

DEFENDING FREEDOMS YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO LIKE

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1: DEFENDING FREEDOMS YOU DON'T HAPPEN TO LIKE

Most wise people of most times and places, as well as great mobs of secondary-literary-hacks, curbstome philosophers, and intellectual knaves, have said at some point in their lives, "In order for liberty to have meaning at all, it has to have meaning for *all* our citizens", or "If we're serious about our love for freedom, we'll fight for it, even when it's being exercised by people we consider lunatics, or worse."

What's being said is that if a particular "right" is contingent upon what those in political power happen to think of the person exercising the right, it's no right at all - it's a mere privilege subject to revocation, like an 8th grader's hall pass or a politician's sworn oath. We must not differentiate *among persons*.

There's something equally true which both leftists and rightists have generally failed to see. It is that in thinking of freedom, we also should differentiate *among freedoms*. Just as we should not say, "I believe that liberty should be enjoyed by all persons", and then look to see *who* a particular liberty-enjoyer is to decide whether to include him *out*, so we should not say, "I believe that all persons should enjoy the freedom to control their own lives as long as they do not aggress against others", and then look to see the *way* in which they're controlling their lives (peaceably) so we can decide whether to make exceptions to the rule.

If you were to ask a thousand liberals and a thousand conservatives "Should a person have absolute control over his or her own life as long as no aggression is committed against others?" ninety nine per cent of each would nod so hard they'd endanger their upper verte-

brae. So why do liberals spend so much time advocating the theft of money from people they don't like and the giving of it to those they like better (under such euphemisms as taxes and welfare)? Why do conservatives hardly finish breakfast before they're out trying to put people in cages for doing things with their own bodies that conservatives don't like?

Both groups allow their visions of the "Good" Society to override their theoretical commitment to liberty in the abstract.

What is important is that there is only *one* liberty - the liberty to control one's own life. What we tend to think of as various freedoms are just different *expressions* of that one liberty. A person seeking to keep that which he has earned, and one trying to use his body as he sees fit are both expressing the same (the only) claim to liberty - they're claiming the absolute right to their lives and the product of those lives.

Once we realize that there is only one liberty (with various ways of expressing it), it is logically easy to conclude: it's as indefensible to differentiate among ways of expressing freedom as it is to distinguish among *people* doing so. Over and over and over again (to paraphrase FDR), we need to stress that once we've established that liberty is the issue in a given case (no aggressive acts), the argument is *over*. The way the person in question is enjoying liberty (controlling his own life) is as irrelevant as *who* he is. We much defend "freedom" we don't like as much as individuals we don't like.

2: SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND POLITICAL ACTION

I think no one who has observed the state of political life in this country, or elsewhere, would question the need for a qualitative improvement. I suggest we start with a simple moral axiom, and see where it leads us. Suppose we start with one that is found universally: Thou shalt not steal. Now if you don't agree with this, don't bother reading the rest of this article; you're part of the problem.

Now there are basically two ways of stealing: force and fraud. In addition, stealing is not confined to money or even to material objects; one of the commonest types of fraud is failure to pay for labor performed, where what has been stolen is someone's work.

Of course, force, and to a lesser extent, fraud, may be used for other nefarious purposes. You may use force against someone with the intent of doing him bodily harm. This is likewise an improper and immoral use of force. There are a few uses of force that are proper and moral, such as to prevent someone from injuring or robbing you. There are also a few special cases, such as taking matches away from an infant, where you are using force, but not against anyone.

Let us then enunciate a principle: It Is Wrong To Initiate Force or Fraud Against Anyone. Please note that it says "initiate"; if someone snatches your purse, you have every right to snatch it back. Likewise, you have every right to lie to an armed robber to keep from finding money you have hidden, or to tell a potential rapist that you will infect him with herpes. (Or, for that matter, to infect him.)

Now, if you accept this principle, let us see where it leads. If it is wrong for you to do something yourself, it is equally wrong to do it by proxy. This is the step at which so many people balk. They will not come right out and say: I believe it is all right to rob my neighbor for my benefit, as long as I don't do it in person. What they say is: We should take money from those who have it and give it to those who need it. Note the difference: it is wrong if I put a gun to the head of my neighbor and take his money, but if the IRS does it for me, and gives me his money, it is all right. This sophistry is ridiculous. It is, usually, not put quite so plainly; some version of The Means Justifies the End is commonly used. This is like justifi-



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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY



ying Robin Hood because he only robbed the rich; the truth was that only the rich had any money or valuables for him to steal.

Of course, there are those with ulterior motives; they say they want to help the needy, but what they want is for the help for the needy to pass through their hands so some of it can stick to their fingers. The classic case is Judas Iscariot.

Similarly, anything else that it would be wrong for you to do yourself, is wrong for you to have someone else do for you; murder or whatever.

Please notice that we have only begun the process of spiritual growth. So far we have only two principles, common to almost any civilisation: You Must Refrain from Robbing or Attacking Others.

We have, however, already established the basis for a whole program of political beliefs, by condemning as immoral anything, from aggressive war to income redistribution schemes, which would be immoral if done by an individual. This is the crux of the issue: an insistence that the government obey the rules of common morality; that it not steal, or murder, etc..

This does not mean that it cannot use force in other ways; it is entirely legitimate to restrain those who go about committing violent crimes by locking them up, so that they have no opportunity to do such (except perhaps to each other). It is entirely legitimate to use force to recover stolen property. It is entirely legitimate to take passive measures to prevent crimes, from not leaving carkeys in cars to keeping a watchdog; this sort of thing is not only prudent but laudable, in that one should not tempt anyone to commit a crime.

