



VIRGINIA'S LAND GRANT UNIVERSITY

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

CENTER FOR STUDY OF PUBLIC CHOICE (703) 951-5501

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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<sup>as</sup> 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