

From Edith Efron to Peter Schwartz

A few years ago I came across a letter I wrote to Edith Efron back in 1978 responding to an article she had published in *Reason* criticizing anarchists within the libertarian movement;¹ I attach my [letter](#). After rereading my letter — I had forgotten ever writing it — I found her article on the *Reason* site and read that. It gave an interesting early picture of two long-running arguments within the movement, only one of which I responded to in my letter.

One argument is anarchy vs limited government but, despite Efron's repeated references to anarchists, that was not her central concern. What she was attacking was a strategy of libertarian alliance with the left that she thought she saw revealed in two new journals: *Inquiry* and *Libertarian Review*.

Alliance with the left had been proposed by Murray Rothbard back in 1965, after he abandoned his association with the *National Review* circle over their support for an aggressive anti-communist foreign policy.² What he proposed was not alliance with the left in general but with decentralist elements in the New Left, most notably Students for a Democratic Society and intellectuals such as revisionist historians William Appleman Williams and Gabriel Kolko.

The project lasted from 1965, when the journal *Left and Right* was established, until the collapse of SDS in 1969.³ By 1970 Rothbard had declared the New Left dead and written an article criticizing young East Coast libertarians for continuing the project that he had now abandoned.⁴ At first glance, Edith Efron appears to have been attacking the project as the work of the anarchists eight years after the most prominent anarchist in the libertarian movement had abandoned it.

Or perhaps not. Rothbard was friendly with the editors of *Inquiry* and *Libertarian Review* and published articles in both. As best I can tell, while he had abandoned the project of allying with decentralist elements in the New Left, he had replaced it with the idea of selling libertarianism to the left more generally.

Inquiry's approach was to feature both articles by liberals and libertarian articles tailored not to put off liberal readers. In a letter I got from Ralph Raico, its editor, he wrote:

"I ought to mention that our readership will probably not be primarily composed of libertarians, but rather of open-minded liberals and leftists, so that their sensibilities and the gaps in their political sophistication should be kept in mind."

¹ Webbed at <https://reason.com/1978/02/01/warning-to-constitutional-repu/>. Responses in *Reason* to her article are webbed at <https://reason.com/1978/05/01/letters-28/>.

² For a detailed account, see "Rothbard's Time on the Left" by John Payne, *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 19, No. 1, (2005), webbed at <https://mises.org/library/rothbards-time-left-0>

³ For Rothbard's description of his efforts, see *The Betrayal of the American Right*, Chapter 14, <https://www.lewrockwell.com/1970/01/murray-n-rothbard/the-later-1960s-the-new-left-chapter-14-of-the-betrayal-of-the-american-right/>

⁴ "Farewell to the Left," *The Libertarian Forum* 2, no. 9 (May 1, 1970). Much of its language is similar to that used by Efron eight years later and Schwartz eight years after that to attack Rothbard et. al.



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February 3, 1978

Edith Efron
c/o Reason

Dear Miss Efron:

While I enjoyed your "viewpoint" in the February "Reason," and agreed with much of it, there are two parts of your argument with which I must take issue. You object to the lack of discrimination of "the anarchists." But by using that term, in a context which repeatedly implies that "the anarchists" share a common (also mistaken and destructive) set of views, you show the same lack of discrimination. For Murray Rothbard or Karl Hess to view policemen^{as} inherently enemies of liberty merely because they are part of a government organization which is, in others of its activities, an enemy of liberty, is indeed an error, but it is a more plausible one than blaming libertarian anarchists as a group for the views of Murray Rothbard. The policeman is at least a part of the same organization that is elsewhere opposing liberty, and his wages are extracted from the taxpayer by means which not only anarchists but also many believers in limited government (Tibor Machan and, I believe, Ayn Rand, are examples) regard as illegitimate. All that anarcho-capitalists qua anarcho-capitalists have in common--all that I have in common with Murray--is belief in two propositions: that the ideal form of social organization does not involve government, and that it does involve private property.

