

Economics or Philosophy

Some years ago I discovered that [Libertarianism.org](#) had webbed a [video](#) of a debate I had had with George Smith in 1981; I found it interesting enough to be worth including here. What follows is a lightly edited transcript, ending with some questions from the audience and my responses. The topic announced for the debate was “Economics or Philosophy: Which is the Proper Foundation for Libertarianism?” The source of the difference between that and the question I thought we were debating, mentioned below, is explained in the next chapter.

My first speech

Let me begin by saying that what this debate was, at least the first time around, I believe, was a debate about what sorts of arguments were most important or most useful in defending libertarianism. There is certainly a sense in which economic arguments without philosophical arguments are logically impossible or useless. You can't talk about what is desirable without talking about what ultimately you want. But if everybody agrees about what they want you would reduce the issue only to questions of how to get it, which would be economic questions.

I should start by briefly defining what I mean by economics and economic arguments vs. philosophy and philosophical arguments, because I got the impression towards the end of the previous run of this debate that a good deal of what I thought was economics George thought was philosophy, which led to a certain amount of confusion. Economics deals with questions such as what will be the consequences of certain laws and certain institutions. Philosophy, or at least the particular part of philosophy that is mostly used by libertarians for making arguments, deals with oughts, with statements such as “it is desirable that people be happy,” or “you ought not to steal someone else's property,” or other questions of that sort.

There is a good deal of overlap in these two. That can be seen by considering one very simple philosophical position, the position called rule utilitarianism, which holds that we ought to act according to that set of rules which maximizes the sum total of human happiness. In one sense you could say that all of what I call economic arguments, that if you have private property people will be happy for example, are part of a philosophical argument which the rule utilitarian uses to say we ought to act in certain ways. But I would separate out the philosophical part of the argument, which is the part that says that you ought to make people happy, from the economics, which discusses what the consequences of certain acts will be. When I say that we ought to use primarily, not entirely, but primarily economic arguments, I mean we ought to be arguing with people about what are the consequences of certain acts, what are the consequences of certain institutions, how does socialism work, how does capitalism work, rather than arguing with them primarily about whether taxation is immoral, whether private property is a natural right, and so forth.

My reason is not that I believe that “is” statements without “ought” statements can tell you what you should do — obviously they can't — but that I believe that most of the disagreement in the world, most disagreement on things libertarians are interested in, comes from disagreements about how institutions work, about consequences, and only a relatively small part from disagreement about ends. If I persuaded a socialist that socialism would lead to everybody being poor and miserable and enslaved and capitalism would lead to everybody being happy and wealthy and wise, we might have many remaining disagreements about what was desirable and yet he would almost certainly be in favor of capitalism. Even though the statement “it is desirable that people

be healthy and wealthy and wise” is a philosophical statement logically necessary for the argument, it would not in practice be necessary because we don’t disagree about it.

George objected last time that I seemed to be including an awful lot in economics. For those of you who are perfectionists, I would say that economics is that approach to understanding what is which starts with the premise that individuals have objectives which they rationally pursue and draws conclusions from that. It would take much more than fifteen minutes to expand on that, so I won’t.

Part of my evidence that political disagreement stems more from disagreement about “is’s” than “oughts,” comes from an experience which I have had and I think many of you have had. A Libertarian is arguing with a socialist about some fundamental moral question such as whether a capitalist has the right to the profits he gets from his capital. One discovers after a while that the socialist’s idea of the history of that particular hypothetical capitalist is that he got his capital by stealing it from somebody, by doing things that the libertarian would regard as stealing it from somebody, whereas the libertarian’s idea of the history is that the capitalist hacked a tract of land out of the jungle while the lazy worker sat by and now wishes to get some income for the use of his farmland. That suggests to me that both people have similar moral intuitions and that each is trying to twist his vision of reality to make his moral intuitions consistent with the institutions that he is in favor of.

For another example, consider the way in which Marxists use the term “exploitation.” The Marxist argument goes as follows: All things are produced by the workers, either directly by the workers working or indirectly by the workers building machines which then help produce goods. The capitalists consume some of what is produced, therefor the capitalists exploit the workers.

If you think a bit, you will notice that there is a hidden libertarian premise — that things belong to the people who make them. If the socialist really believed that the right premise was “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” it would follow that if the workers were good at working and the capitalists needed Rolls-Royce’s, that there would be absolutely nothing wrong with the capitalist receiving profits. The reason the socialist is upset about the capitalist receiving profits is that, at base, his moral intuition is very much like yours and mine, namely that ownership comes out of producing.

I am not asserting that there are no disagreements at all, of course. Certainly there are a lot of socialists who think that taking from the rich to give to the poor is a good and meritorious activity, and very few libertarians who believe that, although I can think of perhaps one example if I work at it, a philosopher I met recently.¹ The reason, in my view, that we don’t have to argue about the philosophical points is that our economic arguments are sufficiently strong so that we can reach our conclusion starting with any of a wide range of views about what is desirable. Since capitalism happens to be the best system for the poor as well as for the rich, since redistribution in practice means taxing the average Californian to support the students attending UCLA, who will on average end up with higher than average incomes, we can, I think should, argue that whether or not you believe that redistribution is theft you should be against it. I am taking redistribution because that’s the case where I think the economic argument is weakest.

¹ I was probably referring to Baruch Brody. See Chapter 57 of *The Machinery of Freedom* and [Comment on Brody](#), *Social Philosophy & Policy*, Volume 1 (1983). Brody’s argument that I was responding to is “Redistribution Without Egalitarianism” in the same volume. The Bleeding Heart Libertarians, who I discuss in Chapter XXX, would be another example.

For many other issues, the policies we are opposing are bad for all concerned. There is, for instance, a rather elegant argument for freedom of contract which shows that, if you make laws making it illegal for landlords to write lease contracts in which the tenant can be thrown out on a week's notice, the consequence is to make both landlords and tenants worse off. This is often, although of course not always, true about interferences in the free market.

