

LIBERTARIANISM

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INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is produced by Students For Liberty, an international nonprofit organization that spreads the ideas of freedom and develops the next generation of leaders of liberty. We were founded in 2008 by student leaders who ran just a handful of groups. At the time of this printing in 2014 the SFL network has grown to include 1364 groups from every inhabited continent on the planet. We are not a chapter based organization. There is no litmus test to be involved. We are united by a desire to spread the philosophy of liberty and the many issues the philosophy entails.

SFL's substantial growth has been possible because libertarianism is spreading around the world, especially among students. Raised in an era of ongoing war, abuse of power, financial crisis, gridlock, and general governmental incompetence, young people recognize the problems with the status quo and are looking for an alternative for the future. Libertarianism offers an optimistic alternative by empowering individuals and communities, limiting the power of politicians, and increasing freedom and opportunity for all. This pamphlet explains the principles of libertarianism, their intellectual foundations, and why liberty is essential for human progress and flourishing.

WHAT IS LIBERTARIANISM?

Libertarianism is a political philosophy that holds liberty as its primary political value. It is the modern form of the liberal tradition from the 17th, 18th & 19th centuries which was responsible for the spread of democracy, free speech, international trade, the separation of church and state, and the end of slavery. Today libertarian ideas are responsible for increasing marriage equality and the push to end the drug war. This philosophy can be justified on many grounds including utilitarianism, deontology, individual rights, social progress, and more, but the principle of liberty is what holds together the big tent that is the libertarian intellectual tradition.

Libertarians are often described as being 'fiscally conservative' and 'socially liberal.' This description is based on libertarian support for expanding freedom and personal choice in all spheres of life. While this description is largely accurate, the relationship is inverted. Fiscal conservatism is derived from libertarian economics. Social liberalism is derived from the libertarian principle of tolerance. Libertarianism has led to increasing respect for individual rights and social progress, and will be critical to them in the future, as well.

*“LIBERTARIANISM IS THE IDEA THAT
ADULT INDIVIDUALS HAVE THE RIGHT
AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE THE
IMPORTANT DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR
LIVES.”*

– David Boaz, Vice President of the Cato Institute



EMPOWERMENT & PERSONAL CHOICE

Libertarians believe in empowering individuals to control their own lives. Freedom of choice is paramount in a free and fair society, but governments frequently limit choice. Examples range from outright censorship and drug laws to immigration controls and licensing requirements to be an interior decorator. These laws tend to be pushed by powerful interest groups who want to impose their views on society at large.

Personal choice is important not just for the individual but society at large. Decisions should be made by those closest to the situation because they have the necessary knowledge, perspective, and incentives, to make the best choice, not by a bureaucrat in a far away capital.

Libertarians want to keep politicians out of your business and personal life. Governments should be limited to protecting our individual rights and leave the rest up to us.

*“INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS
ARE NOT SUBJECT
TO A PUBLIC VOTE;
A MAJORITY HAS
NO RIGHT TO VOTE
AWAY THE RIGHTS
OF A MINORITY;
THE POLITICAL
FUNCTION OF
RIGHTS IS PRECISELY
TO PROTECT
MINORITIES FROM
OPPRESSION BY
MAJORITIES (AND
THE SMALLEST
MINORITY ON EARTH
IS THE INDIVIDUAL).”*