I would add that so far as I can tell (and my sample of libertarian anarchists, while limited, is probably larger than yours) libertarians who regard themselves as anarchists are not sharply distinguished from those who believe in a limited state by sympathy for the new left, a hippie life style, or hostility to the U.S. vis a vis its communist opponents. The ones I know tend to be "respectable" people (i.e. graduate students, professionals, etc.) with rather conservative sympathies (my Graduate Teaching Assistant, who was an LP candidate for the state legislature from Idaho, describes himself and the other anarchists he knows as children from Goldwater conservative families who went into the new left then to libertarianism). I think they tend to have been libertarians longer, and to be more interested in libertarian ideas and controversy than limited state libertarians. I am talking now about the current generation--say people between twenty and thirty.

The reason for this pattern, I think, is that the limited state position is not being competently expounded and explored in libertarian circles. So far we are in agreement. But in blaming this failure on an implicit contract by which the limited state libertarians agreed to stop arguing with the anarchists you do your fellow-thinkers too much credit. Insofar as there was any agreement it was to continue to work together while we

argued. The reason that the argument died down, in my possibly biased opinion, was that the defenders of the limited state had very little to say. As a result, they tended to either convert or become uninterested in theoretical arguments.

Ayn Rand, to take the obvious example, simply refused (so far as I can determine) to examine the anarcho-capitalist position. The objectivists were left, as her final statement on the subject, with an essay which ends where the anarcho-capitalist analysis begins, with the problem of two protective agencies whose clients disagree. Perhaps this is really an insoluble problem, but after a number of libertarians (myself among them) have offered solutions to it which seem to persuade many other libertarians, it is not sufficient to simply state the problem and leave the rest as an exercise to the reader--which is what she did. Roy Childs as I recall, wrote a reasonably intelligent "anarchist-objectivist" article, which Ayn Rand simply ignored.

The one striking exception is Robert Nozick, who in his book presented a subtle and powerful defense of limited government along with a somewhat less effective critique of the anarchist position. If this contribution to the debate was greeted by "ugly invective" I failed to notice it. A couple of years ago, at an LP convention, I gave a talk on Nozick's book which was on the whole sympathetic, although in places critical. Nozick was present, and afterwards said that I had fairly stated his position. I cannot recall receiving any hostility or criticism from fellow anarchists as a result.

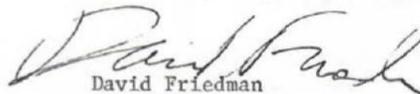
My other disagreements with your article concern the reasons you are not an anarchist and I am. That would be a long argument, and you only sketch your side of it in the article. To sketch my part, I would suggest that while "national culture" in the sense of certain shared values, expectations, etc., is indeed an important element in the stability of a society, the existence of such a culture does not depend on government. National culture in that sense long predates the rise of the nation state; to give only one example, one of my favorite historical societies, Iceland during the period described in the sagas, had a flourishing national culture (from a literary standpoint, one of the most productive small population societies that has ever existed--second perhaps to Periclean Athens) with virtually no government (no police, no armies, one "government employee" in the entire country) for three hundred years. And at present I would argue, and you would I suspect agree, that the nation state is one of the main forces destroying the feeling of common interest and common value in our own society.

Having said so much in disagreement, let me add that I am also disturbed by the Cato institute, and by the attempt of Rothbard and his coterie to define the true religion in their image. I have written one book review for "Inquiry," and have agreed to write another; after that I have no plans to do any more writing for the Cato publications. I do hope to write for "Reason," precisely because it maintains an independent position with a fairly broad base of both readers and writers.

In closing, let me suggest that if you can obtain a copy of my book, The Machinery of Freedom (Harper, but out of print; Arlington House is reprinting it sometime this year) and turn to the chapter on national defense, you will find that anarchists qua anarchists are not committed to

the proposition that defense is unnecessary.

Sincerely,



David Friedman

P.S. I enclose a draft of an article that may interest you.

ENC:

DF:dt

cc: Robert Nozick

Efron interpreted allying as supporting; since the left was hostile to central values of libertarianism, most obviously private property, supporting it made no sense. Rothbard's response, both in his article in the *Libertarian Forum* responding to hers in *Reason* and elsewhere in his writing, was that libertarian alliance with the left was intended to work with it for common goals such as the abolition of the draft or an end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Part of the reason Efron did not see it that way may have been that much of what Rothbard was for, most notably a non-interventionist foreign policy, she was against, so interpreted as left-wing goals that libertarians has been tricked into supporting.