So I would argue that we don't have to argue about what we ought to want, first because what people actually do want, although not identical, is fairly similar across people, and second because our economic arguments are strong enough that the same system which maximizes freedom also maximizes happiness or utility or any of quite a number of other things, or at least comes very close to maximizing them. We can therefore argue, essentially, "pick your objective." There are hypothetical objectives that capitalism is not best for, making people poor for example, but for any reasonable objectives, ones that will cover the views of 98% of the population of the world, we can demonstrate that our system is the one to produce those objectives.

It is fortunate that our economic position is so strong because, unfortunately, our philosophic position is much weaker than we wish it were. Imagine that you are arguing with a conservative who says we need a draft. You object that the draft is slavery. He replies that we need it to defend ourselves.

You say, to yourself and perhaps to him, that the reason he is in favor of a draft and you are not is that he is a wicked man who does not mind slavery. Before you say that you need to ask yourself, if you agreed with him about the positive question, about the economic question, if your only disagreement were moral, would you still be that sure you were against the draft? If you really believed, as you don't, that without a draft the Russians would conquer us and we would all be slaves, you might start trying to figure out some libertarian excuses for a draft.

Let me go back to the case of arguing with a socialist. The socialist believes that capitalism won't work, that it will lead to enormous inequalities, to misery, to Great Depressions, to bread lines, to dictatorship, to all sorts of horrible things,² and he also believes socialism will work. We say to him "You are an immoral person. As a matter of principle I am against socialism and I would be against it even if you were right." That is usually a lie. Usually, the reason we're willing to say that is that we are sure he's wrong.

If he says to us "Yeah but just suppose for a minute that you believed that capitalism led to these horrible things," I think we would be in a much harder position. I will give you some evidence. There are places where a straightforward application of what we believe to be libertarian principles does lead to horrible conclusions, and the result is that none of us believe them. We think up complicated excuses for not believing.

I will be talking more about that tomorrow or Sunday, whenever I'm giving a talk,³ but here is a simple example. We like to say that you cannot trespass on a person's land without his permission, however small the trespass is, that it should be up to him to decide whether you are injuring him, not up to you. But every time I light a match, photons from that match are trespassing on property for a hundred miles around. Every time I light a match, little bits of soot are trespassing on land for 20 miles around. If we took seriously the sort of simple aprioristic arguments that we sometimes

² For an example of such a view from a real socialist, although one less optimistic than my imaginary socialist about the socialist alternative, see George Orwell's [review](#) of two books, one by Friedrich Hayek and one by Konni Zilliacus.

³ The talk I was referring to is Chapter XXX.

use to prove things we do believe are true we would have to conclude you couldn't light a match without permission from every landowner within sight, every landowner who with a sufficiently powerful telescope could see your match, thus demonstrating that your photons are trespassing on his property. We don't believe it. When these simple hard-and-fast arguments lead to conclusions we don't like, somehow we ignore them.

I suggest that that is a good reason why, instead of saying to the socialist “the reason you ought to agree with us is that we are morally right,” we ought to say to him “The reason you ought to agree with us is that your system leads to results you wouldn't like, and we can give you quite a lot of evidence for that, both empirical and theoretical, while our system leads to results you would like.”

Having said that, I don't want to argue that there is no place for philosophy. There are two places for philosophy. One of them is for the philosophers to work at doing a better job than I, from my biased position, believe they have so far done, in giving coherent, clear, persuasive explanations of oughts. Maybe then eventually we will all agree on that and maybe that will help a little. Second, the philosophers can and do serve a useful defensive function in trying to make people willing to consider our ideas by making it plausible than what we want is morally attractive as well as functional and that what they thought they wanted is morally unattractive as well as non-functional. That, I think, is a useful and valuable function and I have got 7 seconds left so it's George's turn.

George's First Speech

Being a firm believer in technology I will use the microphone. The subject we're debating here this evening or foundation for libertarianism can Onyx Graphics not think the key word here is foundation I would be the last to deny the enormously valuable contributions that he can Onyx handmade and in fact has made a can make it has made to the libertarian case but I think when we're talking about the proper Foundation of libertarianism we clearly have to decide in favor of Ethics being the basis for the libertarian philosophy and I'll try to explain a few reasons why I think this is so first of all let's consider what's involved in even stating what number channel is just applying libertarian principles to a particular problem but I mean if you were to explain to a friend of yours and he said will tell me what libertarianism is in 25 words or less what would you say well I suspect you would say something like why Libertariansbelieve that no person should initiate Force against another person or Libertariansbelieve in is a mess now I don't mean just applying libertarian principles for particular problem but I mean if you were to explain to a friend of yours and he said will tell me what libertarianism is in 25 words or less what would you say well I suspect you would say something like well Libertariansbelieve that no person should initiate Force against another person or Libertariansbelieve in the right of self ownership or Libertariansare against any form of aggression regardless of how you state the basic libertarian principle somewhere in that statement you're going to have an odd statement I should statement or a statement pertaining to rights and of course rights have implicit within them hot statements another word you'll have to say something like people ought not to aggress so in the very statement of the essence of libertarianism you are already hip-deep in ethics because you are introducing that very important. Or its philosophers like to call them normative statements I would suggest to you that there is not similarly implicit within the basic statement of the libertarian philosophy necessarily a particular view of Economics ranted a view of Economics develops out of that basic philosophy but it's not as essential that is not as basic to it at this the ethical answer so that's the first point I want to make an attempt to clarify what I mean when I say the ethics is the foundation of libertarianism let me proceed a little bit and try to clarify more and what stamps ethics is the foundation first we have

