (Or that the FAQs written by proponents are.) It is also impossible for this FAQ to represent all the opposing positions to libertarianism, though I hope to see many future contributions from others. One notable failing (common to many libertarians as well) is that this FAQ is rather US-centric. All statements in this FAQ can be argued further by both sides, and indeed most have in several answers to this FAQ, available at the Critiques website. However, feel free to save a copy of this FAQ and cite from it. It may not be ultimate truth, but it can be a starting point for answers to libertarianism.

The editor and primary author, [Mike Huben](#), has 20 years experience in debate over electronic networks. Much of that has been with religious believers and creationists, and this colors some of the arguments and examples. No judgement or personal offense is intended, though there is a substantial amount of ridicule of arguments (based in large part on my belief that it is the most effective antidote to pompous argument.) I welcome recommendations for alleviating offense while retaining the sense and humor of the arguments.

This FAQ is an unfinished work. Vast sections have yet to be created: as in talk.origins, we might expect perhaps 20 FAQs to eventually result. Only the first major section (Evangelism) has been written and included here. This FAQ is written in HTML, then converted to plain text for posting.

WHAT IS LIBERTARIANISM?

It's hard to clearly define libertarianism. "It's a dessert topping!" "No, it's a floor wax!" "Wait-- it's both!" It's a mixture of social philosophy, economic philosophy, a political party, and more. It would be unjust for me to try to characterize libertarianism too exactly: libertarians should be allowed to represent their own positions. At least two FAQs have been created by libertarians to introduce their positions. But the two major flavors are anarcho-capitalists (who want to eliminate political governments) and minarchists (who want to minimize government.) There are many more subtle flavorings, such as Austrian and Chicago economic schools, gold-bug, space cadets, Old-Right, paleo-libertarians, classical liberals, hard money, the Libertarian Party, influences from Ayn Rand, and others. An interesting survey is in chapter 36 of Marshall's "Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism", ["The New Right and Anarcho-capitalism."](#)

This diversity of libertarian viewpoints can make it quite difficult to have a coherent discussion with them, because an argument that is valid for or against one type of libertarianism may not apply to other types. This is a cause of much argument in alt.politics.libertarian: non-libertarians may feel that they have rebutted some libertarian point, but some other flavor libertarian may feel that his "one true libertarianism" doesn't have that flaw. These sorts of arguments can go on forever because both sides think they are winning. Thus, if you want to try to reduce the

crosstalk, you're going to have to specify what flavor of libertarianism or which particular point of libertarianism you are arguing against.

Libertarians are a small group whose beliefs are unknown to and not accepted by the vast majority. They are utopian because there has never yet been a libertarian society (though one or two have come close to some libertarian ideas.) These two facts should not keep us from considering libertarian ideas seriously, however they do caution us about accepting them for practical purposes.

STRATEGIES FOR ARGUMENT

Many libertarian arguments are like fundamentalist arguments: they depend upon restricting your attention to a very narrow field so that you will not notice that they fail outside of that field. For example, fundamentalists like to restrict the argument to the bible. Libertarians like to restrict the argument to their notions of economics, justice, history, and rights and their misrepresentations of government and contracts. Widen the scope, and their questionable assumptions leap into view. Why should I accept that "right" as a given? Is that a fact around the world, not just in the US? Are there counter examples for that idea? Are libertarians serving their own class interest only? Is that economic argument complete, or are there other critical factors or strategies which have been omitted? When they make a historical argument, can we find current real-world counterexamples? If we adopt this libertarian policy, there will be benefits: but what will the disadvantages be? Are libertarians reinventing what we already have, only without safeguards?

There are some common counterarguments for which libertarians have excellent rebuttals. Arguments that government is the best or only way to do something may fail: there are many examples of many government functions being performed privately. Some of them are quite surprising. Arguments based on getting any services free from government will fail: all government services cost money that comes from somewhere. Arguments that we have a free market are patently untrue: there are many ways the market is modified.

There are a number of scientific, economic, political, and philosophical concepts which you may need to understand to debate some particular point. These include free market, public goods, externalities, tragedy of the commons, prisoner's dilemma, adverse selection, market failure, mixed economy, evolution, catastrophe theory, game theory, etc. Please feel free to suggest other concepts for this list.

One way to bring about a large volume of argument is to cross-post to another political group with opposing ideas, such as [alt.politics.radical-left](#). The results are quite amusing, though there is a lot more heat than light. Let's not do this more often than is necessary to keep us aware that libertarianism is not universally accepted.

LIBERTARIAN EVANGELISTIC ARGUMENTS

Evangelists (those trying to persuade others to adopt their beliefs) generally have extensively studied which arguments have the greatest effect on the unprepared. Usually, these arguments are brief propositions that can be memorized easily and regurgitated in large numbers. These

arguments, by the process of selection, tend not to have obvious refutations, and when confronted by a refutation, the commonest tactic is to recite another argument. This eliminates the need for actual understanding of the basis of arguments, and greatly speeds the rate at which evangelists can be trained.

Without preparation, even blatantly fallacious arguments may disturb or convince a targeted individual. Evangelists, who tend to be more interested in effect than in accuracy, don't tend to point out that there are usually lots of valid counterarguments available, sometimes known for millennia.

If the target is not the person spoken to (it may be a group of onlookers, such as the lurkers in newsgroups or listeners on a radio show), we might expect that the "discussion" will focus on making the person spoken to seem wrong, ridiculous, uncomfortable, at a loss, etc.

Small wonder many people are not interested in entering "discussions" with evangelists! They're likely to be out-prepared, swamped (or worse convinced) by specious arguments, and possibly used as a cat's paw in the persuasion of listeners.

The arguments treated here are not strawman misrepresentations: they are all evangelistic arguments that have actually been made by libertarians. Many of them have been made frequently. Although they are often used evangelistically, we can't presume that someone making them doesn't understand their basis or cannot support their argument. And on the other hand, often other libertarians cringe when they hear these.

Most of these questions are phrased as assertions: that is simply a less clumsy shorthand for "How could I respond to a libertarian claiming X?", where X is the assertion.

1. The original intent of the founders has been perverted.

The founders of the USA were a contentious lot, who hardly agreed on any one thing, let alone libertarian notions. It is well documented that the Constitution and Bill of Rights are compromises amongst them: few agreed wholeheartedly with any particular part. Thus, looking to the founders for "original intent" is silly: it will vary amongst them. Not to mention that "original intent" (or original understanding) is just as open to interpretation as the Constitution itself because while there is lots of explicit data, it is from many contradictory sources. For example, Judge Bork presents notably non-libertarian versions of original intent.

I think the best way to interpret the constitution is the way the founders explicitly specified in the Constitution: look to the courts, especially the Supreme Court. The Constitution leaves the method of its interpretation by the court entirely to the court to decide. This begs the question of how to judge the interpretive philosophies of the possible justices, but libertarians seldom get that far.

"The interpretation of the laws is the proper and peculiar province of the courts. A constitution is, in fact, and must be regarded by the judges, as a fundamental law. It

therefore belongs to them to ascertain its meaning, as well as the meaning of any particular act proceeding from the legislative body." Federalist No. 78.

There is no reason short of worship of the founders to presume that the Supreme Court is less capable than the founders. Indeed, many libertarians from outside the US find the authority of the founders unconvincing. One writes: "As a Canadian, I don't give a damn what the `founders' intended. I hate it when a net.opponent trots out some bit of tired U.S. history as a most holy of holies, not to be questioned."

