

**LIBERTARIANISM:
IDEOLOGY FOR THE COMMON MAN**

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LIBERTARIANISM: IDEOLOGY FOR THE COMMON MAN

WHO MAKES UP the “common man”? They are men, and women. They’re workers, and entrepreneurs. They’re students, and teachers. They’re atheists, and believers in God. The common men and women vary from one another in many ways. Some prefer rock and roll, while others prefer classical music. Some are polite while others are rude. Some want long-term, committed relationships, and others are looking for one-night stands. There are some who prefer reading, and others who prefer television. In short, each individual is unique.

Despite our individual differences, there are basic ideals that virtually all of us share. This is because common men and women are largely libertarian in their personal interactions with one another.

What is a libertarian? The simplest definition of a libertarian is one who opposes the initiation of force in any relationship among humans or the organisations they form. To the libertarian, the only just use of force is *defensive* force. If a person comes along and attempts to initiate force against you, by stealing your wallet for example, he or she is acting in a criminal manner; you have every right to repel his or her attack with equal and opposing force. However, if you initiate force against *your* neighbour, then

you are acting criminally, and he or she may repel *your* attack with equal and opposing force.

Generally speaking, common men and women agree with this human ethic. The common man knows he has no right to place a gun against another person's head and demand this other person hand over her money. The common woman knows she has no right to tell her neighbour to paint his house, threatening to burn his house down if he does not comply.

This ethic is an extremely common one. For example, we common people disapprove of the notion of murder. We oppose rape, theft, and battery. In short, we oppose the *initiation* of force. Unfortunately, not everyone in society does. Those who employ the initiation of force are typically called *criminals* or *government employees*.

Politicians, even ones with good intentions, usually have no problem taking *your* money to fund the special programmes *they* like. If *you* were to start a programme, you would encourage your neighbours to sponsor it with *voluntary* contributions, and without threatening them with jail time or, worse yet, death.* Politicians, on the other hand, take money from you at the point of a gun. By this I mean to say that if you do not surrender the money you earned, politicians will send armed officials to your door and drag you off to prison; and in some countries, you'll be lucky to come away from the experience alive. Certainly, this conduct would be impermissible if you or I tried to do to our neighbours what the politicians do to us, but this just goes to show that typical politicians do not live by the same ethic as the common man.

* One of my favourite short articles on libertarianism is Harry Browne, "Why You Are a Libertarian," December 12, 2005, <http://www.harrybrowne.org/articles/WhyYoureALibertarian.htm> (accessed January 15, 2008).

Politicians don't simply take our money, they also rarely have any problem forcing their personal or moral standards onto people. If *you* don't like that your homosexual neighbours are planning to marry one another, then you would simply talk to them, encouraging them to alter their life-styles. You would *never* think to place a gun against their heads and force them to conform to your standard, just as you would not want them to force you to conform to theirs. Politicians, by and large, do not care about the Golden Rule.

Insofar as criminals aim to impose their wishes onto their fellow citizens, they are no different from your average politician. The difference between the common criminal and the average politician is simply, effectively, the difference between how *many* guns they use to compel innocent persons to conform.

Given the libertarian's opposition to the initiation of force, libertarians typically have political ideals that aim at limiting the power of government. Thus, libertarians oppose laws that restrict freedom of speech or of the press, freedom to bear defensive weapons, freedom to choose one's own religion or to choose no religion at all, freedom to a fair trial, freedom of association, freedom to form unions, freedom to fire unions, freedom to choose what kind of foods one wishes to buy, freedom to choose to what causes one donates one's own money, and freedom to choose what substances one wishes to place into one's own body. Libertarians oppose all forms of slavery, and wish to see taxes cut as much as possible and the repeal of all drug laws. When it comes to voluntary sexual relations, including prostitution, libertarians wish to see the abolition of all such regulations, while continuing to oppose the use of force in sexual relations, such as rape and molestation. The libertarian, believing the only just use of force to be def-

ensive, opposes war for any purpose other than defence. All of these reforms would serve to limit the power of government and increase the liberty of all individuals in society, in the eyes of libertarians.

The libertarian is neither inherently socialist nor conservative. Indeed, one can be very conservative in one's personal life and personal conduct, but be a libertarian because he or she would never dream of forcing his or her own conservative conduct onto his or her neighbour. Likewise, one can be very much a socialist (or "liberal" in the American context) in one's personal life and personal conduct, but nevertheless be a libertarian because he or she would never dream of forcing his or her socialism onto his or her neighbour. Compare the common men and women, who wish to see their neighbours and themselves fully free in their own respective persons and property, with the typical politician, who has no "live and let live" outlook, and thinks nothing of forcing his or her conservative or socialist standards onto his or her subjects. The difference is like the difference between night and day!

It is not impossible for a politician to be a libertarian. Some particularly radical libertarians who have served as politicians include Frédéric Bastiat of France and Auberon Herbert of England. Nevertheless, politicians often fail to meet the libertarian standards of the common man, even going so far as committing disgusting crimes against humanity, such as Adolph Hitler in Germany and Josef Stalin in the Soviet Union. Therefore libertarians, aiming to do away with the initiation of force in any relationship among humans and the organisations they form, necessarily aim to limit the size, scope, and cost of government. After all, it's the least we can do to protect the Liberty of the common men and women.