this notion of rights that practically all libertarian subscribe to in 1/4 as he is the ethical aspect so that's the first point I want to make an attempt to clarify what I mean when I say that ethics is the foundation of libertarianism let me proceed a little bit and try to clarify more and what stamps ethics is the foundation first we have this notion of rights that practically all libertarian subscribe to in one form or another you may stated in different ways you may say that Libertarians believe you have a right to life or you may stated as I prefer that every person has the right of self ownership but however you stayed at you come down as some kind of theory of natural rights but you see one could believe in something we have natural rights and yet not give it top priority in one Philosophy for example you might or some people you know Mike if you ask them do you think people are cell phone or if they might say well of course I do yes of course but then when confronted with a particular type of problem they might decide that there are overriding considerations more important than a person's individual rights now there are many many historical examples of this let me give you one and I think it was straight very early how there can in fact be a conflict between moral arguments and you can all make arguments now I should mention here that I happen to believe in most cases there are not conflicts if the two are very compatible but there can be conflicts between moral and economic arguments and if it should if those if those sorts of conflict should arise then I maintain that the moral arguments always take precedence it clearly how there can in fact be a conflict between moral arguments in economically arguments now I should mention here that I happen to believe in most cases there are not conflicts if the two are very compatible but there can be conflicts between moral and economic arguments and if it should if those if those sorts of conflict should arise then I maintain that the moral argument should always take precedence it should take precedence because it's more fundamental let me give you the example of that I like to use from the 19th century Libertarians were very involved as you may know in the pre-civil war-era with the abolition of slavery they were at The Cutting Edge so to speak of the Abolitionist Movement individuals like William Lloyd Garrison Lysander Spooner Wendell Phillips another's they explicitly argued on the basis of self ownership throughout the Abolitionist literature are constant references to self ownership as the moral objection to slavery they accuse slave owners as being as they put it man Stealers because they deprived the slave of that which was probably his own name with his body his freedom now they're developing a very important split in the Abolitionist or not in the Abolitionist Movement but the anti-slavery movement generally the abolitionists were in favor of the immediate and of an immediate end to slavery by which they met as fast as humanly possible they argue that there should be no other considerations which override the slaves right to his own Freedom there was another group which became known as the gradualist who argued who agreed with the abolitionists they said was true that slavery is wrong it's evil it should be gotten rid of but they added on eventually what they argued was that should slavery cease immediately it would wreak economic havoc on the south in particular but also on the Northern Industrial states which relied heavily on Southern Agriculture so what they did was introduce an argument and economic argument trying to show that the immediate abolition of slavery would Ricky conomic havoc and therefore slavery had to be phased out in increments rather than immediately this was a very important and bitterly fought contest between the two sides now it's important to know how the abolitionists responded to this they did not necessarily try to argue that the immediate Avelin abolition of slavery would not have these terrible Economic Consequences what they argued was it just economically sort of argument was your relevant because what had to take precedence was the right of slave to his own liberty and this was an important argument example that can arise and has arisen and many lesser forms a very clear example of a conflict between immoral and economically argument and the abolitionists

recognize clearly that the moral argument with the real basis for their philosophy and therefore that had to be the guiding principle as indeed I think it has to be the guiding principle for Libertarians today this sort of conflict can arise even today it's not inconceivable that if you had some old curmudgeon who wanted to hang onto his little plot of land and whiskey by Hope by refusing to sell it even at highly exorbitant prices for whatever eccentric reason you might have this person might be obstructing some sort of super freeway or Supermarket or any stores or some kind of pie rise development and it seems to me one could give a fairly convincing economic argument there's some sort of loss of utility by this old cream refusing to sell us property in fact Economists argue that way all the time but of course Libertarians would say The Economic Consequences of this are irrelevant not notice the argument here it's not whether in fact this is economically beneficial or not but we would say is it doesn't matter whether this old curmudgeon decides to sell his land it doesn't matter if the consequences are good or bad economically the point is he has a right to that land is none of your business what he does with it and therefore you can even bring in the economic consideration in the first place is totally irrelevant to this question now I'm afraid that the big danger of trying to overthrow as the foundation of libertarianism trying to overthrow Ethics in favor of Economics is it this very sort of thing will happen if an onyx will lose its pairing it will start to hedge and compromise on many many issues and it won't have that solid clear-cut well-defined position that it now has now if I had a lot of time I can go through a lot of historical examples of this kind of thing let me just mention one in 19th century Classical liberalism there was a witch was at that time one of the foremost I would call a quasi libertarian movements one had two distinct schools one had a natural rights school and want to have the utilitarian or the moralistic economic argument School in a natural rights school where people like Thomas Hodgkin Herbert Spencer auberon Herbert and others in the economic utilitarian School Jeremy Bentham James Neal John Stuart Mill and others like that now eventually that utilitarians one out but what in fact happened as a result of economic side winning out was it destroy the classical liberal movement. In fact Classical liberalism on utilitarian side pave the way in many respects for the welfare state this is been verified by many contemporary Scholars because by using is economically arguments about social utility social welfare and so forth what the utilitarians did was set up their opponents So eventually the Socialist and a welfare state people came along and said well look we think these things promote social utility we think the state can actually further social utility and utilitarians really were bested wear as a natural rights people simply said we don't care about your stick calculations of social utility efficiency we don't give a damn about those things people have certain rights and your government or you personally can't do anything about them in terms of violating them it's none of your business so the natural rights people didn't even want the source of argument see if you even interested in even enter into the situation now I'm not saying I'm not saying we shouldn't use the arguments obviously many cases they're stronger for particular sorts of issues that are ethical argument if you're arguing an issue with rent control I suggest a problem you can only argument might be more convincing on the other hand there are some arguments which are many arguments I think ethics is far more suited for for example of victimless crime laws if you argue on economic grounds against heroin restricting heroin because it will drive the price up the Buckley I can serve it as well say great that's what we want we want to if you say well the cost of enforcing is too expensive they'll probably say it's a blight on society no cost is too expensive really and even if we can't control it completely at least we can put a lid on it now the of course the moral argument on victimless crime laws is quite clear it doesn't matter what the economic consequences are a person has a right to his or her own body and what he or she decides to put in it is none of your business basically so I think

