



The Unsung Virtues Of Regulation, The Clear Foolishness Of Libertarianism

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Libertarianism opposes all economic regulations. Robert A. Levy, of the libertarian Koch brothers' Cato Institute, has written that, "Libertarians are not opposed to reasonable safety regulations, sensible compromises of civil liberties to enhance national security, or even selective gun controls," but whenever a 'libertarian' advocates that way, and (like there) fails to define what determines those adjectives "reasonable" and "sensible," and "selective" (*on what basis?*), he or she is merely begging the issue (faking it), so as to avoid dealing with the reality of their own ridiculous philosophy. Libertarianism has accurately been commonly described as anarchism, the repudiation of government, which is at the very *foundation* of libertarian philosophy. The way that Grover Norquist most famously phrased it was "I don't want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub." But what "size" is that, and how is it to be empirically determined? And why that particular size and shape, and none other? They never say, because their philosophy is too ridiculous to address the real issues in a way that will make it attractive to intelligent people, so it's all a game to them, a game of deceit to themselves and to others. Libertarianism is a repudiation of government, but it pretends not to be anarchic. Essential to it is its repudiation of regulation.

Nobody credibly denies the fact that, in actual practice, libertarians are *especially* fighting against regulations of corporations. However, in the case of sellers in the gun-control debates, libertarians — who tend to be very much on the pro-gun side as a reflection of their repudiation of government — fight for gun-*owners'* rights (the rights of the consumers, instead of the gun-makers), and against gun-sale regulations that reduce consumers' rights to purchase guns.

But the vast majority of the anti-regulatory thrust of libertarianism, particularly as reflected by the mega-corporate funders of libertarianism and their most broadly influential fundees — people such as the funders Kochs, and such as the fundees Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman — are for, as much as possible, unfettered corporations. Libertarians are for corporations' rights, against governments' rights and against governments' obligations to their citizens — those citizens being the real persons, instead of fictitious collective "artificial persons" that are no "persons" at all but instead collections of financial assets — mere property,

not real “owners” (except in the legalistic fiction). So: libertarianism is against regulations that restrict the rights of corporations.

However, economic regulation lowers, not just raises, prices; and it raises efficiency by introducing and enforcing standardization, so that consumers can reliably know what they’ll get for what they pay — for example, “500 mg” of x will then far likelier be 500 mg of x. Of course, if the government is corrupt, then the regulation and its enforcement will be, too, but that’s a corruption-problem, not a problem of regulations that shouldn’t exist at all (according to libertarian dogma); so, keeping one’s conceptual categories clear is important, when discussing regulation, or anything else.

Take, for example, drugs — all types, regardless of whether they’re now legal, or, to the exact contrary, are altogether prohibited. Any drug should be taken in the dose suitable for the intended purpose — neither more nor less — but if there is no reliably enforced legal *penalty* for dishonest labeling of potency, etc., then the consumer (again, regardless of whether the drug itself is legal or *not*) can be victimized by a dishonest or sloppy vendor, who can be careless or else shortchange that consumer on potency or even include toxic impurities, without that seller’s having any other concern than that perhaps the consumer will change vendors or perhaps die from what the vendor did and will thereby reduce the seller’s customer-count by one, but cannot be subjected to legal or regulatory penalties that would be disincentives *above and beyond* that of perhaps merely losing a customer.

Furthermore, in all types of consumer-rights cases, not just drug-related ones, only the existence of government enables the consumer to hold accountable a manufacturer or seller of dangerous and misrepresented products, such as of tobacco products, insecticides, or food-ingredients such as hydrogenated oils, if and when those products or services turn out to be vastly more dangerous than their consumers assume.

For example, Janet Bufton, co-founder of the libertarian Institute for Liberal Studies, has written against regulations of tattooists, because:

I’m considering getting a tattoo of ama-gi, the earliest known writing of the word “freedom” and was trying to find out if the Ontario tattoo industry was regulated or not, since if it was I would go to Michigan, where the industry is unregulated. [A friend challenged her preference to buy tattoos in a country where it’s an unregulated industry and asked her, “So, on principle you want to get hepatitis?”]

Finally, I had an epiphany. I texted her: “It’s important to me that where I go is being safe because they think it’s important to be safe, and not because they’re doing the absolute minimum the government says they have to do.”

And I think that’s at the heart of the libertarian argument against regulation.

Government regulations take away our vigilance for our own well-being and the rewards that should be enjoyed by people who are willing to go the extra mile with their business through a declaration that all businesses are acceptable in their eyes. It’s a terrible injustice; in fact the epiphany probably put me one step closer to a pro-tattoo decision.

Buffoon wanted “to get my freedom tattoo in an unregulated tattoo parlour” so as to be totally ‘responsible’ for the outcome (after all: in an anarchic world, it’s every person on his own and for himself, no laws restraining his or her ‘freedom’), so that if she’d become diseased from it, she would blame only herself, and not the corrupt system in which she functions and which she wants to love — craves to love the “state of nature” — and not to blame it for whatever bad might come to her from its corruptness. Only the consumer is to blame, in that system (libertarianism).

Of course, aristocrats, who have enormous wealth, might reasonably self-identify with the supply side in all economic transactions, because they’re much more on that side (the side of the producer and seller) than on the side of the consumer (the purchaser and user), and so they reasonably might fund such operations as the Cato Institute or perhaps the Institute for Liberal Studies — in order to maximize the freedom of corporations.

But, for anyone else to welcome the increased danger to themselves that will result from such a corrupt system, is to self-identify with the corruption, and self-identify against anyone who would seek to change it so as to attach legal accountability to irresponsible or evil unconcern regarding suppliers’ meeting the most basic and legally enforced standards of safety in the provisioning of the given product or service.

Such buffoons — suckers of the corporate propaganda — are unfortunately assisting the corrupt to victimize the public. They’re thus dangers not only to themselves, but also to non-buffoons, who recognize the foolishness (if not evil) of libertarianism. They thus harm the entire body-politic, by their foolishness. To the extent that they influence government, they reduce everyone’s safety.