Who, from Efron's standpoint, were the guilty parties among libertarians? She attributed the error of seeking to ally with the left to "a significant portion of the libertarian leadership" and went on to talk in critical terms of "the libertarian movement." After mentioning three economists, Ludwig Von Mises, Milton Friedman, and Friederich Hayek, as people the libertarians should be allying with and were not, she wrote that "It is only since Hayek and Friedman have received Nobel prizes that some libertarian publications have deigned to say a civil word about either man." As she presumably knew, *Reason*, the leading libertarian magazine and the one she was writing in, had published friendly references to all three well before either Friedman or Hayek received their Nobel prizes. That suggests that when Efron said "the libertarian movement" what she meant was Rothbard and his allies.

The climax of her argument comes when she explains the reason for the error. Only at that point does she connect it to anarchism.

The collapse into counter-culture vulgarity has already been explained by Ayn Rand. Years ago, she said that the libertarian movement was doomed to degenerate into a "hippie" movement. She was quite right; in some important measure, it has. The reason for that is plain enough. Without a serious metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical base, a commitment to individual self-interest must necessarily degenerate into a slovenly rationalization for "doing your own thing." It is no great surprise, under the circumstances, that the counter-culture gutter movements, celebrating the most irrational

manifestations of self-assertiveness, have been attractive to many libertarians, shorn of a guiding ethics or worse: confusing free market theory with ethics.

But, unless I missed that prophecy, even Ayn Rand did not predict that this movement would crawl into bed with the collectivist, anti-American Left. And for that, I think, there is yet another explanation. I suspect that a critical turning point in the evolution of this movement occurred when the proponents of a constitutional republic, who by definition advocate a nation-state, agreed to suspend their endless quarrel with the anarchists, on the grounds that one should not split the forces of a small pro-liberty movement. ...

For the constitutional republicans it was a very serious error. ... they actually had agreed to abandon a series of important areas of political thought — above all they had abandoned the *affirmative* aspects of their position — the value of nation, the necessity of a national culture, the value of a government, the need to defend the country, and the need for a radical reformer to formulate a political position which integrates his proposals for change with his desires to preserve.”

...

By agreement with the anarchists, no examination of the affirmative aspects of the nation-state or of the unifying abstractions of the nation's pluralistic culture, was allowed. Over the years, in fact, the taboo became so intense, that ugly invective broke out whenever an individual presumed to explore these areas. The invective, of course, came from the anarchists, whose sole position on nation and state is negative—and who had lost nothing whatever by the agreement.

As best I can tell, what she described never happened. Insofar as there was ever an anarchist/minarchist treaty it was the Dallas Accord, an agreement at the 1974 LP convention to put neither the minarchist nor anarchist position into the party platform, leaving the party open to both factions.⁵ I was active in the libertarian movement from the early sixties, attended meetings of Radicals for Capitalism, a campus Objectivist group, argued with them, eventually was asked not to come back.⁶ As a member of the Young Americans for Freedom and the token libertarian columnist on *The New Guard*, their magazine, I argued with everyone from traditionalists through fellow libertarians. When, at an LP convention in New York, I gave a critical talk on *Anarchy, State and Utopia* with Nozick, who had argued against anarchy in the book, present, our interaction was friendly, with no sign of “ugly invective.”

One of the letters to *Reason* by a reader included the following passage:

Ms. Efron's article has needed saying by someone with clout, not in the Libertarian Party, for the past three years, if not longer. Limited governmentals in the Party sure could have used it as added ammunition during the 1977 California Convention. At that time a concerted effort was made to bring the matter to a head, with pamphlets on the anarchy/limited-government argument, written by both John Hospers and William Westmiller, being distributed to all, and ignored by most of the delegations. An

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dallas_Accord

⁶ Which gave me a claim to have been expelled from an Objectivist group I was not a member of.

amendment, which would have made clear once and for all that the Party was dedicated to a *government* that is limited to the protection of individual rights, never even got a hearing due to the anarchist majority of delegates.

While the writer thought he was supporting Edith Efron's position, what he wrote made it clear that the conflict in the Libertarian Party was not over whether anarchists and minarchists should stop arguing but whether the Party should officially adopt the minarchist position.