-Ayn Rand

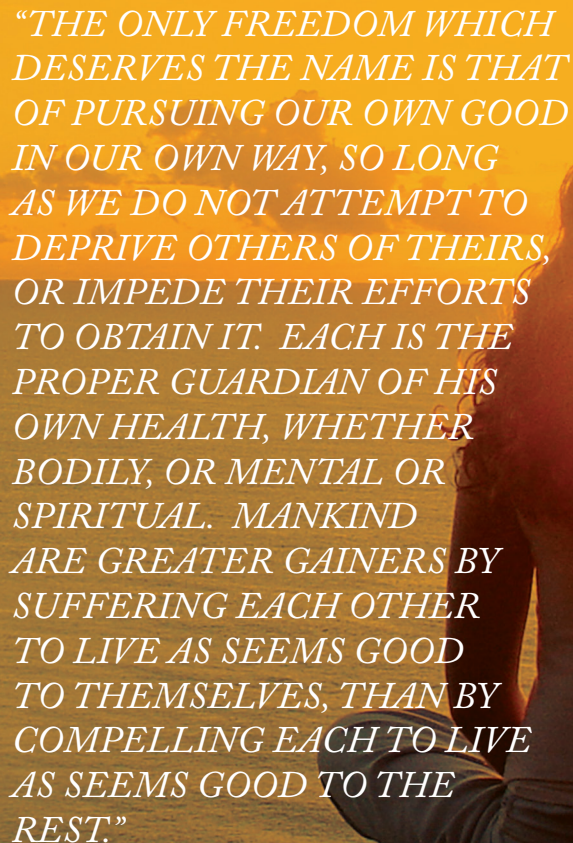


INDIVIDUAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Libertarians agree with Thomas Jefferson that each individual is born with a right to their “life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.” Governments are created by groups of individuals to protect those basic human rights. We are free to do as we please as long as we do not infringe on the rights of another. It is through the exercise of those rights that we explore the world, discover our passions, make a living, and serve our communities.

These rights include those listed in the Bill of Rights such as freedom of speech and protection from unreasonable searches and seizures, but are not limited to those because the scope of human freedom in action and thought is limitless. Modern examples include the right to privacy and freedom of information communicated via the internet.

These rights also come with responsibilities. If we are each entitled to our own life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, we may not infringe the rights of others. We need to be self-reliant, to work hard to provide for ourselves and our families, so that we are not a burden on others.

A person with long dark hair, seen from behind, is sitting on a beach. They are looking out at the ocean under a bright, golden sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the entire scene in warm orange and yellow tones. The person is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top and dark pants.

*“THE ONLY FREEDOM WHICH
DESERVES THE NAME IS THAT
OF PURSUING OUR OWN GOOD
IN OUR OWN WAY, SO LONG
AS WE DO NOT ATTEMPT TO
DEPRIVE OTHERS OF THEIRS,
OR IMPEDE THEIR EFFORTS
TO OBTAIN IT. EACH IS THE
PROPER GUARDIAN OF HIS
OWN HEALTH, WHETHER
BODILY, OR MENTAL OR
SPIRITUAL. MANKIND
ARE GREATER GAINERS BY
SUFFERING EACH OTHER
TO LIVE AS SEEMS GOOD
TO THEMSELVES, THAN BY
COMPELLING EACH TO LIVE
AS SEEMS GOOD TO THE
REST.”*

— John Stuart Mill

TOLERANCE

A unique aspect of libertarianism is that it allows for wide diversity in one's personal moral values. While one cannot practice libertarianism within a socialist society, one can be a socialist within a libertarian society. The only requirement is that the socialist refrain from using physical force or fraud against other people.

This principle applies to all kinds of moral values. This means that one is free to believe in God, or not. This means that one is free to believe in traditional values, or not. You are free to use drugs, or not. Within the libertarian framework, there is room for libertines and puritans alike. Outside of force or fraud, the responsibility of defining moral behavior is left up to the individual and their community. A libertarian society is one in which all peaceful activity is tolerated.

"IT IS NOT FROM THE BENEVOLENCE OF THE BUTCHER, THE BREWER, OR THE BAKER THAT WE EXPECT OUR DINNER, BUT FROM THEIR REGARD TO THEIR OWN INTEREST."


- Adam Smith



VOLUNTARY COOPERATION & SPONTANEOUS ORDER

Libertarians believe in the power of voluntary social cooperation. As long as they are not using force or fraud, rational individuals should be able to interact as they please. Trade is voluntary. When two people engage in trade they are creating value. When you pay someone \$100 for an iPhone, you are indicating that the iPhone is worth more to you than the money. When the seller gives you the iPhone in exchange for the \$100, they are indicating that the \$100 is more valuable to them than the iPhone. By trading resources, value is being created for both parties and both of their interests are served.

Societal preferences and values are expressed through the complex web of self-interested voluntary exchange. Social orders function best through evolutionary market processes rather than top-down authority. No politician or bureaucrat can represent every individual nor understand the complexity of modern society.



“... THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE WAY, SO FAR DISCOVERED, OF IMPROVING THE LOT OF THE ORDINARY PEOPLE THAT CAN HOLD A CANDLE TO THE PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES THAT ARE UNLEASHED BY A FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM.”