we have to take I think we have to take a long hard look not only the issues involved but what the possible consequences are if the natural rights position should be abandoned and let me backtrack a little bit and discuss more about the natural rights position because there doesn't seem to be widespread understanding about it basically there's nothing mysterious about ethics or ethical Theory what at this is trying to do and have been trying to do I think rather successfully for centuries is to look at human beings and ask themselves what are the basic facts of human nature that make social life possible or desirable other was as philosophers like to put it what are the basic aspects of human nature that would lead one to the good life in a social context through all the steps of the argument basically what libertarian philosophers have argued is that freedom to act on the basis of one's own judgment isn't into spell indispensable aspect of the good life that the relationship between your judgment and your happiness and the means you choose to live by that these are also closely intertwined that you introduced conversion into in between your judgment and your to deny you the right to act on the basis to your off your own judgment is to act in a way that is profoundly anti-life otherwise is it is to act in a way that contradicts the very essential aspect of human nature that makes human life possible to happy a happy as possible or the good life would have you however you want to put it into something quickly mysterious about it I think in some respects without going into complex philosophical argument you can examine it for yourself and you can understand what philosophers mean when they say that if someone interposes corrosion between your judgment and your action that is if someone forces you in such a way that you cannot act according to your own judgment but this is something that is fundamentally bad in terms of your own your own life that's a fairly clear sort of thing to grasp and I see nothing hard or Difficult about that have course requires elaboration just like any Theory does and science or economics are philosophy but that's the basic idea behind it and as I said before and I think this point cannot be emphasized enough this really is the bearing of libertarianism and let me just say and I don't usually like to make predictions but I think this one's give me made quite safely if for any reason natural rights was thrown out so to speak as the foundation of the libertarian philosophy I would predict without hesitation that the libertarian movement would be dead as a doornail within 10 years if not sooner and I mean that quite seriously some people when they heard about this topic is being debated they say what is the debate I mean of course economics and ethics are both important I agree but in terms of the foundation as I said before ethics has to take priority and if it doesn't I think we will see happen with the modern libertarian movement utilitarian saw happen in the 19th century what the radical Libertariansin America in the late 19th century when they overthrew natural rights movement disintegrator within a few years they saw it happen as well and we're going to see it happen if in fact the moral basis is not there resume 10 years probably if not sooner as I said if not an outright disbandment of the libertarian movement what we put probably see is a bunch of David Stockman's running around freezing people like Ronald Reagan because they like the Freakonomics points if you another words the radical edge of libertarianism would be destroyed without that moral certainty and moral Foundation to it and Ascend to conclude and this is more of a pragmatic or a practical point but I'm sure David will forgive me for all you in the Practical side just as a practical matter if you're trying to inspire people if I were to take a pull here today and say how many do you were inspired to libertarianism buy some moral ideal I suspect a good many of you if not then perhaps the majority would answer that you had been inspired in that way there's something about the ideal of Liberty that's very attractive I mean we can think of a song missionary you know holding a flag at battered from Battle or whatever struggling along with a flag that says Liberty of our individual rights on it it's very difficult to imagine that same revolutionary with a pattern flag that says social efficiency are utility or afraid of optimality on

people are not going to go to the ball and fight for their ideals if those ideals are no finer than what is considered to be efficient in an economic sense and let me just conclude with a brief passage which I think captures is fairly what I think about does from Alexis de tocqueville's book the old regime the French Revolution de tocqueville being a very important 19th century French writer wrote I do not think that a genuine love a wall and fight for their ideals if those ideals or no higher than what is considered to be efficient and economic sense and let me just conclude with a brief passage which I think captures is fairly well this is from Alexis de tocqueville book the old regime the French Revolution de tocqueville being a very important 19th century French writer who wrote I do not think that a genuine love of freedom is ever Quicken by the prospect of material rewards indeed that Prospect is often dubious anyhow as regards the immediate future true in the long run Freedom always brings to those who know how to retain it comfort and well-being and often break Prospero nevertheless for the moment it sometimes tells against amenities of this nature and there are kind indeed when despotism condensed structure of reef and running out of them Anthony hasn't itself apart from all Quote practical considerations the man who asks a freedom tocqueville concludes the man who asked if he'd of anything other than itself is Born To Be A Slave thank you

My Rebuttal

I think George has clearly established the principle that philosophy does have an important function in libertarianism. Its function is providing purple prose and whipping up our passions, letting us all feel good about what we're doing and getting us to die on the battlefield under the Black Flag and things of that sort. I think there's some truth to that, incidentally, even if I make fun of it.

I get a bit of a feeling that George may have bribed whoever wrote the title of this debate, because I remember it being a little different last time around. I thought this was supposed to be a rerun, but that's all right. I agree with George that if we were trying to sum up libertarianism in one sentence, which is a rather dangerous thing to do, but that if we were going to do that, we would almost certainly have a sentence with "ought" in it. But I would also point out that "ought" means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. The reason we would all agree on that "ought" statement, or at least agree that it was an approximate way of saying what we believed — the one time I signed such a statement, when I joined the free libertarian party of New York, I footnoted it — the reason we would agree is that we have come to similar conclusions about what was desirable from many different starting points about what "desirable" meant. Some of us would say men ought to own themselves because we believe that only in such a society will people be able to develop their own potentialities and that that's the most important thing. Others would say that only such a society is just. Others would say that only in such a society can I privately expect to be happy and I want to be happy. Others would say many different things. So that it would indeed be an ought statement, but the agreement would be on the conclusion not on the arguments that got us to there, and not on any particular derivation of natural rights.