The intellectual failure that Efron blames on her imagined agreement not to argue was, in my view, due to the minarchists' inability to hold up their side of the argument. Their problem was that most in the libertarian movement, both anarchist and minarchist and including Objectivists, accepted the Non-Aggression Postulate, which held that it was never legitimate to initiate force. That implies that taxation is a rights violation, making it difficult to defend the existence of government.

Rand tried to solve the problem by arguing for a government with a monopoly on the use of retaliatory force, funding itself by charging for services such as contract enforcement. The problem with that position, as Roy Childs had pointed out in his letter to Rand⁷ and others, myself among them,⁸ since, is that the use of retaliatory force either is or is not a rights violation. If it is, the government cannot legitimately do it. If it is not, government enforcement of its monopoly violates the rights of would-be competitors.

To defend the existence of government one must accept some rights violation by government as legitimate, if only to prevent greater rights violation by private criminals or foreign invaders. That was the position of the classical liberals in the Nineteenth Century, almost none of whom were anarchists, and of 20th Century libertarians outside of Objectivist and LP circles, such as the three economists Efron mentions. But it was unacceptable to Objectivists, Rothbardians or pretty much anyone associated with the Libertarian Party, one of whose requirements for membership was and is agreeing to the NAP. By the time Efron wrote the article she had broken with Ayn Rand, I suspect because she was unwilling accept Rand's judgement over her own whenever they disagreed, making her a better Objectivist than those who remained in the movement. But she was still an admirer of Rand and shared many of her views.

The argument Efron offered against anarchists reappeared eight years later in a much longer and more ferocious form as the article, book chapter, and pamphlet *Libertarianism: The Perversion of Liberty* by Peter Schwartz, an orthodox Objectivist.⁹ He applied it not merely to anarchists but to libertarians in general, on the grounds that the logical implication of their beliefs, as he interpreted them, was anarchy. Also moral nihilism, political violence and support of anyone opposed to anything the U.S. government did.¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.panarchy.org/childs/objectivism.html>

⁸ Mostly in extended arguments with Objectivists on the Usenet group `humanities.philosophy.objectivism`.

⁹ Initially published in *The Intellectual Activist*, New York, in 1986, republished as a chapter in *The Voice of Reason: Essays in Objectivist Thought* (New American Library, 1988), and currently available as an undated pamphlet from the *Ayn Rand Institute*.

¹⁰ "Thus the libertarian umbrella can encompass virtually anyone who does not like something the government is doing," Peter Schwartz, *Op. Cit.*, p.7. His examples were, I think uniformly, leftists of one sort or another.

The argument starts by correctly stating that “libertarian,” as libertarians use the term, describes political conclusions, not the arguments that produce them. A libertarian might have reached libertarian conclusions from his interpretation of Christianity, his view of the implications of utilitarianism, natural rights theory, or any other philosophical basis. His views might or might not provide Efron’s “serious metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical base.” Whatever their base, he would still be a libertarian. Schwartz jumps from the proposition that the definition of libertarian does not require any particular philosophical basis to the claim that it requires the absence of one. He concludes that a libertarian, being someone with no philosophical basis for his views, cannot be trusted to support liberty, Efron’s claim about anarchists.

To see what is wrong with the argument, consider that the definition of “human being” does not specify gender — both males and females qualify. It does not follow that to qualify as a human being you must be neither male nor female.

Schwartz offers quotes from a variety of individual libertarians, repeatedly representing what they say as what libertarians believe rather than as what at least one libertarian believes. Since different libertarians say, and believe, different things, he concludes that libertarians really believe nothing.

He quotes Rothbard, who wrote:

My own position grounds Libertarianism on a natural rights theory embedded in a wider system of Aristotelian-Lockean natural law and a realist ontology and metaphysics. But although those of us taking this position believe that *only it* provides a satisfactory groundwork and basis for individual liberty, this is an argument within the Libertarian camp about the proper basis and grounding of libertarianism rather than about the doctrine itself.¹¹

It does not appear to occur to Schwartz that what he has just quoted is inconsistent with his claim that “libertarianism is incompatible with values as such,” Rothbard being a libertarian and having not only values but a stated philosophical basis for them. Possibly Schwartz simply believed that Rothbard was lying.

