

# Paradigms and Demographics

## The Libertarian Hypocrisy Test

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I've shared several quizzes that people can take to see whether they are libertarian, some of which are very simple and some of which are very nuanced and complex.

- The Definitive Political Orientation test.
- The Circle test.
- The Libertarian Purity test.
- The 8 Values test.
- The world's smallest political quiz.

I've also shared many examples of statist hypocrisy.

- Six examples from 2014.
- Leonardo DiCaprio's giant carbon footprint.
- John Kerry's money in tax havens.
- Rich leftists with kids in private school while fighting school choice for poor kids.
- Celebratory leftists dodging their tax obligations.

So I guess I shouldn't be surprised to see that someone on the left wants to play this game by combing the concept of quizzes and hypocrisy. I don't know R.J. Eskow, but he has a quiz on a left-wing website that's designed to ostensibly measure libertarian hypocrisy.

Though it's hard to treat the exercise seriously since it is prefaced by some rather silly rhetoric.

Libertarian...political philosophy all but died out in the mid- to late-20th century, but was revived by billionaires and corporations that found them politically useful. ...They call themselves "realists" but rely on fanciful theories... They claim that selfishness makes things better for everybody, when history shows exactly the opposite is true. ...libertarianism, the political philosophy whose avatar is the late writer Ayn Rand. It was once thought that this extreme brand of libertarianism, one that celebrates greed and even brutality, had died in the early 1980s... There was a good reason for that. Randian libertarianism is an illogical, impractical, inhumane, unpopular set of Utopian ravings. ...It's only a dream. At no time or place in human history has there been a working libertarian society which provided its people with the kinds of outcomes libertarians claim it will provide.

I'm not an ideological enforcer of libertarianism, but I can say with great confidence that Randians are only a minor strain of the libertarian movement. Many of us (including me)

enjoyed one or more of her books, and some of us even became libertarians as a result of reading tomes such as *Atlas Shrugged*, but that's the extent of her influence

I also find it odd that Eskow didn't do his homework when conspiracy-mongering about the Kochs or mentioning Cato. We get almost no funds from corporations. Indeed, I'm willing to bet that major left-wing think tanks get a much higher share of their budget from businesses.

...political libertarianism suddenly had pretensions of legitimacy. This revival is Koch-fueled, not coke-fueled... Exxon Mobil and other corporate and billionaire interests are behind the Cato Institute, the other public face of libertarianism.

Though Eskow gives us a bit of credit.

...the unconventionality of their thought has led libertarians to be among this nation's most forthright and outspoken advocates for civil liberties and against military interventions.

Gee, thanks. What a magnanimous concession!

But I've spent enough time on preliminaries. Let's get to the test.

Though I have to warn you that it's just a rhetorical test. You can't click on answers. There's not even an answer key where you can calculate any results.

For all intents and purposes, the test is just a series of "gotcha" questions. Eskow probably hopes that libertarians will get flustered when confronted by this collection of queries.

But I'm always up for a challenge. So I decided to give my two cents in response to each question.

*Are unions, political parties, elections, and social movements like Occupy examples of "spontaneous order"—and if not, why not?*

The term "spontaneous order" refers to the natural tendency of markets to produce efficient and peaceful outcomes without any sort of centralized design or command. I'm not sure how this is connected to government and politics, however. Perhaps Eskow is asking whether political pressure groups can arise without centralized design and command. If so, then I'll say yes. But if the question is designed to imply that market forces are akin to government actions and/or political activity, I'll say no.

*Is a libertarian willing to admit that production is the result of many forces, each of which should be recognized and rewarded?*

Admit it? That's an inherent part of our approach to economics. The famous "I, Pencil" essay celebrates this principle, and this video is a modern version that captures many of the same concepts. For what it's worth, I'm guessing Eskow thinks that the market allocation of

recognition and reward is somehow deficient, so he's making some sort of weird argument that intervention is needed.

*Is our libertarian willing to acknowledge that workers who bargain for their services, individually and collectively, are also employing market forces?*

Yes, we think workers should be able to use any non-coercive tactic to get the maximum pay, including joining unions. And we also recognize the right of employers to use non-coercive tactics to keep costs down. But note that I include "non-coercive" in my analysis. That's because no employee should be forced to remain at a company that doesn't pay enough, and no employer should be forced to hire any particular worker or deal with any particular union. Market forces should determine those choices.

