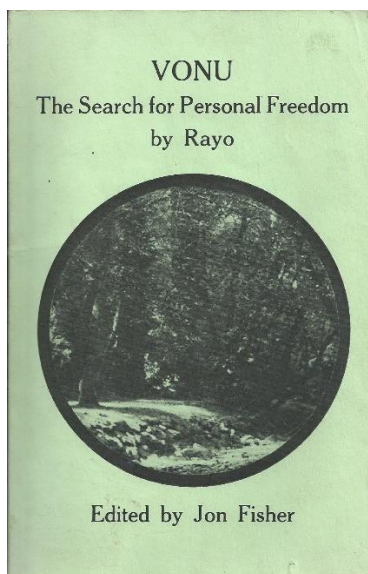


Libertarians and Coercivists

By El Ray (A.K.A “Rayo” and Tom Marshall)

*Note: The following is [a mirrored essay from the August 1987 edition of Liberty Magazine](#). This was originally published in the third issue of *Eleutherian Forum* on January 16th, 1967. Since the digital version of his book **VONU: The Search for Personal Freedom** will be released tomorrow, June 8th in audiobook and PDF format, I figured it was only fitting to give you guys a taste of what to expect from **Mr. Tom Marshall**. Please enjoy this essay and make sure to read the aforementioned book.*



A libertarian is a person who holds (for whatever reason) that no one has the right to use coercion (initiate the use of physical force or threat thereof).

Most libertarians hold that one may use physical force in self-defense and/or retaliation *against* coercion; distinguishing between coercion and *non*-initiated force appropriate to a situation.

The opposite of a Libertarian is a Coercivist, a generic term for persons who inflict or advocate coercion.

Two main subcategories of coercivists are:

- *Felons* who personally coerce others;
- *Statists* who seek organized coercion by a State.

Most “conventional” political categories are simply different varieties of Statism – “rival gangs of looters” who fight over who has the right to coerce and for what purposes coercion may be used. These include:

- *Socialists* who advocate government ownership of major industries;
- *Fascists* who advocate government regulation and taxation of private business;
- *Conservatives* who advocate government regulation in accordance with tradition;
- *Liberals* (not to be confused with *Classical Liberals*) who advocate economic “equalization” through coercion;
- “*States-rights*” advocates who prefer coercion by small States at a local level;
- “*One-world*” advocates who prefer coercive control of the entire earth by a single government;
- *Nationalists* who advocate coercion which increases the “power” of a particular State; and
- *Racists* who advocate coercive subjugation of certain races.

These categories are by no means mutually exclusive. Thus the American government might be described as predominately fascist-liberal-nationalist.

Most States makes a determined effort to indoctrinate their subjects (and especially children) to support the present State policies (whatever these may be) through direct and indirect control of education, information, and entertainment media. So, until very recently, almost all persons have been coercivists, and differed with their rulers (when they differed at all) only on petty details. This has been the case not only in Communist Russia and China, but in America as well; the American government has been a “pioneer” in socialized education and mass propaganda.

The best known divergent bodies of opinion in America -the “radical right” and the “radical left” -are unfortunately not very radical. The “right-left” polarization has reflected not so much a genuine desire for liberty (at least on the part of the leaders) as class special interests. While many persons on both the “right” and the “left” claim to want freedom, their advocacy is only partial and inconsistent. Thus the “radical left” tends to oppose censorship and conscription, but endorses coercively-financed “welfare programs”. Similarly, the “radical right” opposes “medicare” and income taxes, but demands tougher laws against “pornography”.

Libertarian opinion, however, takes the best of both “left” and “right” and goes far beyond-to a consistent advocacy of freedom; the total separation of State from all voluntary activities. Since only the libertarian is genuinely radical-only the libertarian truly seeks liberty, only the libertarian can provide a durable and effective opposition to the welfare-warfare state.