Jefferson himself said this plainly: "Some men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, and deem them like the ark of the Covenant, too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment... laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind... as that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, institutions must advance also, to keep pace with the times.... We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain forever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors."

2. **The US Government ignores the plain meaning of the constitution.**

Often this is presented as "The US wouldn't be so bad if the government followed the Constitution."

"Plain meaning" is a matter of opinion. A plain meaning one century can well be reversed in another, depending on popular usage, historical context, etc. Well intentioned people can disagree on "plain meaning" endlessly, as we see in any non-unanimous court decision. For practical purposes, the meaning **MUST** be decided one way or another.

Libertarian claims of "plain meaning" are often clearly shaped by their beliefs. Where this occurs, it's pretty obvious that their claims to "plain meaning" are not "common sense".

3. **The Declaration Of Independence says...**

The Declaration Of Independence is a rhetorical document, without legal standing in the USA. That status was a deliberate decision of the founders, not an accident. If it is purported to reflect the intent of the founders, then we can only conclude that they changed their minds when writing the Articles of Confederation and then the Constitution.

Nor should it be mistaken for a philosophical treatise: that was not its purpose. If a libertarian would like to defend it as philosophy, he should rely on sound argument, not reverence for the founders.

4. **Libertarians are defenders of freedom and rights.**

The foremost defenders of our freedoms and rights, which libertarians prefer you overlook, are our governments. National defense, police, courts, registries of deeds, public defenders, the Constitution and the Bill Of Rights, etc. all are government efforts that work towards defending freedoms and rights.

Libertarians frequently try to present themselves as the group to join to defend your freedom and rights. Lots of other organizations (many of which you would not want to be associated with, such as Scientologists) also fight for freedom and rights. I prefer the ACLU. (Indeed, if you wish to act effectively, the ACLU is the way to go: they advertise that they take on 6,000 cases a year free of charge, and claim involvement in 80% of landmark Supreme Court cases since 1920.)

It would be foolish to oppose libertarians on such a mom-and-apple-pie issue as freedom and rights: better to point out that there are EFFECTIVE alternatives with a historical track record, something libertarianism lacks.

Nor might we need or want to accept the versions of "freedom" and "rights" that libertarians propose. To paraphrase Anatole France: "How noble libertarianism, in its majestic equality, that both rich and poor are equally prohibited from peeing in the privately owned streets (without paying), sleeping under the privately owned bridges (without paying), and coercing bread from its rightful owners!"

5. **Taxation is theft.**

Two simple rebuttals to this take widely different approaches.

The first is that property is theft. The notion behind property is that A declares something to be property, and threatens anybody who still wants to use it. Where does A get the right to forcibly stop others from using it? Arguments about "mixing of labor" with the resource as a basis for ownership boil down to "first-come-first-served". This criticism is even accepted by some libertarians, and is favorably viewed by David Friedman. This justifies property taxes or extraction taxes on land or extractable resources if you presume that the government is a holder in trust for natural resources. (However, most people who question the creation of property would agree that after the creation of property, a person is entitled to his earnings. Thus the second argument)

The second is that taxation is part of a social contract. Essentially, tax is payment in exchange for services from government. This kind of argument is suitable for defending almost any tax as part of a contract. Many libertarians accept social contract (for example, essentially all minarchists must to insist on a monopoly of government.) Of course they differ as to what should be IN the contract.

6. **If you don't pay your taxes, men with guns will show up at your house, initiate force and put you in jail.**

This is not initiation of force. It is enforcement of contract, in this case an explicit social contract. Many libertarians make a big deal of "men with guns" enforcing laws, yet try to overlook the fact that "men with guns" are the basis of enforcement of any complete social system. Even if libertarians reduced all law to "don't commit fraud or initiate force", they would still enforce with guns.

7. **Social Contract? I never signed no steenking social contract.**

That argument and some of the following libertarian arguments are commonly quoted from Lysander Spooner.

The constitution and the laws are our written contracts with the government.

There are several explicit means by which people make the social contract with government. The commonest is when your parents choose your residency and/or citizenship after your birth. In that case, your parents or guardians are contracting for you, exercising their power of custody. No further explicit action is required on your part to continue the agreement, and you may end it at any time by departing and renouncing your citizenship.

Immigrants, residents, and visitors contract through the oath of citizenship (swearing to uphold the laws and constitution), residency permits, and visas. Citizens reaffirm it in whole or part when they take political office, join the armed forces, etc. This contract has a fairly common form: once entered into, it is implicitly continued until explicitly revoked. Many other contracts have this form: some leases, most utility services (such as phone and electricity), etc.

Some libertarians make a big deal about needing to actually sign a contract. Take them to a restaurant and see if they think it ethical to walk out without paying because they didn't sign anything. Even if it is a restaurant with a minimum charge and they haven't ordered anything. The restaurant gets to set the price and the method of contract so that even your presence creates a debt. What is a libertarian going to do about that? Create a regulation?

8. **The social contract is like no other because it can be "unilaterally" modified.**

Not true. Consider the purchase of a condominium. You have a contract with the condominium association, agreeing to pay the fees they levy for the services they provide and obey the rules that they create. You have an equal vote with the other residents on the budget and the rules. If you don't like the budget or rules that are enacted, you can vote with your feet or persuade everyone to change them.

There are numerous other common sorts of contracts that allow changes by one or both sides without negotiation. Gas, electric, oil, water, phone, and other utility services normally have contracts where at most they need to notify you in advance when they change their rates. Insurance companies raise their rates, and your only input is either pay

the new rates or "vote with your feet". (The exception is when rates are supervised by government regulatory agencies.)

9. Other misc. claims denying the social contract.

One commonly cited Spooner argument is that the social contract is like no other, and thus not a contract. That's a nonsequitur. A unique feature or combination of features doesn't disqualify something from being a contract.

Some complain that the social contract is fundamentally unjust because it doesn't treat people equally, that people are taxed unequally or receive services unequally. So? Like insurance, rates can vary from individual to individual, and services received may be more or less than premiums paid.

Some complain "Any contract where the enforcing agency is one of the contractors is hardly fair." But the U.S. Constitution is a contract between SEVERAL parties: the three branches of the government, the states, and citizens. It's a multilateral contract where every party is subject to enforcement by one or more of the other parties, and every party is involved in enforcement for at least one other. This pattern of checks and balances was specifically designed to deal with precisely this fairness issue.

10. Why should I be coerced to leave if I don't like the social contract?

Why leave an apartment if you change your mind about the lease? You do not own the apartment, just as you do not own the nation. At most, you may own some property within the apartment, just as you may own some property within the nation.

11. Do Cubans under Castro agree to their social contract?

If you define contracts as voluntary, then you probably wouldn't say the Cuban government operates by social contract, since most people who wanted to emigrate have not been permitted to.

Most libertarians have a peculiar definition of voluntary: contractual agreement makes all requirements of the contract "voluntary", no matter how unexpected they are, no matter how long the contract lasts for, no matter if the contractee changes his mind. However, they're seldom willing to view our social contract in that manner.

Our social contract in the USA is one of the nice, voluntary contracts that libertarians should like. Even better, because you can terminate it by leaving at any time. There is no US government obstacle to emigration from the US.

12. Isn't that "love it or leave it"?

Nope. This is a distinction that seems too subtle for a lot of libertarians: the difference between having a choice and having to leave.