Schwartz continues his identification of libertarianism with amoralism, writing that:

If there are no objective standards for judging right and wrong, why *shouldn't* anyone be entitled to act on his feeling that counterfeiting is not fraudulent — or that owning bazookas and flamethrowers is not threatening — or that blowing up nuclear plants is not coercive?¹²

...

Law as such is anathema to Libertarians, who reject all standards of behavior in principle. They abhor the law because it tells them, in effect, that they *cannot* do whatever they feel like doing.¹³

¹¹ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p.11, quoting

¹² Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p.38.

¹³ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p.39.

Having proved to his satisfaction that libertarians — all consistent libertarians — are amoralists interested only being able to do whatever they want, Schwartz concludes that:

“It is no accident that so many Libertarians, particularly among the dominant leadership, endorse anarchism, since they grasp that Libertarianism views liberty as the absence of all restraints in the path of anyone’s whims.”¹⁴

There is no evidence that Schwartz read anything by libertarian anarchists beyond what was needed to find quotes suitable for his purposes. If he had tried to understand the position, perhaps by reading a book defending it, he would have discovered that what libertarian anarchists propose is not a society without law but a society in which law is enforced by private institutions. I spent sixty some pages of my first book sketching out the institutions for creating and enforcing law in a stateless society. Rothbard, in a passage Schwartz does not quote, wrote:

[I]t would not be very difficult for Libertarian lawyers and jurists to arrive at a rational and objective code of libertarian legal principles and procedures based on the axiom of defense of person and property, and consequently of no coercion to be used against anyone who is not a proven and convicted invader of such person and property. This code would then be followed and applied to specific cases by privately competitive and free-market courts and judges. (Rothbard [1965], 208¹⁵)

Both books were published long before Schwartz wrote his pamphlet.

Following out the logic of his position, he concludes:

“The primary libertarian battleground is not the halls of academia or the editorial pages of the newspapers but the streets and back alleys.”

Also

“Libertarians want to transform the present system not by force of argument, but by plain force. And they broadcast this openly.”

Followed by a quote from Justin Raimundo, one of the founders of the Radical Caucus.

The number of libertarians making revolution in the streets and back alleys, in comparison to the number active in the halls of academia, does not seem to be something Schwartz enquired into. So far as the relative numbers of anarchists and minarchists, the 1988 *Liberty Magazine* poll found that about a third of those they polled were anarchists, two-thirds minarchists. The 1999 poll found the number of anarchists down to just over a tenth of their sample.

For the most part, what Schwartz wrote can be explained by the combination of poor logic and a burning desire to trash libertarians for not being Objectivists — Objectivism being the one true philosophy, anyone who was not an Objectivist could not really have a philosophical basis for his beliefs. But there is at least one example of what has to be deliberate dishonesty. Schwartz writes, about the 1984 platform of the Libertarian Party:

¹⁴ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁵ Rothbard, Murray N. [1965]. “The Spooner-Tucker Doctrine: An Economist’s View,” reprinted in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays*, pp. 205-218. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000.

now it calls for ‘general and complete disarmament down to police levels’¹⁶

What the platform actually said was:

We view the mass-destruction potential of modern warfare as the greatest threat to the lives and liberties of the American people and all the people of the globe. We favor international negotiations toward general and complete disarmament down to police levels, provided every necessary precaution is taken to effectively protect the lives and the rights of the American people.

The same platform also said, but Schwartz does not quote:

We recognize the necessity for maintaining a sufficient military force to defend the United States against aggression. We should reduce the overall cost and size of our total governmental defense establishment.

[Should the Goldberg discussion by cut out as not sufficiently relevant?]

Neither the argument about minarchy vs anarchy nor the one over alliance with the left has ended, nor is likely to. The latest version of the latter was a *National Review* article by Jonah Goldberg, a conservative with libertarian sympathies,¹⁷ responding to an article by Brink Lindsey proposing a libertarian-liberal alliance.¹⁸ Goldberg is not an Objectivist, but part of his argument overlaps with theirs..

Goldberg correctly points out that extreme libertarian positions — permitting hard core porn on Saturday morning television is his example — are unlikely to get much political support. And he correctly points out that many hard core libertarians are interested mostly in some single issue, such as drug legalization or the Second Amendment. But all of that is irrelevant to the case for such an alliance, since the proposal is neither to get the Democrats to adopt extreme libertarian positions nor to get hard core libertarians, a large fraction of whom don't vote anyway, to support the Democratic party.

