

Preface. Libertarianism from the Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract:

This special issue of *Studia Humana* is devoted, and dedicated, to libertarianism; its promotion and its study. I am very grateful to the editors of this journal for inviting me to put together such a compilation. There are 16 contributions in all, covering most of the social science disciplines.

Keywords: economics, politics, history, philosophy, psychology.

Why is it important to offer an entire issue on this subject? It is crucial because libertarianism, the natural state of freedom, is man's last best hope for prosperity, even for his very survival.

Why so? This is because this philosophy is dedicated to peaceful interaction between people. Its non-aggression principle maintains that all human relationships should be voluntary. Thus, murder, rape, kidnapping, theft, or the threats thereof are ruled illicit. All other behavior is legal, included "capitalist acts between consenting adults" [2, 163], including sex, drugs, earning profits, etc. To prohibit or interfere with these is to legally proscribe victimless crimes. Libertarianism also provides the means through which all disputes can be resolved: self-ownership and private property rights. If this philosophy were adopted world-wide, it would mean the end of war and crime, and a radical diminution of poverty. It is my hope that this volume will make a small but significant contribution to such an eventuality.

I. Economics

We are fortunate to be able to include three essays on the School of Salamanca in this collection. However, a critic might object on the ground that this is economics, not political philosophy, and libertarianism, strictly speaking, is an aspect of the latter, not the former. Not so, no so, I aver. Any school of thought that maintains that the just rate of interest is the market rate of interest, that the just price is the market price, that the just rent is the market rent, that the just wage is the market wage, etc., cannot be considered too far apart from libertarianism. Yes, of course, there is economics involved in this. But in this School's concern for justice, it also partakes of the philosophy studied in this special issue of *Studia Humana*.

The School of Salamanca is very important since it was started in the 16th century by Jesuits and Dominicans. To say that these priests embraced laissez faire capitalism then, would be a vast

understatement. But any study of their viewpoints at present, particularly the Jesuits, would indicate a 180 degree turn away from their foundational viewpoints.¹ Not to be too blunt about it, but they have with very few honorable exceptions embraced the doctrine of social justice, or liberation theology, anathema to the Salamancans, and to libertarians. Here are the three entries in this category:

1. The School of Salamanca's Reconciliation of Economics and Religion, Anthony J. Cesario

This first one is brought to us by Anthony J. Cesario, with his "The School of Salamanca's Reconciliation of Economics and Religion." He demonstrates their opposition to usury laws, underlines their development of monetary theory and focuses on their Catholic theology.

2. Beneath the Black Robes of Ignatius and Mariana: Limited Liberty within an Interventionist Order, L. B. Edgar

The second in this category comes to us from an author who maintains there was at least one exception to the general rule that the early Jesuits all favored free enterprise. Edgar singles out the founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola, "a statist interventionist turned militant religious reformer."

3. Martín de Azpilcueta: The Spanish Scholastic on Usury and Time-Preference, Pedro J. Caranti

This author focuses his attention on one of the most prominent members of the School of Salamanca. Caranti credits Azpilcueta with developing the theory of time-preference, one of the very basic building blocks of Austrian Economics, the free enterprise school of thought. However, our author sees some clay on the feet of this early economist; strangely, he did not defend the practice of usury as did his fellow Salamancans.

II. Politics

Given the non aggression principle, and private property rights based upon initial homesteading and licit (voluntary) title transfer thereafter, what follows? What are the implications for public policy? Here, we consider a full half dozen repercussions ranging from welfare to children's rights to diet, to price gouging to egalitarianism to war and peace.

1. Rethinking Welfare: The LDS Welfare Program vs Public Welfare, David R. Iglesias

What should be the libertarian position on welfare? None at all? Privatize it? In his "Rethinking Welfare: The LDS Welfare Program vs Public Welfare," David R. Iglesias adds on to the analysis of Hazlitt and Rothbard and points to the Mormon Church as one of the most successful organizations in helping the poor through voluntary contributions.

2. A Rational Theory of the Rights of Children, Ian Hersum

Children are a challenge, as any parent full well knows. The same is true for the libertarian philosophy which abjures paternalism, but necessarily applies it to youngsters. In his "A Rational Theory of the Rights of Children" Ian Hersum sheds light on child abuse, children's rights and derives them from basic libertarian principles. He sees libertarianism as a philosophy of conflict resolution, and there is no more subject in need of that benefit than children.

3. On Huemer on Ethical Veganism, Walter E. Block

Huemer (2019) argues against the killing of animals. I offer a critical libertarian analysis of his claim. Huemer is one of the leading philosophical supporters of libertarianism. He maintains that veganism, or at least vegetarianism, is a logical implication of libertarianism. I argue against this point.

4. Price gouging

In “Medical Mask Resellers Punished in Canada” Milton Kiang demonstrates that it is not greed, it is not capitalism that retarded the provision of medical masks to combat the Corona virus. Rather, the blame should be laid at the door of the Canadian government that would not allow prices based on supply and demand. Anti-gouging law and price controls were the culprit, not economic freedom.

