

Intolerance and Voluntaryism



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There’s a growing trend among libertarians to distance the movement from those whose intolerance of others are based on race, gender, sexuality, religion, *et cetera*. There seems to be two forks of this trend, 1) those championing “thick libertarianism” and arguing that intolerance is incompatible with the foundational principles of libertarianism, and 2) those calling for a “humanitarian” approach to spreading libertarianism by not focusing on the property rights of the intolerant, rather on how liberty helps us become better people. Here are my thoughts on the trend as they concern voluntaryism.

Intolerance, Hate, Discrimination

First, let me define my terms. Intolerance occurs when one interferes with an action taken by others. This interference can be either violent or nonviolent. I am intolerant toward others trying to murder or pillage me or my loved ones, and probably others. My willingness to interfere is an indication of my intolerance. Hate is a feeling of strong dislike for something. I hate the initiation of aggression, as I hate rape, battery, murder, slavery, and the like. And discrimination is the act of choice. To choose is to discriminate, to divide or separate. What you choose is thus separated from what you didn’t choose.

Words convey ideas and the examples I gave in defining the above words, I hope, are free of controversy. Having thus defined my terms, how do any of them relate to voluntaryism? If one interferes, is intolerant of, a violent action by others, with violence, then his actions are compatible with the principles of voluntaryism. If one is nonviolently intolerant of a violent action by others, his actions are likewise compatible with voluntaryism. If one’s intolerance takes the form of refusing to associate with others based on their race, gender, *et cetera*, he has violated nobody’s rights and should be free from violent interference by those intolerant of his discrimination. If one hates, for example, people of a different race than his own, and his hate creates intolerance, and that intolerance is manifested violently against the nonviolent, then his actions are incompatible with voluntaryism, and others may respond in kind.

“Thick” vs. “Thin” Libertarianism

Thick libertarianism takes a broader view of the philosophy than does “thin” libertarianism. Thin libertarianism, a term coined by Charles Johnson, is only concerned with the initiation of force. Thin libertarians, then, believe that libertarian theory should only be used to determine when the use of force is justified. Thick libertarians, on the other hand, recognize the relationship between the philosophy of liberty and individualism. From here they argue that a recognition of individualism is a recognition of the equality of the races, genders, *et cetera*. Therefore, a libertarian can’t be a racist, a sexist, and other such attitudes of superiority toward others (according to thick libertarianism). What about voluntaryism? Voluntaryism sprang from libertarianism, and voluntaryism necessarily recognizes the individualism of self-ownership.

Can one recognize the self-ownership and property rights of others (individualism) while at the same time being nonviolently intolerant, hating, or discriminating against them? I see no reason why not. I discriminated against others, men and women, when I chose to marry my wife. I hate jerks and rude people, especially when their assholery is directed toward children. And I am nonviolently intolerant of those who promote fallacy and error. But I still recognized all of these people’s self-ownership and property rights. While I consider my wife, non-jerks, and honest searchers for truth superior specimens of the human race, I don’t consider them as having more rights than those I consider inferior. I recognize anyone’s right to life and liberty who recognizes mine. I really don’t see the point in separating libertarianism into “thick” and “thin”.

“Humanitarian” vs. “Brutalist”

The other fork on the latest trend was introduced by Jeffrey Tucker in his article, “Against Libertarian Brutalism”. He contrasts two approaches to liberty, 1) the “humanitarians” who “are drawn to reasons” for libertarianism “such as the following: Liberty allows peaceful human cooperation. It inspires the creative service of others. It keeps violence at bay. It allows for capital formation and prosperity. It protects human rights of all against invasion. It allows human associations of all sorts to flourish on their own terms. It socializes people with rewards toward getting along rather than tearing each other apart, and leads to a world in which people are valued as ends in themselves rather than fodder in the central plan,” and 2) the “brutalists” who “find all the above rather boring, broad, and excessively humanitarian. To them, what’s impressive about liberty is that it allows people to assert their individual preferences, to form homogeneous tribes, to work out their biases in action, to ostracize people based on ‘politically incorrect’ standards, to hate to their heart’s content so long as no violence is used as a means, to shout down people based on their demographics or political opinions, to be openly racist and sexist, to exclude and isolate and be generally malcontented with modernity, and to reject civil standards of values and etiquette in favor of antisocial norms.”

There's much I agree with in this piece, and I appreciate Tucker's admission that libertarianism allows for both humanitarians and brutalists, but it all seems to me to be a concern over the strategy one should take in the promotion of liberty, rather than a redefining of what libertarianism is, unlike the "thick" versus "thin" debate. Each strategy has value, I think. When the state is advancing and using racism or sexism as justification for its encroachments on private property, then it seems the best strategy in response is brutalism. However, when the state is advancing and using "consumer safety" or "economic stability" as justification for its encroachments, then it seems the best strategy in response is humanitarianism. Again, both seem to have value as responses to state encroachments. What is the point in picking one as a foundation and tossing the other? They are both foundational, I think, and both have their uses.

Final Thoughts

I could very well be wrong on anything I've written here. I'm open-minded. At present, however, I see no reason to adopt any other label for myself than "voluntaryist". I remain unconvinced of coercivism and statism, of any other property rights theory than that of self-ownership and individualism. If I had to choose right now, I'd choose "thin, humanitarian" libertarianism. That seems like the better approach for everyday life in the presence of the state. I'm careful not to use force unjustly, and I'm optimistic for both my personal future and the future of the society in which I live. To each his own, peacefully.

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