Lindsey had cited a Cato piece which estimates that about 15% — the numbers vary according to the poll — of the electorate is libertarian leaning. Very few of those are hard core libertarians. What the authors of the piece were looking at were voters whose views were similar to those of conservative Republicans on economic issues and to those of liberal Democrats on social issues.

Liberal Democrats do not support Saturday morning broadcast porn any more than conservative Republicans support complete laissez-faire and zero taxation, but there apparently is quite a sizable block of voters who want at least moderate change in the direction of less government involvement in both social and economic matters. In 2000, most of them voted for Bush; in 2004, a majority still voted for Bush but a sizable minority voted against him. That pattern suggests that a Democratic party that made efforts to look at least a little more libertarian than the current Republican party — which should not be very hard — could eventually pull a substantial voting

¹⁶ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 2, repeated on page 61.

¹⁷ December 2006, no longer webbed.

¹⁸ “Liberalarians,” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/liberalarians>

block over to their side. It was a point I made, without the benefit of the data from the Cato article, in a blog post back in 2005 and another in 2008.¹⁹

What most interested me about the Goldberg article was not his confusion between libertarians broadly and narrowly defined but his explanation of why any split between libertarians and conservatives is at least partly the fault of the libertarians. He starts with a reference to the late Frank Meyer, whose fusionist position attempted to unite libertarian and traditional conservative views; as Goldberg puts it:

"Meyer's libertarianism was primarily concerned with the ability of the individual to find the virtuous path within "an objective moral order based on ontological foundations" best expressed in Western civilization. As such, fusionism was less a coalitional doctrine than a metaphysical imperative. But these days, phrases like "objective moral order" will get you knocked off Cato's Kwanzaa-card list.²⁰ Liberty's virtue is no longer that it supports the virtuous. Rather, according to today's leading libertarians, economic freedom's virtue lies in its ability to provide everybody the custom-made lifestyle of his choice."

The mistake here is in confusing a conclusion—libertarianism—with the arguments that lead to it. There are many different reasons to believe in liberty, hence lots of different reasons why someone might be a libertarian. That is true now, and it was true when Frank Meyer was making his arguments. As Nero Wolfe memorably put it, "any spoke can lead an ant to the hub."

What Frank Meyer was offering was not *the* reason to be a libertarian but *a* reason why a conservative should also be a libertarian. Insofar as his argument was correct then it is still correct now. And his argument is at least as relevant to the areas where current conservatives disagree with libertarians as to the areas where they agree, so if Goldberg accepts it he ought to be supporting social as well as economic freedom. If he did, then he and I could agree that drugs ought to be legalized.²¹

What struck me about Goldberg's mistake was its similarity to the Objectivist argument that while libertarians and Objectivists may appear to reach about the same conclusions, libertarians, at least the ones who are not also Objectivists, reach those conclusions for the wrong reasons. Right conclusions reached for the wrong reasons do not really count and those who hold them cannot be trusted.

Some Objectivists might argue in their defense that they are talking about philosophy, not politics. But Goldberg is explicitly discussing politics, the possibilities for a political alliance. Politically speaking, if Republicans supported less government instead of more, they would be natural allies for libertarians, whether those libertarians reached their conclusions via Catholic philosophy, natural rights, utilitarianism, skepticism, or hedonism. Since Republicans at the moment support

¹⁹ <http://davidfriedman.blogspot.com/2005/12/howard-dean-to-white-courtesy-phone.html> and <http://davidfriedman.blogspot.com/2008/02/thoughts-for-obama.html>

²⁰ I expressed my support for moral realism in the second edition of *The Machinery of Freedom*, published in 1989, and devoted a chapter to the subject in the third, 2014. Cato does not, so far as I know, send out Kwanzaa cards, but my latest invitation to speak at one of their events was more recent than that.

²¹ In fact, as I discovered with a little googling, he doesn't: <https://oklahoman.com/article/5570531/jonah-goldberg-legalization-not-the-answer-to-opioid-crisis>.

more government—more even than Democrats did as of the last time they were in power — it is worth looking for other allies.