5. A Libertarian Perspective on Peace Enforcement by the United Nations, Sukrit Sabhlok

Libertarians, at least of the Rothbardian variety, have views on foreign relations, and these are often at variance with those on the right, or conservatives, with whom we are all too often confused. Sabhlok demonstrates this unique perspective with his analysis of the United Nations.

6. In their “Nulla Libertarian Poena Sine NAP: Reexamination of Libertarian Theories of Punishment” Eduardo Blasco and David Marcos wrestle with a particularly thorny challenge to libertarianism: punishment theory. They take on such previous contributors to this literature as Murray N. Rothbard, Walter E. Block, Stephan Kinsella, Randy Barnett, David Friedman and Hans-Hermann Hoppe. Their unique contribution is that they “take time preference into consideration” something never before done as far as I know. They offer a limit and a limitation to libertarian punishment theory.

III. History

We are fortunate to have two papers focusing on the history of the libertarian movement. If we do not know where we have been, the way forward is even the more perilous, since we cannot learn from the past.

1. A Review: Digital Archeology of the Modern American Libertarian Movement, Mike Holmes

The first of these historical excursions is provided by Mike Holmes in his “A Review: Digital Archeology of the Modern American Libertarian Movement.” He dates the start of this effort to promote freedom to the mid-1960s in the United States. Holmes sees Murray N. Rothbard, and Ayn Rand, both living in New York City at the time, as integral to the start of this undertaking. The review provides descriptions of digitally accessible publications from the early American libertarian movement and where they can be found.”

2. Libertarianism: A Fifty-Year Personal Retrospective, Mark Thornton

The second is provided by Mark Thornton in a contribution that could have been entitled “A trip down libertarian memory lane.” In my own humble opinion of all the think tanks, organizations, political parties, responsible for what success libertarianism has had in the U.S., the Mises Institute stands head and shoulder over all the others. Thornton has spent virtually his entire career right there in Auburn, Alabama, in the belly not of the beast but of the opposition to statism

in all its forms. So his contribution is an especially important one to this collection. This is an important intellectual autobiography. For another such, see [1].

IV. Philosophy

Libertarianism is, foremost, an aspect of philosophy. Philosophy is the mother of all sciences, and libertarianism is, at least in my opinion, the mother of one of its branches, political philosophy. In this section we present three important contributions to that discipline.

1. Hoppe's Argumentation Ethics, Lucas Maciel Bueno

An Interpretative Model of the Evolution of Hoppe's Argumentation Ethics, Lucas Maciel

Libertarianism resembles the sticks of an Indian teepee. They all cross about 15 feet high in the air. Where they intersect is akin to the non-aggression principle and private property rights based on homesteading, the twin foundations of libertarianism. Below that point are the implications of this philosophy. What do the bits of stick protruding upwards signify? The various justifications of the free enterprise system. Among them are utilitarianism, natural law and religion. Ayn Rand claims it stems from "A is A." In my view the most powerful of these validations is Hoppe's "argument from argument." Maciel's contribution to this compilation is to further elaborate upon this crucially important building block of our philosophy.

2. Is statism an amoral philosophy? Jakub Bożydar Wiśniewski

One would expect a contributor to this volume to claim not that statism, the polar opposite of libertarianism, is immoral, not amoral. Thus, we shall all have to sit up and take notice as this gifted philosopher makes an unexpected argument. On the other hand, not at all unexpectedly, he demonstrates that only libertarianism deserves the honorific "moral."

3. Problems with the Notion of Freedom and Voluntariness in Right Libertarianism, Igor Wysocki

In this third paper in the philosophy category Igor Wysocki wrestles with the relationship between freedom and voluntariness. He takes on the person who might well be considered the most eminent libertarian philosopher who ever made his mark in this discipline. No, not Murray Rothbard, the person who deserves this appellation, but rather Robert Nozick. Wysocki takes the position that voluntariness (or freedom) is logically prior to the notion of rights.

4. Peter Singer's "Famine, Affluence, and Morality": Three Libertarian Refutations, J. C. Lester

Peter Singer is widely known as an eloquent supporter of egalitarianism. He maintains that those in the wealthy West are morally obligated to donate far more than at present to the poverty stricken in the third world. J. C. Lester takes issue with these claims of Singer in his contribution.

V. Psychology

Last but far from least comes psychology. Indeed I have saved the best for last. This is because I think that to the extent we libertarians make any headway in promoting our beloved philosophy, it will not be mainly through economics, law, history, philosophy or any of these others. Rather, it will be on the basis of this discipline, because this is the one that most closely approaches where we live our mental lives.

A Proletariat of One: Libertarianism and the Psychosis of Authority David L. Fisher

What are the difficulties libertarians face in their effort to promote this philosophy? David L. Fisher locates them not in economics, not in philosophy, not in law, not in politics, the usual focus of members of this group, but, rather in psychology and religion. In his “A Proletariat of One: Libertarianism and the Psychosis of Authority” locates the roadblocks facing libertarian in terms of the authoritarianism wielded by the intellectual and political elites of the West.

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References

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2. Nozick, R. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books, 1974.

Notes

1. Ok, ok, a 179 degree turn.