For example, let's say you live in a condominium, and are very fond of it. As long as you can move out, you have a choice. No matter how firmly you intend to stay. No matter how much you prefer your current condo. No matter how good or bad your current condo is for you, you still have a choice.

This is analogous to living in a nation. You choose which one to live in, and you can change. You may not be able to improve some things about it all by yourself, because it is not entirely yours.

You have at least 4 choices. 1) Tolerate the social contract, and perhaps try to amend it. 2) Leave it by emigrating. 3) Violate it. 4) Revolt.

13. Why should we be coerced to accept the social contract? Why can't we be left alone?

You are not coerced to accept US government services any more than you are coerced to rent or purchase a place to live. If pretty much all territory is owned by governments, and pretty much all houses and apartments are owned, well, did you want them to grow on trees? There ain't no such thing as a free lunch.

14. We can't emigrate because there is no libertarian nation.

Yes, you can emigrate, just as you could buy a different car even though your favorite company doesn't produce cars which let you travel at the speed of sound and get 2000 mpg. Even if nobody produces EXACTLY what you want, you can choose any car the market produces or you create yourself.

There are roughly 200 nations to which you could emigrate. They are the product of an anarcho-capitalist free market: there is no over-government dictating to those sovereign nations. Indeed, the only difference between the anarchy of nations and libertopia is that anarcho-capitalists are wishing for a smaller granularity. These nations have found that it is most cost-efficient to defend themselves territorially.

If any other market provided 200 choices, libertarians would declare that the sacred workings of the market blessed whatever choices were offered. The point is that choices do exist: it's up to libertarians to show that there is something wrong with the market of nations in a way they would accept being applied to markets within nations.

Libertaria is a combination of values that just doesn't exist: the government equivalent of a really posh residence for very little money. You can find nations which have much lower taxes, etc.: just don't expect them to be first class.

And the reason these combinations don't exist is probably simple: the free market of government services essentially guarantees that there is no such thing as the free lunch libertarians want. It's not competitive.

15. Extortion by the state is no different than extortion by the Mafia.

This is a prize piece of libertarian rhetoric, because it slides in the accusation that taxation is extortion. This analogy initially seems strong, because both are territorial. However, libertarians consider contractual rental of land by owners (which is also fundamentally territorial) ethical, and consider coercion of squatters by those owners ethical. The key difference is who owns what. The Mafia doesn't own anything to contract about. The landowner owns the land (in a limited sense.) And the US government owns rights to govern its territory. (These rights are a form of property, much as mineral rights are a form of property. Let's not confuse them with rights of individuals.) Thus, the social contract can be required by the territorial property holder: the USA.

16. There's no such thing as rights to govern territory!

You'd have to ignore an awful lot of history to claim this sort of PROPERTY didn't exist. The US government can demonstrate ownership of such rights through treaty, purchase, bequeathment by the original colonies and some other states, and conquest. The EXACT same sources as all other forms of land ownership in the US. Also note that governance rights are merely a subset of the rights that anarcho-libertarians would want landowners to have. For example, insistence on contractual obedience to regulations and acceptance of punishment for violations.

17. Why should I be told what to do with my property? That infringes on my rights of ownership.

This question comes up rather often, since absolute ownership of property is fundamental to most flavors of libertarianism. Such proprietarianism fuels daydreams of being able to force the rest of the world to swirl around the immovable rock of your property. For example, there were trespass lawsuits filed against airlines for flying over property.

A good answer is: what makes you so sure it is yours?

18. Of course it's my property. I paid money and hold the deed.

What do you hold the deed to? Property as recognized by a government. As such, you can address infringement of your rights through the legal system. However your property as recognized by the legal system is limited.

This isn't too surprising, since limitations created by private transactions are also common. For example, property is often sold without water rights or timber rights. Property is commonly sold with easements: for example a neighbor may have the right to cross to reach the road. And property may be sold with limitations to its usage: for example, the Adirondack State Park was bequeathed to the people of New York State with the stipulation that it remain forever wild.

Most government limitations on property are analogous, and you bought property that was already under those limitations. Just as it would be wrong to deny the validity of an easement sold by the previous owner, it is wrong to deny the validity of the current

system of limited ownership of property. For example, a clear statement of such an "easement" is in the Fourth Amendment, which essentially says that the government can enter your property with a valid search warrant and not be trespassing.

There are many existing limitations such as government rights to tax and to zone property, limitations to ownership of navigable waters, how far property extends to the water, etc. And sometimes new limitations are specified, such as non-ownership of airspace above property.

19. New limitations on use of property are a taking, and should be compensated.

Some new limitations can be viewed as merely making specific that what was claimed was never really owned. For example, where was ownership of airspace above property ever explicitly granted in our system of property? Where were polluters ever explicitly granted the right to dump wastes into air or water that they do not have a title to?

Other limitations (such as rezoning to eliminate undesirable business or protecting wetlands from development) might be viewed as control of negative externalities. Most libertarians would recognize the right of a mall owner to write his leases so that he could terminate them if the renters cause externalities: why shouldn't communities have this right to self-governance as well?

20. Think how much wealthier we'd be if we didn't pay taxes.

This is a classic example of libertarians not looking at the complete equation for at least two reasons. (1) If taxes are eliminated, you'll need to purchase services that were formerly provided by government. (2) If taxes are eliminated, the economics of wages have changed, and wages will change as well.

Here's a really ludicrous (but real) example of (1): "With taxation gone, not only will we have twice as much money to spend, but it will go twice as far, since those who produce goods and services won't have to pay taxes, either. In one stroke we'll be effectively four times as rich. Let's figure that deregulation will cut prices, once again, by half. Now our actual purchasing power, already quadrupled by deTAXification, is doubled again. We now have eight times our former wealth!" (L. Neil Smith)

And here's an example of (2): "I'm self-employed. My pay would absolutely, positively go up 15+% tomorrow if I wasn't paying FICA/Medicare." But only briefly. Standard microeconomic theory applies just as well to someone selling labor as to someone selling widgets. If FICA disappeared, your competitors in the market to sell labor would be attracted to the higher wages and would sell more labor. This increase in supply of labor would drive down your wage from the 15% increase. You'd earn more (per hour). But less than 15% more.

21. We lived in a fairly libertarian society in the US 150 years ago.

A classic libertarian roll-back-the-clock argument, that sounds good at first because none of us directly remembers it. Libertarians do usually remember and criticize some of the more prominent non-libertarian features of that period, such as unequal protection under the law for blacks and women. However, they seem to overlook a lot of other important things.

Yes, the Federal government had a much lighter hand then. However, state and local governments had a much greater influence. There is not one class of positive duty or obligation in the US today that did not exist 200 years ago at state or federal level.

All the biggies were there except income tax. The equivalent of income tax was property tax (on all possessions) or head tax by many states. There was involuntary conscription, eminent domain, etc. As a matter of fact, things got much better when powers of states were interpreted to be restricted by the US constitution (much later.) Powers such as state religious authority.

Also, society was organized quite differently before the industrial revolution spread to the US. Our "nation of shopkeepers" was actually a nation of farmers. The means of production were controlled primarily by the workers (who were the owners of the farms and shops.) Government of that era would be as out-of-place today as the tariffs and scientific knowledge of that era.

22. **"Might Makes Right" is the principle behind statism.**

No, "Might makes ability to make something", Right or Wrong. You can't even try for Right until you have Might to back it up in the real world. That's the reason that some real governments have survived and all utopian governments that have tried to abolish force have failed.