Now, let us go back to our spiritual growth. The next point is that we must realize that people are not all alike, and that, so long as they do not go around robbing or beating up, they have a right to be different. Please note that you don't have to like it. You merely have to refrain from using any force against others to force them to change, so long as they are not hurting anyone else. Now we get

into some subtle questions here: pollution, including noise, is a forcible violation of the rights of others to live in peace and quiet. Certainly, you have no right to complain that your neighbor is polluting the air by breathing; on the other hand, if he takes to heating his house by burning used tires, you have a legitimate complaint. Somewhere in between there is a limit of what is necessary and reasonable.

But, this brings us to the next point: if you do not have the right to forcibly restrict your neighbor's lifestyle; then you cannot delegate that right to a collective entity, such as the government.

Now we get to the positive benefits of renouncing the initiation of force. First, you should see a certain lessening of your own faults, or at least some of them: envy and hate in particular. (I don't claim it will cure all your faults; it probably won't do much for sloth.) Second, since you are now committed to the use of reason, rather than force, to solve problems, you should begin to find yourself thinking more clearly; these are the mental benefits.

Next, you may find that you are accomplishing something. Many spiritual authorities have held that it is impossible to improve the world by force; we must use persuasion (some call it love; some reason). It has been done; Jesus was so persuasive that he got tax collectors to return money they had stolen. This, to me, is as great a miracle as raising the dead or feeding the multitude.

And then, there is the question of Peace. If you are using methods that require initiating force against others, you cannot be at peace with yourself, or with others. I should have thought this would be self-evident, but it is not. Let me give you an example: Have you ever, even once, heard anyone suggest that the disarmament conferences with the Soviets should discuss ending conscription in the USSR? Why not? But unless you take the first step, and say: "I do not believe in or advocate the initiation of force or fraud as a means of achieving political or social goals", you are not on the road to peace.

3: IN PRAISE OF BEGGARS

The most precise measure of how far gone a particular society is in anti-liberty, anti-sanity directions is the extent to which its citizens have come to love things which are inimical to both their freedom and their affluence, and to hate things which are either good for them (in both those senses of "good") or neutral/ harmless. Thus in the American of Right Now, the Great Mass Mind idolises the state-as-provider and fails to comprehend the inevitable results (tyranny and economic cataclysm) of such a provision-system; and it abhors the thought of a free economic system, though such a system (which last appeared in America in about 1810) would both avoid the disasters of the one *and* produce immense positive achievements of its own.

What of neutral/harmless factors? Consider the case of one which is *at least* harmless, which in fact might be considered positively useful - and which is as widely condemned as anything this side of venereal disease: the institution of begging. By that I don't mean Institutional Begging, the process through which organised interest groups go crying/sniveling/howling to the government and demand resources stolen from others (and get them); I mean the scenario in which someone stops you on the street and asks you for cash. Begging.

The case for begging-as-neutral/harmless is as brief as it is powerful. The act of begging consists of only this: a person (why do we picture beggars as men?), operating in a legitimate *place* (a public location or a private location to which the owners have admitted him/her), commits a legitimate *act* (seeking a gift of money or goods), using legitimate *means* (the spoken word). No violence here, no crime, no immorality, no infringement of any human right; whether you happen to *like* the panhandler asking you for cash is irrelevant, from a moral perspective, as whether you happen to like the ravings of the local radio-talk-show lunatic - the beggar's right to merely ask for something is incontestable, assuming of course that you're not physically impeded in the slightest.

Thus, if the protection of individual liberty is the goal, begging is at the very least a neutral institution, for no infringement of liberty

occurs. But wait; "at the very least" turns out to be a key phrase and a prescient one, for a bit of further analysis shows begging to be an institution which performs a very valuable service. Very. *That service consists of exemplifying with perfect accuracy the relationship between (possible) donor and (potential) recipient.* When the beggar approaches a person on the street, it is abundantly clear that (a) he comes in the pure role of supplicant, with no pretensions to having a *claim* on the citizen or his resources; (b) the person approached has *total* autonomy, total free choice, on the question of whether or not to contribute; and (c) if he or she should choose *not* to kick in, no "right" ("welfare right" or "social right" or whatever) of the beggar will have been violated, no "oppression" will have been directed at him, and neither "social justice" nor his "just deserts" will have been obliterated.

Now, it should be clear that in a world and in a country where all of those points are *constantly* obfuscated, where those seeking resources from their rightful owners are *constantly* demanding them instead of politely asking for a gift at the discretion of the owner, any institution or practice which makes those relationships so brilliantly clear is not merely neutral; to call it that does it an injustice, for in performing that important a service it has defined itself as a very significant and very *useful* human institution.

Finally, this also should be clear, now that we've placed begging in its proper perspective: the reason government at all levels *hates* begging with great vehemence is *precisely* that the institution provides such a wonderfully enlightening contrast with what governments do through their steal-from-some-for-the-benefit-of-others "welfare" systems; every beggar on the street, through his/her entirely legitimate action of asking the owner of resources for a gift of them, is saying terrible (and terribly accurate) things about a system in which resources are taken by violence from their owners and given to - beggars. It should not be surprising that in every western country there are super-severe laws against begging; every beggar is "eloquent", though he may never open his mouth, on the subject of the only moral way to help unfortunates and the theft-based nature of the present system. Take a beggar to lunch.