Libertarians can be subcategorized according to methods advocated for achieving and / or preserving liberty. Libertarians include:

- *Limited government advocates* who seek a non-coercive central government, financed by voluntary means, and having as its principle functions national defense and appellate judiciary. Such a government is hypothetically achieved by

ideological education, culminating in legal transformation of the existing government.

- *"Autarchists"* who desire to be left alone by the government but otherwise do not especially care about it (and believe that those who want it should be allowed to have it). Autarchy is hypothetically achieved as individuals discover ways to "opt out". More and more persons cease supporting and "sanctioning" the State, and it gradually atrophies. Most autarchists differ from competitive government advocates (below) in opposing retaliatory force and/ or in opposing the delegation of self-defense. And most autarchists differ from communitarians (below) in advocating market trade between individuals.
- *Competitive government advocates* who envision private police companies which competitively offer defense services to customers. Such protection agencies might hypothetically begin in relatively chaotic areas where no State is able to maintain "order", gradually growing and expanding their services to residents of States-offering protection against the State.
- *Communitarians* who seek voluntary collectivism in small (usually agrarian) communities or cooperatives; trade (or barter) being predominantly between communities. Many communitarians base their ideas on fundamentalist religious beliefs. Examples of existing (and economically quite successful [sic]) "voluntary communist" communities are the Hutterite *bruderhofs*. Existing communes exploit "legal interstices" within the State. Most communitarians, like autarchists, believe the State will wither away as more and more persons "opt out" by forming cooperatives.
- *Decentralists* who advocate partitionment of large States into many smaller States; culminating in a world of thousands of independent City-States. The decentralist would have relatively little concern regarding the form of government of any particular ministate, counting on direct and indirect competition to keep most of them rather free most of the time and on personal mobility to assure his freedom, "Iron Curtains" being impossible for ministates. Many decentralists expect a catastrophic economic collapse to so severely weaken the central governments of large States (such as America and Russia) to permit regions and political subdivisions to establish autonomy.
- *Anarchists* who advocate destruction of coercive States through retaliatory force against the rulers. In the hypothetical anarchic society which follows, criminals are discouraged and the growth of new States is discouraged by intensive personal cultivation of self-defense. Not all historical anarchists have been libertarians. A libertarian anarchist might advocate rioting, but only against the State and state-held property; he would not (intentionally) seize or destroy non-coercively acquired property. Most other libertarians oppose rioting for tactical reasons. The Watts riots were not "anarchy"- both the rioters and the police were coercivists.

Many libertarians favor multiple approaches to liberation. Since a durable completely-free society has not existed on earth, there is no proof that *any* of the hypothesized libertarian

societies can be established and endure. However, the existing States-especially the larger nations-are so utterly immoral and rampantly destructive that fear of unforeseen consequences could hardly deter one from seeking freedom. States have been by far the biggest thieves and most brutal murderers throughout history. Beside the murder of millions of Jews by the Nazi State, the murder of millions of kulaks by the Russian State, and the murder of millions of innocent residents of Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki (without even the excuse of military expediency) by the American State, the most depraved of private felons pale in significance.

Most of the economic / technological progress has been the result of free enterprise; notable private inventions include the steam engine, the cotton gin, electric generator, telephone, internal combustion engine, airplane radio, and antibiotics. The history of States is a chronicle of death and destruction; *their* most notable "inventions" have been the cross, the rack, the guillotine, the gas chamber, and the atomic bomb!

Every major coercive State has used the threat of "foreign" States to distract the attention of subjects from its own violence; this is a Statist con game as old as recorded history. Thus the American rulers try to justify domestic totalitarianism as a "defense against communist totalitarianism" even as they aid communist governments in the enslavement of their own people, and even as the communist States, in turn, exhort *their* subjects with fear of "American imperialism." But when, as in the present case, States are merely quarreling over who shall rule the slaves, it is seldom worthwhile to aid or abet *either* side. Rather one should regard *both* as mortal enemies and develop means of personal defense.

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