However, government is not alone in requiring might. All property is based on might as well. Nobody is beholden to your notions of what constitutes your property. Property is just as "involuntary" as the social contract. There is no moral obligation for anyone to respect your property: only a practical one.

Recognition that the fundamental nature of property is based on force is essential to recognition that there are costs and benefits to the principle of property. It is not as negative a "right" as libertarians like to portray it.

23. **I want self-government, not other-government.**

"Self government" is libertarian newspeak for "everybody ought to be able to live as if they are the only human in the universe, if only they believe in the power of libertarianism." It's a utopian ideal like those of some Marxists and born-againists that would essentially require some sort of human perfection to work.

More explicitly, "self government" is the peculiar notion that other people ought not to be able to regulate your behavior. Much as we would like to be free of such regulation, most people also want to be able to regulate the behavior of others for practical reasons. Some libertarians claim that they want the first so much, that they will be willing to forgo the second. Most other people feel that both are necessary (and that it would be hypocritical or stupid to want just one.)

24. Why shouldn't we adopt libertarian government now?

Because there are no working examples of libertarian cities, states, or nations.

Innumerable other ideologies have put their money where their mouths are, if not their lives. Examples include most nations that have had Marxist revolutions, Israel, many of the American colonies, a huge number of religious and utopian communities, etc.

Yet libertarians want us to risk what many of them consider the best nation in the world with their untested beliefs. It's not even sensible to convert here first for the claimed economic benefits of libertarianism: there would be less marginal benefit to converting the USA to a libertarian system than most other nations. Let libertarians bear the risk and cost of their own experiment.

Let libertarians point to successful libertarian programs to seek our endorsement. For example, narcotic decriminalization in the Netherlands has been a success. So has legalized prostitution in Nevada and Germany (and probably other places.) Privatization of some municipal services has been successful in some communities. But these are extremely small scale compared to the total libertarian agenda, and do not rule out emergent problems and instabilities of a full scale libertarian system.

25. There's a conspiracy to prevent a working libertarian experiment.

Right. Uh huh. [Read: sarcasm.]

Libertarians sometimes cite the Minerva project (armed squatting on a Tongan island) and an attempted overthrow of the government of Suriname. If libertarians are too inept to compete internationally through diplomacy, politics, bribery, or force of arms, it hardly takes a conspiracy to explain that they lost. That's what sovereignty takes.

A working libertarian experiment could be easily county sized. A tiny religious sect was able to buy control of Antelope, Oregon and relocate there a few years ago: the vastly more numerous libertarians could do much more. Privatize the roads, schools, libraries, police. Abolish property taxes, zoning, anything not required by the state. Then show the benefits. Yes, the state will prevent you from achieving some libertarian goals: do what you can to show how you can improve things. You shouldn't have to go 100% libertarian to show marked benefits according to most libertarian claims.

26. An event is explained by the issue at hand.

This is really a class of argument, "post hoc, ergo propter hoc", that is made all too often by arguers of all stripes. The claims made with this sort of argument by libertarians are innumerable. Counter examples and other issues that plainly had influence are usually extremely easy to find. Here are some real claims actually made in a.p.l.

For example: "The automotive recession started in October 1989, which was the start of the requirement that some cars of each manufacturer be fitted with air bags... Perhaps the reason that car sales have gone down is that many consumers are not willing to pay for a car with air bags."

For example: "There are as many military reasons why the draft is bad as there are moral ones. Witness our success using a volunteer army versus a conscripted one."

It would be possible to collect libertarian examples of the other classes of fallacies of argument, but this frequent one can serve as the exemplar. This particular one comes up a lot because of the lure of testing theory with reality.

27. Haven't you read "Libertarianism in One Lesson"?

Every belief system has its evangelistic writings, designed to help convince or draw in new members. The Campus Crusade for Christ uses "Evidence That Demands A Verdict", Scientology uses "Dianetics", and libertarians use "Libertarianism in One Lesson".

All of these books are very convincing-- in the absence of counterargument. However, they are easily rebutted by skeptics because they MUST omit the exceptions to their point of view to be convincing.

If I may cite a convert: "Libertarians like me believe in a simple morality-- everyone should be free to do what they like, so long as they don't initiate use of force... If you're not familiar with this morality, I urge you to read "Libertarianism in One Lesson", by David Bergland. I was personally shocked to find that things could be so neatly axiomatized, and what's even more remarkable is that in the empirical world, societies seem to me to be punished in an eye for an eye fashion from their deviation from this simple morality. We are deviating quite a bit and suffering accordingly... in my view this is why economic growth is stagnating, the inner cities are dying..."

Any time I read how simple it is to understand the world through system X, I know I'm dealing with a convert from evangelistic writings. They blithely assert that their explanations show the true cause of current problems. And the key to showing them to be wrong, is to show that there's more complexity to the world than is encompassed by their simplistic explanations.

28. Have you read "No Treason: The Constitution of No Authority"?

"No Treason" is a lengthy rant that doesn't take longer than the first paragraph to begin its egregious errors.

For example, in the first paragraph: "It [The Constitution] purports, at most, to be only a contract between persons living eighty years ago." Thus he focuses his attention on the Preamble, and evidently ignores Article VII, which says EXACTLY who contracted for the Constitution:

"The ratification of the conventions of nine States shall be sufficient for the establishment of this Constitution between the States so ratifying the same. Done in Convention, by the unanimous consent of the States present, the seventeenth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the twelfth. In Witness whereof, we have hereunto subscribed our names."

[signatories FOR STATES omitted.]

He's wrong on this simple matter of fact: the constitution says who contracted with whom. But then he goes on to make a big deal about the people of that era being dead, as if contracts between organizations lapse when their office holders depart.

The rest of his "analysis" is equally shoddy, and consists largely of calling government a collection of thieves and murderers at least 75 times. David Friedman, in "The Machinery of Freedom", says Spooner "attacks the contract theory of government like a lawyer arguing a case": but REAL presentations of cases have to cope with counterarguments, and can't depend so heavily on invalid presumptions which are easily shot full of holes.

29. Libertarians oppose the initiation of force.

How noble. And I'm sure that in a real libertarian society, everybody would hold to this morality as much as Christians turn the other cheek. [:-(For the sarcasm-impaired.]

"Initiation of force" is another libertarian newspeak term that does not mean what the uninitiated might think. Libertarians except defense of property and prosecution of fraud, and call them retaliatory force. But retaliation can be the initiation of force: I don't need force to commit theft or fraud. This is a bit of rhetorical sleight of hand that libs like to play so that they can pretend they are different than government. You know: break a law (like not paying your taxes) and MEN WITH GUNS initiate force. Sorry, but you've gotta play fair: it can't be initiation for government and retaliation for you.

Like most other non-pacifistic belief systems, libertarians want to initiate force for what they identify as their interests and call it righteous retaliation, and use the big lie technique to define everything else as evil "initiation of force". They support the initial force that has already taken place in the formation of the system of property, and wish to continue to use force to perpetuate it and make it more rigid.

The National Libertarian Party membership form has "the pledge" on it: "I do not believe in or advocate the initiation of force as a means of achieving political or social goals." It's quite amusing to hear how much libertarians disagree over what it means: whether it is or isn't ok to overthrow the US because it has "initiated force" and they would be "retaliating".

Beyond this perceived class interest, libertarian dislike of "initiation of force" isn't much different than anyone else's. It may be humanitarian, defensive, etc.