Libertarian Anarchism, Foreign Policy, and Alliance with the Left

Judging by the contents of the two journals that Edith Efron objected to, alliance with the left largely meant criticism of U.S. foreign policy and the associated military and security institutions, although she is unhappy as well with libertarian support for other causes she associated with the left, such as gay lib and drug legalization.

There are at least three reasons why support for a non-interventionist foreign policy might be linked, although not limited, to support for libertarian anarchy. The first and most obvious is that in order for there to be a U.S. foreign policy there must be a U.S. government. The second, and worst, is that providing defense against foreign governments is a hard problem for a stateless society.²² For those who want to believe in such a society it is tempting to persuade themselves that foreign states are not a real threat, in which case most of the argument for an aggressive foreign policy disappears. A third reason is that an interventionist foreign policy run badly is worse than none at all, since instead of fighting your wars mostly with other people's blood and treasure you end up fighting their wars with yours,²³ and part of the practical argument for anarchy is that what governments do they usually do badly. While that argument is not limited to anarchists they are likely to accept it in a stronger form than those libertarians who still believe that there are things that should and must be done by governments. One additional reason for the attitudes of both Efron and Schwartz was that Murray Rothbard, the most prominent anarchist and one of the most prominent figures in the libertarian movement, not only supported a non-interventionist policy, he held that the USSR was following an essentially defensive foreign policy and the cold war the fault of the U.S.

The Other Thing Bugging Efron and Schwartz

On the face of it, what Edith Efron was objecting to was libertarians allying with, as she saw it supporting, movements on the left. Her explanation was that “Without a serious metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical base, a commitment to individual self-interest must necessarily degenerate into a slovenly rationalization for ‘doing your own thing.’” Schwartz gave an expanded version of the same argument, claiming that libertarians, all consistent libertarians, rejected not merely a serious base but any values at all. That seems an odd charge, given that one of the central targets of both, implicitly for Efron, explicitly for Schwartz, was Murray Rothbard. Not only did Rothbard have an explicit philosophical basis for his political views, Schwartz actually quoted him saying so.

That suggests that what both of them were objecting to was not that libertarians had no values or no philosophical basis but that they had the wrong values and, by implication, the wrong basis. It is worth looking at actual examples both offered as evidence. Efron writes:

²² Although not necessarily an insoluble one. See Chapters 34 and 56 of *The Machinery of Freedom* for discussions of the problem and some possible solutions.

²³ Friedman 2014, Chapter 45, “Is There a Libertarian Foreign Policy.”

[Libertarians] have absorbed the counter-culture's notion that nothing has higher priority for lovers of liberty than the right to take dope, to contemplate pornography and to enact the full repertoire of Kraft-Ebing.

And Schwartz:

An umbrella that makes room for sado-masochism and acid-dropping cannot have space left over for any code of ethics.

...

Walter Block, in *Defending the Undefendable*, argues that prostitution is no different from any other business transaction and should not be viewed as demeaning. ... Even pimps elicit moral praise from Block ...

....

Who qualifies for Block's accolades? Only the dregs of society. ... As all these reprobates choose to climb into the slime, they do not uphold some new ethical criteria by which they claim that their lives are noble; they simply announce that they relish slime. An affinity for filth, Block maintains, is ennobling.

Although neither Efron nor Schwartz was willing to argue that drugs, prostitution and other activities they associated with the dregs of society should be illegal, they had no doubt that they were things nobody should do and that anyone who disagreed demonstrated by doing so a false sense of values.

Ayn Rand had written:

I would fight for your legal right to use marijuana; I would fight you to the death that you morally should not do it, because it destroys the mind.²⁴

What Rand offered to her followers, what Schwartz certainly and Efron probably accepted, was much broader than a political philosophy. Objectivism had implications not only for what should or should not be forbidden but for what individuals should or should not choose to do. Efron would surely have conceded that other philosophical positions were possible, as shown by her positive references to non-Objectivists whom she thought libertarians ought to be allying with. Schwartz might not have. But both were inclined to interpret disagreement over non-political values as evidence of moral failings, with implications for political values as well.

Postscript: Two Puzzles

One odd thing about about Efron's article is its treatment of Rothbard. He was at the time easily the most visible libertarian anarchist, hence the most obvious target for her attack, as well as the

²⁴ *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q & A*, Robert Mayhew, ed., Berkeley, 2005. The quote is probably not verbatim, since Mayhew produced the book by editing the recorded texts of answers Rand had given orally.