– Milton Friedman

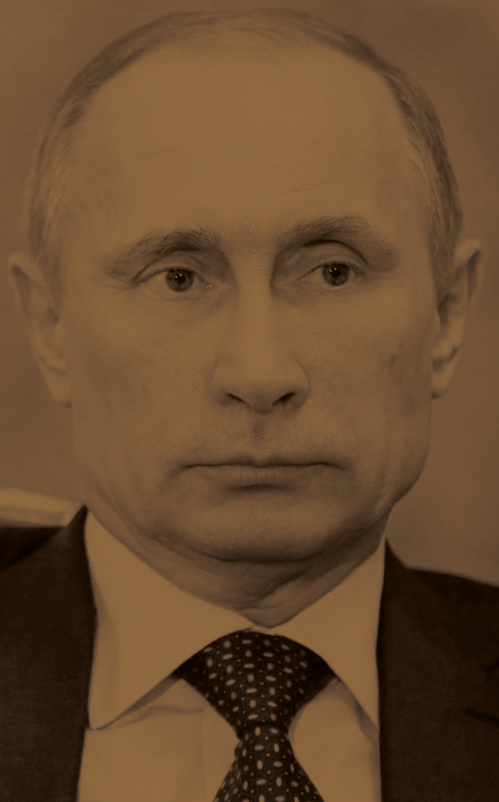
ECONOMIC FREEDOM & HUMAN FLOURISHING

Free market capitalism is the best social arrangement for progress and prosperity. Capitalism provides the freedom for innovation and the incentives for entrepreneurs to continually make a better world. Free markets have saved more people from poverty than any other force in human history.

Markets are dynamic and through competition individual businesses will rise and fall. Governments should not be responsible for picking winners and losers. Successful entrepreneurs reinvest their profits into better products and services for their customers or they fail. Over time this leads to a higher standard of living for everyone. Rather, the question is how we grow the size of the pie for everyone. Instead of asking how to split the economic pie equally, a better question is: how do we grow the size of the pie for everyone? Free markets are the best way.

*“POWER TENDS
TO CORRUPT,
AND ABSOLUTE
POWER CORRUPTS
ABSOLUTELY.”*

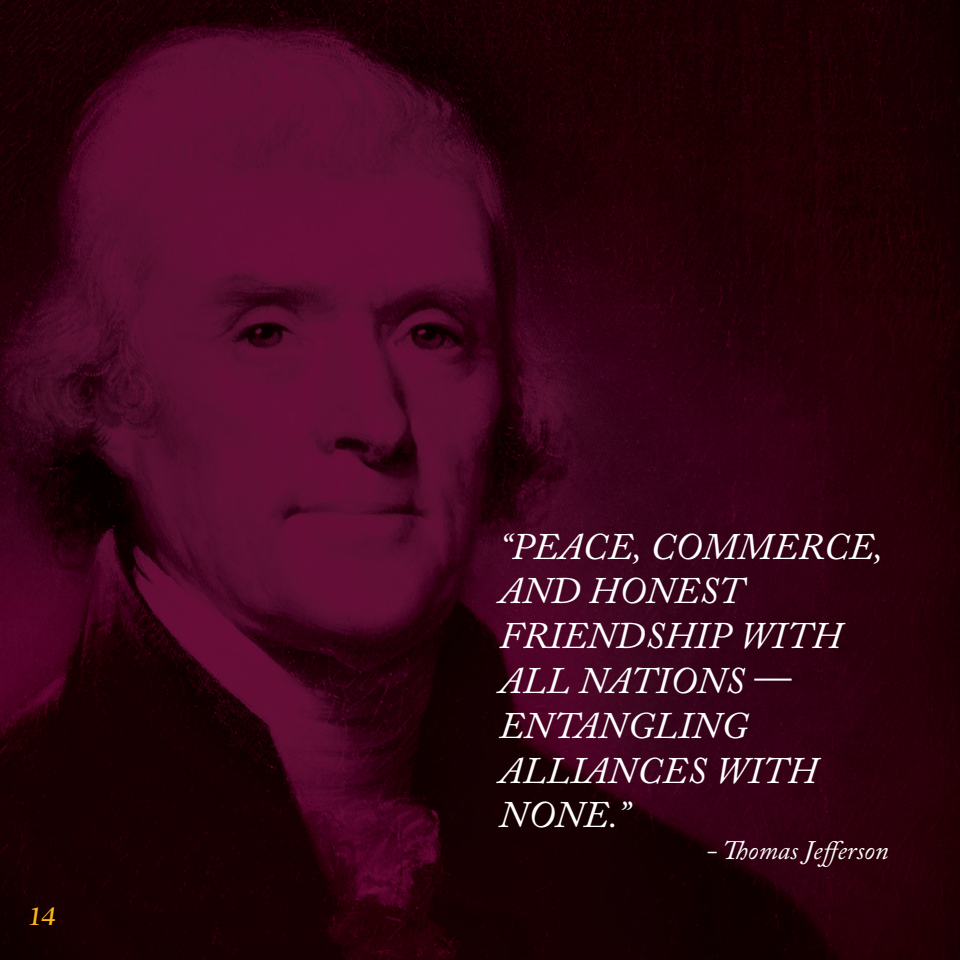
– Lord Acton



LIMITED CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT & SKEPTICISM OF POWER