With regard to George's brief summary of a natural rights position I am going to do something a little unfair, which is to attack an attempt to give a subtle and complicated philosophical position in thirty seconds, but I would point out that he did refer to liberty as being indispensable. I think he and you would agree that all of us have our rights infringed in various ways at the moment. Most of us also believe that, in spite of that, our life is better than it could be and a good deal better than death. That suggests that a term like "indispensable" is good oratory but bad thinking, that

you really ought, in making the argument, to say “For the following reasons, human freedom is desirable.

If, as seems to be the case, I can have human freedom and many other desirable things as well, that is certainly good. But by saying it is desirable I have not automatically answered the person who tells me “Yes, but by giving up a little bit of freedom you can get a great deal of something else important.” Nor have I answered the person who tells me, as many conservatives would, “It would indeed be nice to be entirely free, but that is not one of the options on the menu.” “If,” he will say, “you insist on being free not to have a draft then you will indeed have a draft, but it will be run from Moscow.” You don’t answer that kind of argument by saying that your freedom is indispensable. You answer it by showing that you can defend yourself without a draft.

I was a little puzzled by George’s statement that there were conflicts between the philosophical and the economic arguments. I thought he understood, he certainly seemed to understand by what he said earlier, that “shoulds” are philosophical. There is no economic argument all by itself which says we should do X. There is an economic argument which says “If you free the slaves certain things will happen.” In those cases, which I think covers most issues, where the things that would happen if you introduce freedom are things that 98% of the population is in favor of, demonstrating that those things will happen finishes the argument.

It does not mean that there is an economic argument for those things sitting out there in a vacuum. If the economic argument on slavery demonstrates that if slavery is ended the slaveowners will be worse off and the slaves will be better off, as very likely it would have, that is not an economic argument for slavery. That merely means that economics, in that particular case, is not sufficient to tell us whether we should have slavery or not.

I think the correct economic argument in that case would have shown that there would be very large benefits to the slaves and relatively small losses to the slave owners, and I think that the supposed losses to the people in the North who were consuming southern agricultural goods were fictitious, since the slaves would have, and did, become farmers whether or not they were they were slaves. But I am certainly not saying that it is logically impossible to have a case where you have to settle moral issues in order to decide what you should do. Obviously that can happen. I am saying that most of the real world cases we deal with are not of that sort.

I just don’t understand how George can claim that if the economic argument ends up saying it’s good for some people and bad for others, that that means it shouldn’t happen. That just means that the economic argument hasn’t settled the question.

I also think that George is making a mistake in economics, a very common mistake in economics but one that he shouldn’t make, because as a philosopher he understands the difference between rule utilitarianism and case utilitarianism. He’s making that mistake with his old curmudgeon who owns a piece of land that the throughway is going through. The economic answer to him is that if we have a set of institutions where the way we decide how land is used is that we allow a court or a government to seize land when the court or the government believes that the best value for that land is to have it seized, that will vastly diminish economic welfare, for two reasons. First, because for every case of an old curmudgeon who is foolishly unwilling to sell his land, there will be a thousand cases of land that is more useful for the guy who owns it — that was why he wouldn’t sell it — but which gets transferred to someone else who can persuade some court or politician that he needs more. And second, because if you have a system of that sort, large resources will be spent by people trying to persuade courts that they are the one who have the best use for that land.

George is making the mistake of confusing economic arguments which say “the following institutions should decide who controls” with economic arguments which say “Zap! That piece of land should be given to him,” and the second kind of arguments are just bad economics. As Marshall, a very famous economist, put it, the danger with the system of subsidies is that the managers of firms will stop using their time and energy to manage the firms and start using them to manage the people who give out the subsidies. And that is an economic argument.

I am going to do something not quite fair in a rebuttal, since it's a somewhat new argument — but one George has heard before — and that is to offer a simple empirical observation: The economic profession, compared to other academic areas, is heavily biased towards belief in the free market, and the philosophical profession is not. This has been true for 200 years. George Stigler wrote an essay a good many years back entitled “Why Economists are Conservative,” and what he meant by conservative was pro-free market.

You can find innumerable examples, from Adam Smith, who said that the power to allocate capital, to move people hither and yon, would be nowhere in more dangerous hands than in the hands of the man who believed himself fit to exercise it, to Ricardo who, commenting on the welfare system of England at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, said “the law of gravity is not more certain than that such a system must turn wealth into poverty and confound everything in universal misery,” through Marshall who I just quoted through modern economists. There was a poll published a few years ago,⁴ a random poll of economists, on questions such as “does rent control cause housing shortages,” “do minimum wage laws cause unemployment among unskilled workers,” and so forth. With the exception of questions on redistribution, you had generally between 90 and 99% support for the right side on those questions in a random sample of economists.

Redistribution is a harder question. There are good economic arguments against it as well, perhaps, as good moral arguments, but the economists have not done a good enough job there yet — some of us are working on it — and therefore there are a lot of good economists who still are in favor of government redistribution.

I am not sure I have anything else to say except, perhaps, that Adam Smith based his argument against slavery on economic grounds and that Adam Smith's disciples succeeded in abolishing the slave trade peacefully. If instead you insist on being passionate, on saying that it's not a question of whether there some way of ending slavery that does not hurt anybody too much but only a matter of right and wrong, you might end up killing half a million people. That is what the resolution of the slavery issue in the U.S. did, as well as enslaving many of those people before they were killed. There are tactical as well as fundamental reason for making economic arguments, since the other kind of argument too often ends up saying it's just a conflict between the good guys or the bad guys. If it's just a conflict between good guys and bad guys, the obvious conclusion is that the good guys ought to kill the bad guys — who unfortunately think they're the good guys. Some of the results of that are not entirely attractive. Thank you.

⁴ Kearn, J. R., Clayne L. Pope, Gordon C. Whiting, and Larry T. Wimmer. "A Confusion of Economists?" *The American Economic Review* 69, no. 2 (1979): 28-37. Accessed November 18, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1801612>.