30. Dred Scott and the Fugitive Slave Laws were examples of government enforcement of slavery.

No. There's a subtle distinction: they were enforcement of property rights of slaveowners. It was entirely the owners' assertion that he was property that the government was acting upon. If the owner had at any time freed him, he would not have been a slave.

Libertarians would love to lay slavery at the feet of government precisely because slavery is a sin of capitalism. The US government NEVER enslaved the blacks. The US government never said "you must now own this slave" or "you've never been a slave before, but you are one now." US slavery was initiated by capitalists.

The US government was NOT in the business of proclaiming people free or slaves: that was a private sector responsibility until that Evil Statist Lincoln stole that sacred private right for the State. Until that time, only private, capitalist owners had the right to declare whether a black person was free or slave.

31. The World's Smallest Political Quiz. [Nolan Test]

This libertarian quiz asks a set of leading questions to tempt you to proclaim yourself a libertarian. The big trick is that if you answer yes to each question, you are a macho SELF GOVERNOR: there is an unspoken sneer to those who would answer anything else. It is an ideological litmus test.

The most obvious criticism of this quiz is that it tries to graph the range of politics onto only 2 axes, as if they were the only two that mattered, rather than the two libertarians want the most change in. For example, if socialists were to create such a test, they would use a different set of axes.

The second obvious criticism is typical of polls taken to show false levels of support: the questions are worded to elicit the desired response. This is called framing bias. For example, on a socialist test, you might see a question such as "Do you believe people should help each other?" Libertarians would answer "yes" to this question; the problem is the "but"s that are filtered out by the question format.

Many libertarians use this as an "outreach" (read: evangelism) tool. By making it easy to get high scores on both axes, subjects can be told that they are already a libertarian and

just didn't know it. This is the same sort of suckering that cold readers and other frauds use.

32. The Libertarian Party: America's third largest political party.

Wow, third! That sounds impressive until you realize that the Libertarian Party is about one percent of the size of the other two. Funny how they don't mention that in their slogan. I guess they should get a new slogan. Let's have a new slogan contest for the Libertarian Party!

- A party a lot smaller than the Communists used to be?
- The party that can't get as many votes as any one-shot third party?
- The party that's elected fewer to national office than the Socialists?
- The party whose symbol is a big government statue.
- The party with the oxymoronic name?
- The party of Pat Paulson, uh, I mean Don Imus, uh, I mean Howard Stern!
- America's Third Most Comical Political Party?
- Preschool for hyperactive Republicans?

Join in! Submit your slogan today!

Almost as comical is the Libertarian Party's '94 election results. They now have even fewer elected dogcatchers and other important officials. Most notable, their loss of 2 out of 4 state reps in New Hampshire.

Interestingly, many of the elected libertarian officials run as stealth candidates, not declaring their party or real ideology. Like creationists and fundamentalists trying to pack school boards, they often conceal their beliefs to gain positions.

33. You're a Statist!

Don't be surprised if you receive some ad-hominem abuse from libertarian evangelists when you don't accept their arguments. It's no different than if a communist called you bourgeois or a Bircher called you a commie lover. Sometimes they'll go overboard and even accuse you of mental disease, at which time you can point out to them the fine company they keep: Stalin, Hitler, etc.

34. Why do you spend so much time trying to debunk?

As I told creationists who wondered why I bothered, it's interesting to me to study unusual beliefs for the same reason it's interesting for doctors to study pathologies. You don't have to catch a disease to be able to understand it, fight it, or vaccinate against it.

QUOTATIONS POPULAR WITH LIBERTARIAN EVANGELISTS

The purpose of bumper sticker phrases is not to enlighten: it is to misdirect and channel your thoughts. That's a prime need for evangelism, and thus we see a lot of these from libertarian evangelists.

George Washington

- ***"Government, like fire, is a dangerous servant and a fearful master."*** Well, if we wish to use that analogy, let's note that we now exploit combustion for vastly more purposes, in vastly greater quantity, and for vastly greater benefit than George Washington would have dreamed of. Likewise modern liberal government.

Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850)

- ***"Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place."***

This quote is one of the central ideas of ["The Law"](#), a piece of philosophical propaganda full of errors and unconvincing arguments. Let's start with a simple demonstration of its ambiguity. Did men make laws to support or suppress life, liberty, and property? At first glance, since we like those three glittering generalities, we'd say support. But if we change the generalities and keep the "logic" the same:

"Death, enslavement, and indigence do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that death, enslavement, and indigence existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place."

Now we'd say suppress. The fact is, this ringing statement can be interpreted to praise or damn law supporting or suppressing any generality.

Now, Bastiat does get more specific. If you read a few sentences further into "The Law", he presumes natural rights from god, a simple fallacy of reification (pretending an idea is a real thing.) But the real source of rights is might. Individuals don't have rights to protect their lives, liberty and property: they have minuscule powers to attempt to create such rights. Law is an attempt to benefit those within society by creating rights through conventions that reduce in-society conflict and utilize combined powers efficiently. Bastiat has the tail wagging the dog: collective rights being justified by individual rights, when in actual society individual rights are produced by collective might.

It's hard to accept philosophy like this which starts by preferring imaginary rights to basic observable facts of society.

Lysander Spooner (1808-1887)

- ***"A man is none the less a slave because he is allowed to choose a new master once in a term of years."***

When you contract for government services, you are a customer, not a slave. If you think you cannot change with whom you contract, you have enslaved your self.

Thomas Jefferson

- ***"A wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government." (First Inaugural Address)***

Perhaps as an unreachable goal. Certainly Jefferson's actual practices differed greatly from this statement. For example, Jefferson supported compulsory tax-supported schools and kept slaves. Jefferson was very much a political pragmatist full of such contradictions, as any non-hagiographic biography will tell.

But if you want get into a founder quoting contest, Ben Franklin wrote: "Private property ... is a Creature of Society, and is subject to the Calls of that Society, whenever its Necessities shall require it, even to its last Farthing, its contributors therefore to the public Exigencies are not to be considered a Benefit on the Public, entitling the Contributors to the Distinctions of Honor and Power, but as the Return of an Obligation previously received, or as payment for a just Debt." We could find quite a few other appropriate quotes with a little searching.

Libertarians might endorse their interpretation of the initial quote without the backing of Jefferson: if so, let them present a working example of such a government before we take it as more than a utopian ideal.

- ***"Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question." (First Inaugural Address)***

History shows that the USA has been one of the best governments, by most people's standards, even libertarian. The last sentence indicates that Jefferson intended these as rhetorical questions, not as statements against all government. He also said (in the same address:

"If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

Jefferson clearly had more confidence in government than the initial quotation out of context would imply. If libertarians want to adopt this position (as some do), they'd be better off supporting it with something more than an appeal to the inconsistent authority of Jefferson.

Thomas Paine

- ***"Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one."***

To say that governments are evil is on a par with saying that humans are evil. To claim that it is a necessary evil is on a par with saying that cars are a necessary evil. What we are really talking about are subjective preferences which may or may not be satisfied, not some theological notion of right and wrong.

The inescapable evils of coercive behavior are not unique to government. Our government is where we choose to channel and regulate them, because the alternative (private, unregulated coercion) gives much worse results, as the history of privately owned states (monarchies, dictatorships, despotisms) and private "law" such as slavery, mafias, warlords, etc. show rather clearly. We have constructed a government that is jointly owned by all, because private ownership gives too much incentive for profit through coercion of others.