It is now known that Rand herself used amphetamines for thirty years, sometimes heavily. But there is no necessary inconsistency, since she might have argued, probably believed, that they provided useful energy and did not "destroy the mind."

libertarian most closely associated with many of the ideas she is objecting to. Several of the letters to *Reason* in response to her article, including the one from Rothbard, took it for granted that he was the anarchist she was chiefly attacking, as did my letter to her. But her article actually mentions him only once, in the context of an anecdote attributed to him about a failed past attempt to work with the left.

The other puzzle is that anecdote, which he denied. She wrote:

And thereby hangs a tale, told to me by Murray Rothbard a number of years ago. It seems that he had a shocking experience in the late 1960's, when he joined a leftist political party led by that distinguished ex-rapist and then advocate of racial and class murder known as Eldridge Cleaver. Murray assumed that because the members of this party were raging at America for conducting the Vietnam War and for maintaining racist institutions, they were his allies. He knew, of course, that they were scarcely advocates of capitalism — indeed, he knew Cleaver was a communist and that most of his new associates were collectivists. But, as he told me, he thought he could gradually sneak up on them, teach them economics, and, in effect, take them over. One day Murray got involved in an internal party squabble about a candidate for some office, and found a gun stuck in his ribs.

To which Rothbard's response was:

There is not one word of truth in her alleged report of our private conversations. I never tried to "take over" any party of which Eldridge Cleaver was the head; and, in the course of working with leftists against the draft and the Vietnam War, I never once had the absurd idea of converting them to capitalism or the free market, sneakily or in any other way.

Above all, no one has ever pulled a gun on me, in the ribs or in any other way. How she dreamed up *that* lulu the Lord only knows.

And Efron's response:

Murray Rothbard did indeed tell me that story.

The Lord may or may not know where she got the story, but I have a pretty good guess. In Chapter 14 of *The Betrayal of the American Right*,²⁵ published in 1970, Rothbard describes his attempts at left/right alliance. That included joining the Peace and Freedom Party. The party nominated Eldredge Cleaver as their presidential candidate, which comes close to Efron's "led by." Rothbard mentions that, at one point thereafter, a Black Panther pulled a gun on the Peace and Freedom Party's senatorial candidate to force him to withdraw, since the Panthers were supporting a different candidate. The same story appeared a little earlier in Rothbard's *The Libertarian* (later

²⁵ <https://www.lewrockwell.com/1970/01/murray-n-rothbard/the-later-1960s-the-new-left-chapter-14-of-the-betrayal-of-the-american-right/>

The Libertarian Forum).²⁶ Either Efron distorted the story in her memory or Rothbard combined elements of what actually happened to make a better story of it. Both sound possible.

A much later issue of *The Libertarian Forum* contains Rothbard's response to Efron's article along with pieces by a number of his supporters. They include a detailed, and I think fairly accurate, account of the contents of the two journals Efron was complaining about, inconsistent with her view of them.

Readers interested in checking that issue for themselves will find issues of *Libertarian Review* back to 1974 at <https://www.libertarianism.org/search/category/periodicals/magazine/libertarian-review-129>. For many only a selection of articles is webbed, but the [January 1978](#) and [August 1978](#) issues are webbed in full.

Full issues of *Inquiry* from 1977 to 1982 can be found at <https://www.unz.com/print/Inquiry>.

Of the authors Efron complains about, only Karl Hess appears, and his article is a defense of local control of textbooks, easily as appropriate in a conservative as a left wing journal. The only articles I found that might support the charge of being left-wing were ones critical of U.S. foreign policy and arguing for a shift towards non-interventionism. At the time that was mostly a left-wing position but it had been the position of the Old Right, among others John Chamberlain, under whom Efron had studied.

²⁶ “The equally inexcusable pulling of a gun by the Panthers on the Peace and Freedom party leaders in New York to force those veteran bootlickers of the Panthers to withdraw their duly nominated candidate for the Senate, the pacifist David McReynolds, ...” *The Libertarian* (later *The Libertarian Forum*) Vol. I No. IV, May 15, 1969, p. 3.