George's Rebuttal

I suppose if a poll were taken among philosophers and 1/2 perhaps there has been one asking how many do you think that murder is wrong and slavery is wrong you make it 100% And that those things are wrong for even out doing the reason why the economist doesn't prove anything in them and I want to spend most of my time discussing David's rather in my mind bizarre notion that everyone kind of agrees about the kind of society we want we just have these kind of technical disagreements that whenever I hear remix of those things wrong even out doing you you could read my The Economist doesn't prove anything David's rather in my mind bizarre notion that everyone kind of agrees about the kind of society we want we just have these kind of technical disagreement about how to get there whenever I hear David say this I'm kind of reminded of it I had this image in my mind almost like a cartoon of of an immigration officer loading a poor Mexican immigrants back on a bus to shipping back to Mexico and as he's loading a sky in the bus he says you know is David Friedman tells us we both want the same kind of society is just that I don't want you in it now David being a good Economist in a good empiricist and issuing any sorts of our priore abstract the nature of mankind of arguments at Ephesus like I'm curious as to how he got this knowledge that everyone wants the same sort of society he said he talked to a few people and some socialist as well okay and he's very gregarious fellow and I'm sure to talk to a lot of people but I'm afraid if we're going to base a hold on this we're going to need more than David's personal conversations with people as we're going to have that is the foundation and I'm wondering is this some kind of holies taken as he interviewed everyone in the world to find out what kind of society they want I doubt it seriously I don't know if Gallup has taken that kind of pole I suspected that kind of pull were taken people with Express profound at least on this Earth philosophy of libertarianism on this we're going to need more than Davis personal conversations with people as we're going to have that is the foundation and I'm wondering is this some kind of holies taken as he interviewed everyone in the world to find out what kind of society they want I doubt it rather seriously no the scallop is taking that kind of pole I suspected that kind of pull were taken people with Express profound at least on the surface profound disagreements about the kind of society they wanted now what would David then do what do you say is that we're done what he say well they don't really know what they want or they just on expressing it right otherwise we'd I'm afraid they would come around just telling these people what they really want in spite of what they say they want that's why I'm curious as to how he knows this it's a very simple question is very important one where to get this information I don't have any information I doubt if any of you have it but David has it and how now they didn't get it in. Lee by a pole then what is he doing here some sort of deductive offertory philosophy is he by any chance thinking in some sort of human nature argument that all human beings by their very nature want a certain type of thing if he is welcome to the camp of philosophy and moral theory because that's basically what he's talking about so we're basically in the same camp if that's the case now but I can't seem to convince stay but the people really want different kinds of societies and it's not just technical differences about how to get to a certain type of suicide so this time I prepared in advance and I brought along a few quotations now these are not quotations from just your ordinary man in the street these are fairly influential philosophers and political figures. Perhaps David would like to explain how these people really are basically latent Libertariansit's just a little messed up about the kind of how to get there the first is from your hand stick to who was a very important early late 18th Century covid-19 Century German philosopher Victor wrote rational life consists in each person for getting himself in the species tying up his own life with the life of a whole and sacrificing himself for the sake of the whole and take their course went on to say that the state Force Base our friend and

fellow traveler late libertarian Mussolini put it life is conceived by the fascist is a serious austere religious and all its manifestations the fastest it just seems an easy life fascism denies the materialistic conception of happiness and abandoned to The Economist of the mid-eighteenth century this means that fascism denies the equation well-being equals happiness which season men near animals content when they feed and fatten does reducing into a vegetative existence pure and simple closed book that was Mussolini line or do we have here legitimate example of an honest disagreement about not only what the happiness is what about the kind of society find me another good libertarian Adolf Hitler wrote the state has to take care of that only the healthy but get children the state has to appear as the guardian of a thousand years future in the face of witch the Witch and the eagle is in the individual appears as nothing has to submit he concluded the right of personal freedom steps back in the face of the duty of the preservation of the race quote the preservation of the race is this just a disagreement about means this is ridiculous this is not a test it's ladies and gentlemen this is a very important different disagreement about aunts about social lands and about moral principles now I suppose David if he were sitting down with old laid off might want to argue that the cost of trying to implement this would be too high well I'm afraid there a lot of people who aren't don't care that much about cost I don't think cost-benefit analysis works well with a lot of people if you've ever talked to a person with strong religious convictions for example which may conservative South and they think that God has told him to Stamp Out sin and therefore lock up all the dope users he doesn't care about cost-benefit analysis he would be even willing to suffer some sort of deprivation of his own lifestyle lowering of his own lifestyle he thought he can lock up all the dope addicts I mean you know this from your personal experience I shouldn't have to stand up here and tell it to you and therefore I'm very puzzled as to why anyone would think that it's starting from the premise that everyone wants the same kind of society put in any way form a basis for libertarianism it can't be because it's the most a false premise your number of other issues here by the way it's quite true that was regarded some socialist you do get some kind of agreement about general and this was pointed out in 19 century by Gustav and Molinari was very important French libertarian he argued that with some socialist you can more or less a look we both want the same thing I can show you how by better way to get there as first of all it's a false premise now their number of other issues here or by the way it's quite true that was regarded some socialist you do get some kind of agreement about General Aunt this was pointed out the 19th century by Gustav did Molinari he was a very important French libertarian he argued that with some socialist you can more or less a look we both want the same thing I can show you how by better way to get there to some extent Ludwig von mises pointed this out Murray rothbard in a very important guess they called left and right CrossFit Liberty talked about the development of socialism the 19th century and he also pointed out that some socialist did indeed want to kind of decided that Libertarians wouldn't find that bad and there was a serious disagreement about means however that works with some socialist it doesn't work with fashes it doesn't work with monarcas it doesn't work with all kinds of political philosophies and a single out one particular sort of political philosophy and a and a small portion of socialist if that does not provide a good example or good enough example to support Davis thesis now let me just say maybe an opinion opinion opinion about the futon shop for a long time to get very aggravated that all of us moral philosophy just don't roll over and play dead as a result of this example suggests of David really thinks he has a knockout argument that he should write it up an article form and I can personally guarantee him to any number of moral you set my timer just saying maybe I can get into this more the sorts of objections David brings up about the futon trespass case so first of all David's been bringing this up for a long time to get very aggravated that all of us moral philosopher just don't roll over and

play dead as a result of this example suggests of David really thinks he has a knockout argument that he should write up an article form and I can personally guarantee him to any number of moral philosophers would be more than happy to be willing and happy to discuss at length these sorts of examples they are not catastrophic example there's some problems plain dealing with light pollution cases for the cutoff point is but they certainly not catastrophic and David seems unwilling to develop in any kind of detail if you're up here in for now it just destroys liver training World Series absurd as to why we should find a Troublesome then all I can say is I await an argument on his side thank you very much