Government is a monopoly on the initiation of force in a given area. Libertarians believe it is important to maintain skepticism of those who hold this power; not because of their motives, but because of the incentives attached to positions of power. In order to win elections politicians must appease powerful interest groups. Politicians may be well-intentioned, but too much centralized power in one place is a very dangerous situation.

This is why the American founders created the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The Constitution divides power among three branches of government and two legislative bodies, so that no one group or person gains too much power. It also explicitly limits the powers the government and each branch have. The Bill of Rights explicitly lists what the federal government MAY NOT DO, such as establish a religion or interfere with free speech. This is an important step toward establishing the rule of law over the rule of tyrants.



*“PEACE, COMMERCE,
AND HONEST
FRIENDSHIP WITH
ALL NATIONS —
ENTANGLING
ALLIANCES WITH
NONE.”*

- Thomas Jefferson

PEACE THROUGH TRADE

War is the worst self-inflicted harm in human history. If it is morally wrong for an individual to carry out an action, such as initiating force against another individual, then it is wrong for a government to do the same on a larger scale. War kills millions abroad and gives politicians an excuse to increase their power and restrict civil liberties at home.

Libertarians believe that war is not inevitable. The alternative to war is international free trade. When countries build relationships through trade they are less likely to fight due to mutual self-advantage. You are less likely to harm someone who also buys your products.

Governments have a responsibility to defend the people and their property from external threats and must be prepared to do so, but should not proactively use their military to run the world. Since trade is a win-win for everyone involved, the occurrence and intensity of war decreases as trade increases.

THE LIBERTARIAN FUTURE & TODAY'S PUBLIC POLICY

Libertarians envision a world free from force and fraud. A world of diversity, tolerance, and peaceful cooperation. Today there are many government policies that limit human liberty around the world. Libertarians would take the following steps to move closer toward a freer and more prosperous future:

- *Empower future generations by cutting the national debt*
- *End the NSA and other domestic spying programs*
- *Balance state and federal budgets by cutting spending*
- *Protect the internet from government intervention*
- *Reduce government intervention in the economy*
- *Free trade with all nations of the world*
- *Allow consenting adults to marry whom they choose*
- *Non-interventionist foreign policy*
- *Minimize bureaucracy and regulation*
- *End the drug war*
- *Implement a more open, transparent, and humane immigration policy*

GET INVOLVED

Libertarianism is spreading around the world. As governments rack up record debts, restrict our economic opportunities, wage endless wars, and infringe on our civil liberties, this generation is realizing that the status quo is broken. Libertarianism provides the moral foundations and practical policy solutions to create a freer and more prosperous future.

Students For Liberty is a network of libertarian students from around the world. What started with a handful of students in 2008 has grown to a movement of over 1300 student groups on every continent. You can be a part of this movement to change the world.

LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED AT
WWW.STUDENTSFORLIBERTY.ORG

MORE READINGS

INTRODUCTORY

The Law, by Frederic Bastiat

Economics in One Lesson, by Henry Hazlitt

Libertarianism, a Primer, by David Boaz

Atlas Shrugged, by Ayn Rand

Capitalism and Freedom, by Milton Friedman

The Road to Serfdom, by F.A. Hayek

INTERMEDIATE

A Letter Concerning Toleration, by John Locke

On Liberty, by J.S. Mill

What to a Slave is the 4th of July, by Frederick Douglass

Tao Te Ching, by Lao Tzu

Knowledge and Decisions, by Thomas Sowell

ADVANCED

Human Action, by Ludwig von Mises

The Mystery of Capital, by Hernando De Soto

A Conflict of Visions & The Vision of the Anointed, by Thomas Sowell

Anarchy, State and Utopia, by Robert Nozick

WEBSITES

Students For Liberty

StudentsForLiberty.org

The Cato Institute

Cato.org

The Foundation for Economic Education

FEE.org

Reason Magazine

Reason.com

Institute for Humane Studies

TheIHS.org



Students For Liberty

1101 17th Street NW, Suite 810

Washington, DC 20036

www.StudentsForLiberty.org