*Is our libertarian willing to admit that a "free market" needs regulation?*

Admit it? We view the private economy in part as a giant network of mutually reinforcing regulation. But Eskow probably doesn't understand how private regulation operates. And besides, I'm sure his question is about command-and-control government regulation. And if that's the focus of the question, am I a hypocrite for saying yes in some circumstances, but accompanied by rigorous cost-benefit analysis?

*Does our libertarian believe in democracy?*

Most libertarians will avoid the hypocrite label on this question because we are not fans of "democracy." At least, we don't believe in democracy if that means untrammeled majoritarianism. Indeed, the U.S. Constitution was created in part to protect some minority rights from "tyranny of the majority." The bottom line is that we believe in a democratic form of government, but one where the powers of government are tightly constrained.

*Does our libertarian use wealth that wouldn't exist without government in order to preach against the role of government?*

This question is based on the novel left-wing theory that wealth belongs to government because the economy would collapse without "public goods." This might be an effective argument against an anarcho-capitalist, but I don't think it has any salience when dealing with ordinary libertarians who simply want the federal government to stay within the boundaries envisioned by the Founding Fathers. Small-government libertarians are willing to give government 5-10 percent on their income to finance these legitimate activities. But, yes, we will preach when the burden of government expands beyond that point.

*Does our libertarian reject any and all government protection for his intellectual property?*

I'll admit this is a tough question. I've never written on this issue, but libertarians are split on whether governments should grant and enforce patents and copyrights. Though I suspect both camps are probably intellectually consistent, so I doubt hypocrisy is an issue.

*Does our libertarian recognize that democracy is a form of marketplace?*

The "public choice" school of economics was created to apply economic analysis to political action, and most libertarians would agree with that approach. So the obvious answer is that, yes, we recognize that democracy is a type of marketplace. Once again, though, I think Eskow has an ulterior agenda. He probably wants to imply that if we accept market outcomes as desirable, then we must also accept political decisions as desirable. Yet he should know, based on one of the questions above, that we're not huge fans of majoritarianism. The key distinction, from our perspective, is that market choices don't involve coercion.

*Does our libertarian recognize that large corporations are a threat to our freedoms?*

Since libertarians are first in line to object when big companies lobby for bailouts, subsidies, and protectionism, the answer is obviously yes. Libertarians opposed Dodd-Frank, unlike the big companies on Wall Street. Libertarians opposed Obamacare, unlike the big insurance companies and big pharmaceutical companies. Libertarians oppose the Export-Import Bank, unlike the cronyists at the Chamber of Commerce. We are very cognizant of the fact that businesses are sometimes the biggest enemies of the free market.

*Does he think...that historical figures like King and Gandhi were "parasites"?*

This question is a red herring, based on Ayn Rand's hostility to selflessness. As I noted above, very few libertarians are hard-core Randians. We have no objection to people dedicating their lives to others. And if that means fighting for justice and against oppression, we move from "no objection" to "enthusiastic support."

*If you believe in the free market, why weren't you willing to accept as final the judgment against libertarianism rendered decades ago in the free and unfettered marketplace of ideas?*

Since we don't have any pure laissez-faire societies, we libertarians have to admit that we still have a long way to go. But our views aren't right or wrong based on whether they are accepted by a majority. Heck, I would argue for libertarianism in France, where I'd have several thousand opponents for every possible ally.

I'll close today's column by briefly expanding on this final question, especially since Eskow also made similar claims in some of the text I excerpted above.

If you look around the world, you won't find a Libertopia or Galt's Gulch (egads, a Rand reference!). That being said, there is a cornucopia of evidence that nations with comparatively small and non-intrusive governments are much more prosperous than countries with lots of taxes, spending, and intervention.

Yes, voters do have an unfortunate tendency to elect more bad politicians (in place likes France and Greece) than sensible politicians (in places such as Switzerland and New Zealand), but that's not the real test. What ultimately matters is that there's a very strong relationship between liberty and prosperity. Libertarians pass that test with flying colors.

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