

Libertarians Aren't on Right or Left

No one really understands anyone else, so it's no surprise that non-libertarians don't understand libertarians.

When I first started writing on the topic of libertarianism, I ran across a blog post written by a self-proclaimed "progressive" who explained why all libertarians were racists and should be hated and mocked. I commented, pointing out a host of reasons this wasn't true. He seemed to imagine everyone he didn't like could be clumped under the term "libertarian." Most of the beliefs he attributed to libertarians were not libertarian beliefs at all. I told him so and provided evidence. He replied with the nastiest name-calling he could manage. Then he blocked me from responding and later his entire blog was taken down.

Other times people who identified themselves as "conservatives" made assumptions about things I would support because they imagined libertarians were something they aren't. Sometimes they thought I'd support harsher enforcement of some law, or a "fair tax." Why I would support something I don't believe is legitimate, and which is not compatible with libertarianism, is beyond me.

The best definition of libertarianism I've run across is "someone who rejects the use of force against anyone who isn't currently violating the life, liberty, or property of another."

Cue the disagreements among libertarians over what counts as "force" or a violation. It keeps things interesting.

Some libertarians are fans of the U.S. Constitution. Others only use it to show how off-course the U.S. government has gone in the years since it was ratified.

Many libertarians believe a fetus is a human being with rights, while many others believe a fetus could eventually become a human being with rights, but a woman is a human being with rights now, which includes the right to end her pregnancy.

Some libertarians believe you can have a limited government — a "night watchman state" — while others think a little cancer is still too much.

Libertarians can be slightly "statist," believing that governing others can be a legitimate human endeavor — as long as it is done gently, or they can be anarchists; not believing political government is ever justified. Or anything in between.

What libertarians are not is politically Right or Left. Even if our personal views could be categorized by those labels, we can't condone the use of force — including legislation — to impose our personal views on people who aren't harming anyone. It's a matter of principle.