Alexander Fraser Tyler

- ***"A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the Public Treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidate promising the most benefits from the Public Treasury with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy always followed by dictatorship." From: "The Decline and Fall of the Athenian Republic".***

I wasn't aware that there was any "permanent form of government". However, we could make a pretty good case that voters in the US have always known that they could vote themselves benefits from the Public Treasury. Indeed, it's been done pretty often. Yet we've lasted 200+ years.

Unlike the Athenian Republic, in the USA the money in the Public Treasury comes directly from the pockets of the majority, the middle class. This might be the most significant deterrent to loose fiscal policy.

Ayn Rand

- ***"I shall choose friends among men, but neither slaves nor masters."***

Did Ayn Rand pay her taxes out of friendship then? That's a new one on me.

Andre Marrou

- ***"Liberals want the government to be your Mommy. Conservatives want government to be your Daddy. Libertarians want it to treat you like an adult."***

Libertarians want to kill mommy and daddy so that they can stay up later and buy more ice cream than they can now.

Bumper sticker analogies are as poor a method of understanding libertarianism (let alone anything else) as science fiction. Too bad so many libertarians make such heavy use of those methods.

James A. Donald

- ***"We have the right to defend ourselves and our property, because of the kind of animals that we are. True law derives from this right, not from the arbitrary power of the omnipotent state."***

The two red-alert-for-a-whopper phrases in this quote are: "the kind of animals that we are" and "true law".

People who compare us to animals usually know little about animals and less about people. If we look to animals for models we can find all sorts of unacceptable (and conflicting) behaviors which are entirely natural. Characterizations of humans as animals for most philosophical purposes have historically ignored sociological, anthropological, and sociobiological knowledge in favor of conveniently parochial observations.

There is no "true law". Innumerable political and religious sects might claim it, but I'd think that if there was such a thing, people could recognize it and agree on it.

Unattributed

- ***"Mob rule isn't any prettier merely because the mob calls itself a government."***

Corporate feudalism isn't any prettier merely because the corporations prattle about free markets. Strawmen are SO easy to create.

The presumption that the US government is the equivalent of mob rule is ludicrous. The assertion that libertarian anarchy would be better is unsupported by real examples. (Libertarian minarchy doesn't change the form of government from "mob rule".)

- ***"It ain't charity if you are using someone else's money."***

Almost all charitable organizations use other people's money. Their real point is that the money used for government social programs is "coerced" (libertarian newspeak for taxes.) What they overlook is that, in many philosophical and religious systems (including Judaism and Islam), charity isn't a virtue of the giver: charity is the relief of the receiver.

- ***"Utopia is not an option."***

This is the libertarian newspeak formula for overlooking problems with their ideas. Much like "Trust in Jesus". Used the way it commonly is, it means "libertarianism might do worse here: I don't want to make a comparison lest we lose."

It is also another motherhood and apple pie issue; it applies to EVERY political theory. The question is what provisions are made for coping with necessary imperfections; libertarians tend to assume "the same as today but better", without any experience of what their proposed changes actually will do.

According to Perry Metzger, who claims to have popularized the phrase, the correct usage is "you **have** to make a comparison of libertarianism against the existing system rather than against your ideals of what you'd like your system to do." However, since there is no real example of libertarianism, that would be comparing the real current system against an ideal libertarian system. That's hardly a fair or valid comparison.

There is one valid way of using this phrase: to indicate that perfection is not a possible result. That is a rare usage.

- ***"Democracy is like three wolves and a sheep deciding what to have for lunch."***

We are not a simple democracy: we are a constitutional, representative democratic republic: there are not direct elections of laws and there is a constitution that limits what laws can be enacted. Extend the analogy to take that into account and lo and behold, it becomes: "deciding what to have for lunch that is not one of us."

Now, if you were making the analogy about anarcho-capitalism, it would become "three wolves competing to be first to 'add value' to the sheep by slaughtering it and sell it to the others."

This is really a classic libertarian strawman, used by many flavors of anarchists for centuries. The authors of the US Constitution were well aware of this: they devoted a segment of the Federalist papers to it: "... it may be concluded that a pure democracy... can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction... A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking." Federalist No. 10, James Madison.

LIBERTARIAN PHILOSOPHY

Libertarianism does have a lot of philosophical literature which is much more sophisticated than the evangelistic and bumper sticker arguments critiqued above. However, much of it can be critiqued as fundamentally flawed. James K. Galbraith, criticizing many economists, might well have been criticizing libertarians when he wrote (in a letter in Slate, Nov. 5, 1996):

I don't accept that much of use can be learned about policy in this way [well-structured deduction from metaphysical first principles.] When the world deviates from the principles, as it usually does, the simple lessons go astray. This is not a complaint against math. It is a complaint against

indiscriminate application of the deductive method, sometimes called the Ricardian vice, to problems of human action. Mine is an old gripe against much of what professional economists do; not against science but against scientism, against the pretense of science. To combat it, I spend my research time wrestling with real-world data, and I spend much of my writing time warring against the policy ideas of aggressive, ahistorical deductivists.

A thorough discussion of problems of libertarian philosophy would be well beyond the scope of this FAQ, though an overview might one day be developed. In the mean time, a few sources are available at the "Critiques of Libertarianism" site (<http://world.std.com/~mhuben/libindex.html>), and still better are a number of the excellent critical references listed below.

CRITICAL REFERENCES

I am seeking references to critiques and analyses of libertarianism or its positions, which seem to be very scarce. So far the following have been found or recommended (special thanks to James Hammerton and Robert Lockard):

Walter Adams "The Bigness Complex"

Pantheon Books, 1987. (opposes libertarian antitrust position)

A. B. Atkinson ["The Economic Consequences of Rolling Back the Welfare State"](#)

MIT Press, 1999. Points out unintended negative side effects of reduction of government.

James Arnt Aune ["Selling The Free Market"](#)

Guilford Press, 2000. Explains the neoliberal rhetoric of markets, and how "economic correctness" is used harmfully to trump all other values. Criticizes Nozick, Rand, Murray, and Posner.

Nicholas Barr ["The Economics of the Welfare State"](#)

Stanford University Press, 1999. A thorough overview of the real world economics of market failures and government interventions.

Norman P. Barry "On Classical Liberalism and Libertarianism"

MacMillan 1987

Jeremy Bentham "Anarchical Fallacies"

David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle ["The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools"](#)

Rebuts propaganda against public schools recited by libertarians.

Colin Bird ["The Myth of Liberal Individualism"](#)

Classical liberalism was not what libertarians claim it was.

John R. E. Bliese ["The Greening of Conservative America"](#)

A conservative refutes common conservative anti-environmental claims that are much parroted by libertarians.

Paulina Borsook ["Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High Tech"](#)

A thorough and humorous skewering of the libertarian pretensions of the digerati.

Frank Bourgin "The Great Challenge: The Myth of Laissez-Faire in the Early Republic"

Harry Brighouse ["Justice \(Key Concepts\)"](#)

Contains 20 pages of criticism of Friedman and Nozick's ideas of justice.

Peter G. Brown ["Restoring Public Trust"](#)

A progressive refutation and alternative to Milton Friedman's "Free To Choose".

John Bryant ["Libertarian Dirt"](#)

Socratic Press, 1995. A ranting pamphlet about Murray Rothbard; 2/3 self promotion and blank pages. Not recommended.

Allen Buchanan ["Ethics, Efficiency, and the Market"](#)

Rowman & Littlefield, 1985. From the cover: "... contains the most thorough and systematic analysis of economic and moral arguments both for and against the market as an instrument of resource allocation." The chapter, "Moral Arguments For and Against the Market" occupies most of the book.

