

Wednesday, December 5, 2007

### **He says that like it's a bad thing...**

I don't know who Jesse Larner is, I don't own a gun, and I may be the only card carrying libertarian in the world who has never read an Ayn Rand book. But I felt I had to put down my thoughts in response to his "Sinister Folly of Ayn Rand" rant on the Huffington Post. Specifically this comment:

In her insistence that she owed nothing to the state, nothing to any human being other than herself, Rand epitomized the kind of childishness shown by libertarians who insist that they have every legal and moral right to own as many guns as they please, pay no taxes, educate their children at home, and live free of any law except those governing, in the most direct manner, their own security and that of their neighbors. A watered-down form of this nonsense today exists in the platform of presidential candidate Ron Paul...

which of course is where the title of today's post comes from. As I said, I've never read an Ayn Rand book and I don't own a gun but I uphold the libertarian ideals that we are all self-sovereign individuals. Perhaps we could voluntarily sublimate ourselves to a state or to a government that earned our fealty through adherence to underlying mechanisms of their power (like holding true to the US Constitution or the Canadian Charter of Rights), but show me a government that actually does that. Especially these days.

I think what people like Larner don't get about Libertarianism isn't that we claim to put our interests above all else, that we're looking out for number one. Yes, we do that, but with that comes personal responsibility for our own lives. So not only do we claim unbridled freedom for our own persons, we accept the absolute responsibility that comes with it.

Many people don't like that, they can't handle it. Everything meaningful in their life has to be attributed to external factors: "I didn't get a raise because I'm black", "I didn't get hired because I'm white", "I don't have any money because you're rich", "The state owes me healthcare (because I'd rather spend my money on cigarettes, twinkies and soft drinks)". The list goes on and on. Give me a break.

Libertarians claim sole responsibility over their own lot in life and with that comes the freedom to do whatever they want. Are there any limits to this unbridled self-actualization? Can we be a society of hedonists, living full-on balls to the wall and to hell with everybody else? Well, that isn't what it's about. Conspicuously absent from Larner's rant is the Non-Aggression Principle, nothing short of the cornerstone of most Libertarian ideology.

The NAP basically says we can all do what we want provided we don't impede on the rights of others to do as they want. So, as I've always said: If you want to be a left-leaning, collectivist pinko, go for it. Don't expect, or try to force me, to come along.

Larner seems to go on to say that Capitalism is some evil death cult inflicted on the world by Ayn Rand:

Rand herself said that capitalism is the only economic system that is fully compatible with man's nature--but on the basis of what evidence? Did anyone ever challenge her on how she came to that conclusion, beyond her own personal conviction that it was so? What, after all, did she know of "man's nature"?

Again, he talks about capitalism and free markets like they're bad things. This is a tough one to tackle and one I've been grappling with awhile. The left, the Adbusters crew, and most activists decry capitalism as the root of all Evil.

This is a problem because in this day and age what passes for "capitalism" simply isn't, and yes, it causes havoc and misery throughout the world. The economic abuses being perpetrated by central bankers, oligarchs and governments are nothing short of crimes against humanity. The playing fields are deliberately kept uneven, laws are rewritten to exempt a few at the expense of future generations. It remains to be seen whether the damage done by Federal Reserve and the corruption of a sound monetary system will ever be undone.

The process has accelerated under the last few years of Neo-CON rule in North America and it has handed plenty ammunition to the left and to those who uphold the tyranny of the mob: Our "powers-that-be" have played dirty pool for generations. It has gotten much much worse since 9/11. After this "Project for a New American Century" runs its course (if any of us are still left) the word "capitalism" will be tarnished beyond usability. The most disastrous political regime in history will swing us inexorably to the hard left for generations to come: in the future it will be illegal to be talented,

wealthy, fortunate or to enjoy an advantage of any kind.

It is very difficult to explain to anti-capitalists why the things they hate about what they think is capitalism isn't actually capitalism and that real capitalists don't like it either. I always suggest the obscure but IMHO required reading of Vincent LoCascio's *The Monetary Elite vs. Gold's Honest Discipline* with a side order of Ferdinand Lips' *Gold Wars: The Battle Against Sound Money As Seen from a Swiss Perspective*.

Perhaps Lerner's biggest misconception about Libertarianism seems to be his belief that we're all antisocial beserkers that deny the existence of society because he finds it necessary to plead the case for playing nice with one another

We are creatures with a long evolutionary history of social structure and social co-operation. This makes sense; we are predators without effective claws or teeth, and we can't run very fast. How did our ancient ancestors catch large elephant and buffalo? By working as a group, by co-operating and communicating. Social organization is our special adaptation, our evolutionary niche; indeed, it is now standard evolutionary theory that there are dynamic relationships between the development of intelligence, language and social organization - with the adaptive payoff being better social organization, the thing vital to survival. In fact there is nothing else that can satisfactorily explain such a stunning evolutionary adaptation as language; an adaptation that loses all meaning, by the way, if you deny that society exists.

Uh, ok. Libertarians hold themselves as self-sovereign. That doesn't mean they can't function in groups and it certainly doesn't mean we should all invent our own languages and talk to ourselves alone and pretend that there's nobody else here on the planet.