Each of us gets five minutes to cross-question the other

(I am putting George's comments in italics)

George, do you actually believe, in the case of your hypothetical Mexican, that the immigration officer is correct in believing that he and people like him are better off keeping Mexicans out?

Yes. And he would say he hates Mexicans, is better off in a society without Mexicans.

Not "say." Do you in fact believe it is true, not can you imagine any that he might believe it is true. Let's take the average immigration officer. Is he better off, aside from being paid to do the job?

What makes a person happy has a good deal to do with what he believes is good. If a person such as the immigration officer believes that a good society is one absent Mexican then he will be happier and that says he will be better off within a society without Mexicans.

If I understand you correctly you are saying people cannot make mistakes. Is that right? In the sense in which you are using words.

Your happiness depends a good deal on your subjective evaluation. You don't make mistakes as such in your subjective evaluation.

Suppose the man believes that if Mexicans come in the crime rate will go up, his income will go down, and prices will go up, just to take an imaginary case.

You might be able to convince him otherwise.

What I am saying is, suppose he believe that and suppose that in fact he is wrong. Are you saying that by definition he will be unhappy if Mexicans come in because these things would make him unhappy and he subjectively believes they will happen?

Happiness is a very, very difficult thing to generalize about. You would have to ask these particular individual involved. All I have been saying is racists are generally happy when their beliefs are implemented just like we're all generally more happy when our beliefs are implemented. Doesn't that make sense? The Klu Klux Klan is more happy if there are not blacks in their neighborhood then they are if there were blacks in their neighborhood. It's a simple statement.

That case may be correct. But a person who believes that certain things have certain consequences will not necessarily be more happy when you do those things if he is wrong about the consequences.

Not necessarily. It depends. It's highly contextual. A lot of variation could be involved. There's no law of nature that will determine when a person is and is not going to be happy.

That I agree with.

You keep saying that I claim that people all want the same sort of society. I don't think I have ever said that. Would you disagree with the proposition that people want roughly the same sorts of results and have a large disagreements on the kinds of societies that will produce them? That, for example, very few political candidate promise people that they will be poor if they vote for these candidates.

Well candidates lie a lot.

That's right. But the way in which they lie suggests an opinion they have about what the voters want to hear. Isn't that correct?

I would be willing to concede to you David that most people would say they'd like to be happy. That is a fairly non controversial statement. As to what they consider essential to happiness, there is enormous and drastic disagreement.

That is certainly true. Let us suppose that a person who supported Hitler actually observed the kind of society that you believe Nazism would produce say in twenty or thirty years — very poor, run by a small clique at the top and so forth. Of the people who supported Hitler, how large a fraction do you think, if they saw what Nazism really meant, would continue to support him.

I don't know. I frankly don't know.

A majority? A large fraction? You have no opinion?

Who knows. Probably quite a few.

Because it seems to me that you are continually confusing disagreement about how a particular society will work, i.e. the Nazi who believes ... take Mussolini, which is a better case, because probably you and I agree with the quote you quoted from Mussolini, that happiness is not merely eating enough and having creature comforts and so forth. If we take the people who supported Mussolini, if they were able to actually observe and live in a well-functioning libertarian society, or alternatively, what Mussolini's fascism would have become after a generation or so, how large a fraction of supporters of Mussolini do you believe would have preferred the actual fascism to the actual capitalism?

David, you're asking questions that no one can possibly answer.

You hold no opinion about them?

If you're saying because of fascism being wiped out by war that fascism leads inevitably to war and therefore you're going to be wiped out if you are fascist then I assume that nobody wants to be wiped out by war.

That would be one case.

There are many other sorts of examples. For example slavery has existed or did exist as an institution for thousands of years in medieval Europe, in Greece, Rome, and so forth. This institution went on for, as I said, hundreds and thousands of years. For the people who were the slaveowners it seemed perfectly satisfactory and a good sort of system for them. They seemed quite happy. If you read a lot of the letters and literature of slave owners for example, in the South, they're quite happy with the way things are, they don't want to change, there's nothing going wrong there. They're well off financially. Why should they be concerned about anything else by your own standards?

I am sorry. Whether or not slavery was in fact in their interest, it's very possible that it was, the fact that they were happy with what was happening is not by itself evidence that an alternative wouldn't have been more attractive. I am trying to distinguish between disagreements about how certain sets of institutions work and disagreements about what people ultimately want. I agree that there is some disagreement of both sorts, but it seems to me that you are continually confusing the two. You are thus saying, what's perfectly true, that a Nazi would think that his dream of how Nazism would work was better than his beliefs about how capitalism would work, and confusing that with the proposition that a Nazi would prefer how Nazism actually would work to how capitalism actually would work.

Those Nazis who really understood the actual causation involved in implementing fascist philosophy, those Nazis who envision themselves or who are who are likely to be in the ruling position, I'm sure would be quite happy with the situation.

That is possible. How many of them do you think there were?

I don't know.

You note that I have continually said that I think you could get very large-scale agreement. It is undoubtedly true that there are some sets of institution in which there are two percent of the population who were better off, at least for twenty or thirty years, than they would be under laissez-faire.

