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Or, If Libertarians are Adolescent, then Non-libertarians are Downright Childish

Posted By [Don Boudreaux](#) On April 22, 2011 @ 9:59 am In [Civil Society](#), [Hubris and humility](#), [Myths and Fallacies](#) | [47 Comments](#)

Here's a letter to the *Washington Post*:

Michael Gerson writes that "But both libertarians and Objectivists are moved by the mania of a single idea – a freedom indistinguishable from selfishness" ("[Ayn Rand's adult-onset adolescence](#)"^[1], April 22). I can't speak for Objectivists (save to say that Mr. Gerson's portrait of them is a caricature). But I can say that Mr. Gerson's understanding of libertarianism is comically erroneous; he has clearly not read the best libertarian scholars, such as [F.A. Hayek](#)^[2], [Milton Friedman](#)^[3], [David Boaz](#)^[4], [Sheldon Richman](#)^[5], or [David Schmidtz](#)^[6].

Were Mr. Gerson to bother himself actually to read the works of such scholars, he would find that libertarianism is grounded both in the value judgment that individual freedom is a worthy end in itself *and* in the theoretical and empirical proposition that government poses the single greatest threat to individual freedom, as well as the single greatest threat to the prosperity that non-libertarians desire no less than do libertarians.

Does such a stance reflect a "mania" of single-minded "selfishness"? Is it "adolescent" to want to be free to peacefully pursue one's own ends *and* to want everyone else to have such freedom in equal measure? Of course not. True adolescent arrogance and selfishness is reflected, not in libertarianism or in Objectivism, but in those political philosophies that justify Jones's itch to interfere in Smith's personal affairs and to confiscate some of what belongs to Smith.

Sincerely,
Donald J. Boudreaux

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URLs in this post:

[1] Ayn Rand's adult-onset adolescence: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ayn-rands-adult-onset-adolescence/2011/04/21/AFv2JyKE_story.html

[2] F.A. Hayek: http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:jS5RnmUr_NOJ:mx.nthu.edu.tw/~cshwang/political-economy/econ5171-2005-Austrian/3Individualism/Hayek%3DIndividualism-TF.pdf+hayek+individualism+true+and+false&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShasri-UW1CCq6WOUIcEtgaaHiSJ5_0_TF8yM7YHsO3vpG0HB9Z4_f61H5EcovBn3Qaf-S_dTaNd_b78x1If9pdKobfI5feJAubvTTq1K19Qcg1ftWjbNP1GIhoWSU6v19KKbcn&sig=AHIEtbQxemCF36R-LZBKZFXpqHX78trMGw

[3] Milton Friedman: http://www.cato.org/pubs/policy_report/cpr-10n6-friedman.html

[4] David Boaz: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/339321/libertarianism>

[5] Sheldon Richman: <http://www.thefreemanonline.org/category/columns/tgif/>

[6] David Schmidtz: <http://www.davidschmidtz.com/research.php>

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