What is important to Libertarians are that social interactions are free from coercion. As the concept of mutual agreement is paramount to Libertarians, they are no strangers to compromise and negotiation (if that's Lerner's worry, he should be looking at his own country's executive branch to find a frightening absence of those qualities).

The world could use a dose of the Non-Aggression Principal, especially here in the West where our governments spend a lot of time telling the rest of the world how they're supposed to live their lives and shitting all over other people's rights to self-determination; undertaking actions most of us disagree with and doing it in our names.

This is the reason Libertarians assert their own self-sovereignty, in word to say "My government's actions do not speak for me, I speak for me."

This is the reason why Ron Paul is getting so much grassroots support: He isn't a Republican as much as he's trying to bring a lost Republic back onto the rails it's Constitution describes. He says things that need to be said and cuts to the true underlying causes of our age's malaise, but as usual, nobody wants to hear it.

Posted by Mark Jeftovic in Personal Liberty at 11:59

beautifully put. and oh so true.  
Anonymous on Dec 5 2007, 14:45

"The state owes me healthcare (because I'd rather spend my money on cigarettes, twinkies and soft drinks)"

You say that like it's a bad thing.

Actually, I do find your conception of libertarianism a tad childish. That everybody is responsible for themselves is a given; its childish to think that "liberals" or "progressives" don't also feel that "personal responsibility", whatever that means, is high on their list of priorities, maybe even the highest.

The problem with Ayn Rand and other libertarians is (1) there's no necessity to point fingers and judge people (2) because universal healthcare, universal education, et al, can be had by the free association of individuals, without the necessity of a State which can break down your down and throw in jail with a key.

In fact, this idea that people would not be charitable, or forthcoming with taxes --sufficient for agreed upon goals--absent State intervention, or some "crazy" progressive ideology that only some people carry, is bogus.

This isn't the 18th century. The vast majority, of Americans at least, have sufficient access to food, shelter and clothing. Arguably, all Americans have sufficient access, by anything but the most lofty contemporary measures. And you know what: none of it is provided by the State. What the State provides is actually in addition to the base welfare that churches, non-profits, etc, already provide.

I'm not anti-taxes or anti-anything. If somebody wants to eat twinkies and soda and freeload healthcare. Fine! You know what; only the most pessimistic individual would think that all people are that way, all the time. We are all a little, and maybe that's why too many doubt that their fellow neighbor would help them in need--because they're afraid they wouldn't help their neighbor.

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But you know you would. And you know they would. And you don't need the threat of force by a State to make it happen. You just need transparency and shared normative values; things human nature and technology can and does provide \*today\*.  
Anonymous on Dec 13 2007, 14:18

Hi, thanks for stopping by and commenting.

I don't claim that conservatives and leftists (the two camps I seem to prattle on about) don't hold personal responsibility high on their list, but they are often guilty of having that priority trumped by their peculiar camp's ideologies:

Conservatives want to tell everybody else how to live their lives while Leftists think they know how we all should live. Both taken to extremes cause much havoc and my suggestion is the Libertarian maxim that we should worry about running our own lives more than running other people's lives is less selfish than others make it out to be.

I am having difficulty parsing this statement:

"In fact, this idea that people would not be charitable, or forthcoming with taxes --sufficient for agreed upon goals--absent State intervention, or some "crazy" progressive ideology that only some people carry, is bogus."

Granted I'm on 2 hours sleep here, but are you saying that the idea that people won't be charitable absent state intervention is bogus? You're right, people do not need a State to make them co-operate with one another, pool resources and respect each other's differences. But is that then "a crazy progressive ideology that only some people carry?" Am I one of the crazy progressives then but you're not? (Are you saying we do need the state because without it only nutcase Libertarians would be nice to other people ?) - like I said, I'm on no sleep.

I always find the US desire for universal healthcare quite interesting from the Canadian perspective, where we have it. On one hand I hear too many heartbreak stories about Americans who can't afford to pay their medical bills and are basically bankrupted by illness or injury.

Then up here in Canada, yay, free health care. But what about wanting access to better healthcare and are willing to pay for it? No dice. You can't if you wanted to. Basically I'd welcome a two-tier system and I think it's inevitable but it's the objections to it I find very typical of the left. They have the strange quirk where asking that we all pool resources and work together to lift the disadvantaged means we also have to drag back anybody who manages to get ahead.

You say you're not anti-taxes. Up here in Canada the highest marginal tax rate is close to 50%, and that's not when you're earning 10 million dollars a year, that kicks in under 100K / year. It's like living through a perpetual divorce, you just keep handing half your money over to an unaccountable beaurocracy that goes and blows it on idiotic affairs I had no say in, like foreign wars.

Here we are agreement:

"But you know you would. And you know they would. And you don't need the threat of force by a State to make it happen. You just need transparency and shared normative values; things human nature and technology can and does provide \*today\*."

which is why I have some trouble parsing your comment, I just call myself a libertarian because I feel to a statist the state is the end in itself. Similar to the way people who are not very financially literate become obsessed with money, which is really just a medium of exchange (it isn't even a store of value anymore), the government apparatus should just be the mechanism by which we all pitch-in and play nice together.

But that isn't how it works these days, now is it?  
Anonymous on Dec 13 2007, 21:06