David Card and Alan B. Krueger ["Myth and Measurement: The New Economics Of The Minimum Wage"](#)

Princeton Univ. Press, 1997. Libertarians claim the minimum wage destroys jobs: real-world evidence points the other way.

George W. Carey, editor ["Freedom & Virtue : The Conservative Libertarian Debate"](#)

Intercollegiate Studies Inst., 1998. Conservatives and Libertarians duke it out.

Noam Chomsky ["Profit Over People: Neoliberalism And Global Order"](#)

Seven Stories Press 1999. Places the current ascendancy of neoliberalism in historic context as yet another form of oppression by elites.

G. A. Cohen ["Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality \(Studies in Marxism and Social Theory\)"](#)

Cambridge Univ Press, 1995.

Joseph Collins and John Lear ["Chile's Free-Market Miracle: A Second Look"](#)

Food First, 1995. A major criticism of the neoliberal makeover of Chile.

Stephanie Coontz ["The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap"](#)

Basic Books, 2000. How many modern claims of family "institutions" are historically incorrect.

Charles Derber ["Corporation Nation: How Corporations Are Taking Over Our Lives, And What We Can Do About It"](#)

St. Martin's Press 1998. Ascendancy of corporate power is decried as illiberal, and a new positive populism is prescribed.

George W. Downs and Patrick D. Larkey ["The Search For Government Efficiency: From Hubris to Helplessness"](#)

Random House, 1986. A serious, scholarly study of efficiency. Not a polemic but very necessary to balance the government as inefficient polemics.

William A Edmundson ["Three Anarchical Fallacies : An Essay on Political Authority"](#)

Cambridge University Press 1998. Exposes fallacies inspired by the ideas of obedience, coercion, and intrusion. Challenges many assumptions of libertarians and others.

Albert Ellis ["Is Objectivism A Religion?"](#)

L. Stuart, 1968.

Peter Erickson ["The Stance of Atlas: An Examination of The Philosophy of Ayn Rand"](#)

Herakles Pub. 1997. Shows some fundamental errors in Rand's philosophy, and identifies some earlier alternatives that are supposedly correct.

Sidney Fine ["Laissez-Faire and the General Welfare State"](#)

UMP, 1956. History of the triumph of progressivism over laissez-faire.

Thomas Frank ["One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy"](#)

Doubleday 2000. Deflates the propaganda and hype for markets that are the new justification for ever-growing inequality.

Barbara H. Fried ["The Progressive Assault On Laissez Faire: Robert Hale And The First Law And Economics Movement"](#)

Harvard University Press 1998. The first, full-length study of Hale's work, which showed that "private", unregulated economic relations were in fact determined by a state imposed regime of property and contract rights which were hard to square with common-sense notions of social justice.

Jeffrey Friedman ["What's Wrong With Libertarianism" \[PDF\]](#) and ["The Libertarian Straddle: Rejoinder to Palmer and Sciabarra" \[PDF\]](#)

The editor of [Critical Review](#) magazine details how libertarian philosophy and economics rely on each other, and neither can bear the weight.

John Kenneth Galbraith ["The Good Society: the Humane Agenda"](#)

Houghton Mifflin Co. 1997. The "why"s of liberalism, illustrating the competing goals in society and how to resolve them compassionately. A book of pragmatic compromise, that asks what is wanted by people rather than what ideology demands.

Willard Gaylin and Bruce Jennings "The Perversion of Autonomy : The Proper Uses of Coercion and Constraints in a Liberal Society"

Free Press, 1996. Discusses the balance in a liberal society between the autonomy of the individual against the responsibility of individuals toward the community at large.

Charles T. Goodsell "The Case for Bureaucracy: A Public Administration Polemic"

Chatham House, 1994. Reexamines empirical findings on U.S. bureaucratic performance, noting how well the American system really works.

John Gray "Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government and the Common Environment"

Routledge 1994. John Gray once held views very close to libertarianism, but in this book he repudiates both neoclassical liberalism and libertarianism. Chapter 3, "The Moral Foundations of Market Institutions" contains some strong criticisms of the libertarian position.

John Gray ["False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism"](#)

New Press 1999. A critique of the politics of neo-liberalism that shows the ideological connections between neo-liberalism and Marxism.

Donald P. Green ["Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory"](#)

Yale University Press, 1994. A serious, scholarly study of the intellectual failures of Rational Choice Theory.

William Greider ["One World, Ready or Not : The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism"](#)

Simon & Schuster 1997. A liberal examination of the implications of the global industrial revolution.

Alan Haworth ["Anti-Libertarianism: Markets, Philosophy, and Myth"](#)

Routledge 1994.

Dennis Henigan, Bruce Nicholson, David Hemenway "Guns and the Constitution"

Aletheia Press 1995. A book-length FAQ of refutations of the gun-ownership propaganda and mythology promulgated by the NRA and gleefully parroted by libertarians. Essential reading. The ["Guns And The Judiciary" section is now available online.](#)

Richard Hofstadter ["Social Darwinism in American Thought"](#)

Beacon Press, 1992. Rebukes Spencerian Social Darwinist arguments for laissez-faire.

Stephen Holmes, Cass Sunstein ["The Cost of Rights: Why Liberty Depends on Taxes"](#)

W. W. Norton 1999. Legally enforceable rights cost money, a fact ignored by libertarian ideologues.

William E. Hudson ["American Democracy in Peril"](#)

Chatham House, 1996. Chapter 3 "The second challenge: radical individualism" has a subsection "The flaws of libertarianism."

Thomas Parke Hughes ["Rescuing Prometheus"](#)

Pantheon Books 1998. An analysis of how four large-scale government projects basically invented and then transformed modern systems management and operations research while also developing much of the core technology of the post-modern world.

Attracta Ingram ["A Political Theory of Rights"](#)

Oxford University Press 1994. Ingram argues that the libertarian concept of self-ownership is inadequate, and proposes a (much more complex) theory of rights based in a principle of self-government. Chapters 1-3, form a useful exposition and critique of the standard libertarian position.

Jane Kelsey ["Rolling Back the State: Privatisation of Power in Aotearoa/New Zealand"](#)

Paul & Co Publishing Consortium 1996. And "Economic Fundamentalism: The New Zealand Experiment - A World Model for Structural Adjustment?"

Pluto Press 1996. Two books that detail the unhappy consequences of a real-world libertarian economic experiment.

Naomi Klein ["No Logo: Taking aim at the Brand Bullies"](#)

Picado USA 2000. Discusses the ill effects of allowing popular culture to be shaped by branding in the quest for corporate profits.

Roland Kley ["Hayek's Social and Political Thought"](#)

Oxford University Press 1994. Shows that Hayek's concept of a spontaneous order doesn't stand up to scrutiny, undermining a body of theory libertarians often draw upon to show that free markets work.

Harold Kyriazi ["Libertarian Party at Sea on Land"](#)

Robert Schalkenbach Foundation 2000. A libertarian criticizes the Libertarian Party positions regarding ownership of natural resources for inconsistency with its own principles.

Robert Kuttner ["Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets"](#)

Knopf, 1997. Why mixed economies would outperform pure markets. Essential for countering libertarian economic arguments.

Will Kymlicka ["Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction"](#)

Oxford University Press, 1991. Now the standard text in the field; very highly regarded. Has a long chapter on libertarianism. Not at all kind to it.

