

Liberty Can't be Centrally Planned



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While I love a good discussion on the logical construction of property rights theory, and the implications stemming therefrom, in a free society concepts like "property," "aggression," "law," and "justice" will evolve to have different meanings in different areas and among different people in the same area. In other words, pure theory might define concepts one way, but without a central authority prescribing meaning, their practice will likely vary.

Pure Theory

Let me demonstrate what I mean by first examining pure theory, and then speculating on practice. Pure libertarian property rights theory would define the previous example concepts somewhere along the lines of:

property: the characteristic given to a scarce resource that has either been appropriated out of nature, traded for, or received as rectification for a criminal offense.

aggression: the uninvited border-crossing of a scarce resource, such as trespassing, theft, battery, rape, and murder.

law: a rule laid down in society through either custom, norm, convention, or dispute resolution.

justice: being made as close to whole as possible after one's property became the subject of aggression.

Each of these definitions were produced through a logical construction of libertarian-based property rights theory. Non-libertarian-based property rights theory may produce different definitions. Let us now proceed to speculating on practice of these concepts in a free society.

Practice

A free society necessarily entails the freedom to compete in the provision of law (rule creation, dispute resolution) and order (security, national defense). In a free society, there is no monopoly on these provisions. Anyone can start a dispute resolution firm or security company. Law and order are thus provided by multiple entities, each doing so on the basis of profits, or rather, of customer satisfaction. Because nobody has the final say on what constitutes law, those resolving disputes to the satisfaction of not only the parties involved, but to everyone else in a given area, will likely have his services sought after in the future. Over time, and through competition by multiple dispute resolution firms, laws, or more accurately, customs, norms, and conventions will evolve and vary across localities, much as we see cultural variation across the world today.

With that in mind, it's not inconceivable that one area of society would define, say property, differently than another. Hunter-gatherer societies today, in my understanding, are more egalitarian than their civilized neighbors. One explanation for this is that children are raised with empathy and so are more intrinsically-motivated to share their possessions with a greater number of people. People in such societies have evolved a practice of not locking away property, rather making it freely available to whoever needs it with the reasonable expectation that it will be taken care of and returned. Customs like this, that evolve over time and without a central authority, create different practical meanings to the concepts listed above.

Final Thoughts

I used to believe that a free society would adhere perfectly to libertarian theory, and would argue on that basis. The flaw in my thinking was the belief that anything, including the meanings of any number of concepts, could be guaranteed in the absence of a central authority, or of a monopoly on the provision of law and order. I am now of the opinion that liberty can't and shouldn't be centrally planned.

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