

Are Free Riders Really a Problem?

For a large number of people, their concern over “free riders” – people who get a benefit without obviously paying for it – is what stands between them and accepting Rightful Liberty. And that is a shame.

True, as far as it goes.

I suppose you could have a stipulation that your fire department is not to fight fires consuming your neighbors’ houses, if they have not also contracted for service, so as not to contribute to their “free-riderhood.” The fire department could just sit at your house, hosing it down so the fire doesn’t spread to your property. As long as the contract was agreeable to you and your fire department, you could have just about any conditions put in you like.

Alternately, if your house catches fire and your fire department puts it out, your neighbor has again benefited, since his house is less likely to be damaged now. Perhaps you prefer that in this case, your fire company set fire to the neighbor’s house in order to allow nature to take its course? I really hope no one would want that.

The “free rider” problem is greatly exaggerated. If people get together to build a bridge, and don’t charge a toll for crossing it, does that mean an out-of-town visitor is a “free rider” if he crosses the bridge?

How would you know? He may be crossing the bridge to trade with a business owner who helped pay for the bridge; someone he wouldn’t have been able to trade with had the bridge not been built. So is the business owner being cheated since he paid to help build the bridge and the visitor did not? What if this person who crosses the bridge decides to trade with a business owner who also didn’t contribute to the construction of the bridge? Does this business owner never trade with the other businesses around him who contributed to the bridge? How did he get the money that he spends in these other stores? Is there no value in keeping his store open for the other people in town?

If you choose to pay for police or “national defense”, are those who refuse getting a benefit for nothing? That depends if you ignore the fact that under current conditions, “national defense” endangers us all, and police are bullies and scum. Me, I’d prefer to just get rid of ALL anti-weapon “laws” and let the cost of being a thug rise back to where it belongs.

If people see a benefit in something, they will probably be willing to foot the bill. In a free society, bridges and roads and fire departments would undoubtedly be cheaper and better, since no bureaucracy is eating up the funds and producing nothing but more bureaucracy. There is no reason to whip out coercion to deal with this. A true parasite will suffer the

consequences of his decisions regardless whether there is a “government” of any sort to punish him or not.

Besides, everyone will be the “free rider” at times. There is no avoiding it. I think this is only a problem if you look at the situation selfishly or from a “*but that’s not fair*” perspective. Just accept that the times someone else is getting a “free ride” on your dime are paybacks for the times you get the same benefit. It all comes out even in the end, so don’t keep a ledger trying to nit-pick every offense. Even if someone seems to come out ahead, are you really willing to give up a little of your liberty to make sure everyone pays in every instance? I’m not.

PS: Also check out this article which has another, much more detailed take on this: [Small-Town Anarchy](#)