William Leach ["Land of Desire"](#)

Vintage Books, 1993. Discusses the rise of America's consumerist culture and shows how our capitalist system has depended on government support at every stage of its development.

Lawrence Lessig ["Code: And Other Laws of Cyberspace"](#)

Basic Books, 1999. A non-libertarian view of the threats to freedom in cyberspace both from government and the market. Makes the point that freedom comes from a particular kind of government, not no government.

Charles E. Lindblom ["The Market System: What It Is, How It Works, and What To Make of It"](#)

Yale Univ. Pr. 2001. The big picture of what markets do well and poorly, their benefits and harms. Very balanced.

Steven Luper-Foy ["The Possibility of Knowledge: Nozick and His Critics"](#)

Linda McQuaig ["The Cult of Impotence: Selling the Myth of Powerlessness in the Global Economy"](#)

Viking 1998. Why economic globalization and its effects are not inevitable, and why democratic government can and should ameliorate those effects.

Irving S. Michelman ["The Moral Limitations of Capitalism"](#)

Proposes criteria for establishing positive economic rights.

Liam Murphy and Thomas Nagel ["The Myth of Ownership: Taxes and Justice"](#)

Explains property rights as government creations, and taxes as part of property.

Stephen L. Newman ["Liberalism at Wits' End: The Libertarian Revolt Against the Modern State"](#)

Cornell University Press in 1984

William J. Novak ["The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America"](#)

Univ. of North Carolina Pr., 1996. "Blasts to pieces... the libertarian fantasy that until the twentieth century the American state left private property owners and economic entrepreneurs alone." --Robert W. Gordon, Yale Law School.

Greg S. Nyquist ["Ayn Rand Contra Human Nature"](#)

iUniverse.com, 2001. Perhaps the most extensive criticism of Rand. Finds that her assumptions about human nature do not match scientific knowledge of human nature.

[Link to online text!](#)

William F. O'Neill ["With Charity Toward None: An Analysis Of Ayn Rand's Philosophy"](#)

Littlefield, Adams, 1972.

Philippe Van Parijs ["Real Freedom for All: What \(If Anything\) Can Justify Capitalism?"](#)

Oxford University Press, 1998. Policy implications for resolving the conflict between capitalism's unacceptable inequality and the paramount importance of real freedom.

Philippe Van Parijs et al. ["What's Wrong With a Free Lunch?"](#)

Beacon Press, 2001. 16 widely varied points of view on the idea of a Universal Basic Income as an antidote to the extreme inequalities of capitalism.

Jeffrey Paul, editor ["Reading Nozick"](#)

(anthology of essays about "Anarchy, State, And Utopia")

Michael Perelman ["The Invention of Capitalism : Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation"](#)

An academic examination of how governments created the preconditions for capitalism by separating peasants from their land, following the advice of classical economists such as Adam Smith.

Karl Polanyi, Joseph E. Stiglitz, Fred Block ["The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time"](#)

Explains the socially constructed nature of "free markets", as opposed to "spontaneous order".

Margaret Jane Radin ["Contested Commodities: The Trouble with Trade in Sex, Children, Body Parts, and Other Things"](#)

An examination of how non-market values are important to personhood, and how social and economic inequality threaten those values, necessitating regulation.

Jack N. Rakove ["Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution"](#)

Pullitzer Prize winning background that helps to understand the fallacies in simplistic libertarian constitutional interpretations.

Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber ["Trust Us, We're Experts: How Industry Manipulates Science and Gambles With Your Future"](#)

Details of the public relations and brownlash manipulations of CATO, Steven Milloy, and others.

Elton Rayack ["Not So Free To Choose"](#)

An extensive criticism of Milton Friedman's economic and social philosophy.

John W. Robbins ["Answer to Ayn Rand : \[a critique of the philosophy of objectivism\]"](#)

John W. Robbins ["Without a Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of Her System"](#)

Apparently a rebuttal from a religious point of view.

L.A. Rollins ["The Myth of Natural Rights"](#)

Douglas Rushkoff ["Coercion: Why We Listen to What 'They' Say"](#)

The coercive and manipulative arms race between marketers and the public.

Scott Ryan ["Objectivism and the Corruption of Rationality: A Critique of Ayn Rand's Epistemology"](#)

A technical analysis that finds Objectivism to be both incoherent and unoriginal.

Schwartz, Peter ["Libertarianism: The perversion of liberty"](#)

An article reprinted in "The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought".

Amartya Sen ["Development As Freedom"](#)

A Nobel prize-winning economist explains elimination of "capability deprivation" in five categories as being crucial to freedom. Shows libertarian ideas of economic freedom to be dreadfully incomplete for liberty or freedom.

Thomas A. Spragens, Jr. ["The Limitations of Libertarianism."](#)

Responsive Community (Spring 1992)45-47. (Part 2.)

James P. Sterba ["Contemporary Social and Political Philosophy"](#)

Wadsworth, 1994. His chapter on libertarianism makes the argument that, "... the right to a social minimum endorsed by welfare liberals is also required by the libertarian's own ideal of liberty."

James P. Sterba ["Morality in Practice"](#)

Fifth edition, Wadsworth, 1997. Another statement of the above argument. A longer version of this article will appear as "Reconciling Liberty and Equality or Why Libertarians must be Socialists" in Liberty and Equality, edited by Larry May and Jonathan Schonsheck (MIT, 1996).

Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado ["No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda"](#)

(Temple Univ. Press 1996). The influence of Cato and Heritage Foundations.

Cass Sunstein ["Free Markets and Social Justice"](#)

(Oxford Univ. Press 1997). Takes on the claims of the Law and Economics camp, libertarians such as Epstein and Posner.

Rick Tilman ["Ideology and Utopia in the Social Philosophy of the Libertarian Economists \(Contributions in Economics and Economic History, No. 223\)"](#)

(Greenwood Publishing Group 2001). Challenges libertarian definitions of freedom and democracy, and shows how libertarianism undermines democracy, civil liberties, and social equality.

Lars Udehn "**The Limits of Public Choice: A sociological critique of the economic theory of politics**"

(Routledge 1996).

Jeff Walker "**The Ayn Rand Cult**"

(Open Court 1998). Questions the originality of Rand's ideas, and presents the cult-like organization of Objectivism.

Gary Wills "**A Necessary Evil: A History of American Distrust of Government**"

(Simon & Schuster 1999) A strong refutation of historical revisionist interpretations of the Founders and Constitution as supporting antigovernment positions.

Robert Anton Wilson "**Natural Law**"

Donald A. Wittman "**The Myth of Democratic Failure: Why Political Institutions Are Efficient**"

University of Chicago Press, 1995. "... refutes one of the cornerstone beliefs of economics and political science: that economic markets are more efficient than the processes and institutions of democratic government."

Jonathan Wolff "**Robert Nozick: Property, Justice and the Minimal State**"

Blackwell 1991. Summarizes and invents numerous philosophical refutations of Nozick's [Anarchy, State, and Utopia](#), a much parroted work. Libertarians are generally unaware of the flaws and incompleteness of their "best" philosophy.

John Cunningham Wood and Ronald N. Woods "**Milton Friedman: critical assessments**"

Routledge 1990.

I've yet to read most of these, and welcome reviews, summaries, and better citations.

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- Friedman, David "**The Machinery of Freedom**"
- Marshall, Peter "**Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism**"
- Spooner, Lysander "**No Treason**"

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Visitors since 97/1/21.

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