David, if we had ham we could have ham and eggs if we had some eggs. I mean we can sit here and speculate all night about if this if that and some this something that you don't know I don't know how many people are going to be happy under fascism this is a ridiculous line of questioning.

On the contrary. We have observed the workings of many societies. We observe what people ...

Who is we?

You and me. And I presume other people.

I have not.

Then I and other people in this room have observed what a fair variety of societies have turned out to be. We observe that people who wish to get support, who wish to get people to do rebellions for them or vote for them or work for them, make certain sorts of promises, and we have observed that societies that radically deviate from capitalism do not deliver on those promises. That seems to me to provide some evidence that there is a very large scale desire for final states which those societies can't produce.

Do you disagree? If not, doesn't that suggest that if we were able to persuade everybody of correct views about positive propositions, this set of social institutions will produce this result, that that would result in their rejecting most of the things very different from capitalism.

I have nothing against that kind of argument in some aspects. In other words the old Misesian/Hayek argument of the impossibility of economic calculation under socialism making a mess of the market order as a result of trying to have central planning. That's a very effective argument and I'm not opposed to that kind of argument. I don't think, and this is the issue under debate here, that it can provide a foundation, that that sort of argument is the foundation for libertarianism or that that sort of argument is more fundamental than ethical arguments. That's the issue. Not whether they are good arguments but whether they are more fundamental.

I do not agree that the question of what is more fundamental in any logical sense is either what we're debating about or something which I even know how to define.

George Cross-questions Me

Now you say that the moral philosophers are not able to answer these trespass cases to your satisfaction. Well, I would charge that the economists are not able to answer much more fundamental sorts of questions like why shouldn't you go out and murder someone assuming you're not going to get caught and do a complete secrecy and so forth. Let's say you are on a desert island and there are only two of you.

You're correct.

You agree with that?

Yes.

Can you give us some kind of economic ...

No. Certainly not. One of the reasons why I am not a utilitarian is that my views about what one ought to do do not perfectly coincide with my economic interest as narrowly defined.

Now maybe I'm misinterpreting you so you'll have to correct me if I am. You claim that the position you adopt, the economic part of it, cannot explain why murder is wrong and yet it can provide the foundation for libertarian philosophy.

What I claim is that the position I adopt can explain why I should be in favor of laws against murder. That is a very different proposition from explaining why murder is wrong. I claim that although it cannot answer the question of why I should never kill, it can answer the question of why I should be in favor of living in a society in which people are prevented from killing.

It cannot pronounce murder wrong.

That's absolutely correct. Economics cannot pronounce anything wrong.

Anything wrong.

That's right. Economics can support a proposition of the form "if we have a society where murder is forbidden, I and most other people will be better off" — we have to have a lot of qualifications of what I mean by better off, I don't mean in your moral sense — that we would have more of the things we would like to have than in a society in which murder is permitted. But no, I am not claiming, I have never claimed that economics provides a substitute for moral philosophy. What I claim is that my moral philosophical views are views which I do not believe either you or other libertarian moral philosophers can justify to my satisfaction, because every time I've discussed it with somebody who has tried it seems to me they're wholly ...

What have you read?

What have I read? I've read Rand's stuff. I've read Nozick's stuff and I've argued with lots of people.

You haven't read Machan or any of the classical works on moral philosophy. Or Aristotle ...

I've argued with Machan.

Or Aquinas

Aristotle, a very long time ago, and I have forgotten most of it. Some of Aquinas a long time ago.

The point I'm trying to make. If I stood up here and took a lot of pot shots at economics and you said "well what have you read?" "Well, I read one book by Henry Hazlitt," You would probably say "go read some more than we'll talk about it." That's what I'm saying to you. "Go read some more."

I might or might not. It would partly depend on whether you had argued with a sufficient number of reasonably bright people and found their ideas unconvincing. And if you did I would probably be willing to argue with you as opposed to simply telling you to go read some books.

You know as well as I do that any fairly complex economic or philosophical position requires a lot of care and systematic presentation. You cannot decide on an important issue simply by having conversations with people. You have to allow a person a chance to develop a thesis over a long space and try to develop various arguments, meet certain objections and so forth. Now I'm perfectly willing to concede that you may not be personally satisfied by arguments you had first hand with a lot of people. But I would say if you want to get up in public and debate this sort of thing, you at least owe it to yourself to familiarize yourself with the literature and you have not done that.

I will be delighted to examine your suggested reading list. But until that time, I repeat that the position I am arguing for is that from economics we can learn enough so that, given the differing views people have about philosophical issues, we can reach widespread although not perfect agreement about desirable institutions. Also that, as far as I can tell, judging by the philosophers and their views as well as by my encounters with them, the philosophers have not presented a body of arguments with which they can persuade each other in the sense in which, despite the popular image to the contrary, the economists have produced a body of arguments by which they can persuade each other.

Would you accept my offer or challenge depending how you look at it to write up your objections to natural rights philosophy so that people like myself can look at your systematic presentation and have a chance to reply systematically rather than having to try in 30 or 60 seconds explain why shining a flashlight on someone's property doesn't constitute a violation of their property rights? You know as well as I do that that's more of a debater's trick. Because it's easy to posit questions but it's very difficult to answer complex questions.

It's tantamount to me saying I don't see how you can have interpersonal utility comparisons in economics and challenging you in a 2-minute rebuttal to explain how you can.

Let me for a moment suggest one reason why I don't think it's a debaters trick, and that is that, at least when this series of debates started out, we were arguing, I think, about how libertarians ought to persuade people to be libertarians.

But that's not the topic of this debate.

That is true.

And by the way, I had nothing to do with the selection of the topic.

A likely story.

I want to make that clear. I think it's a better way of wording it, frankly, but I had nothing to do

...

However, the debate which I believe I agreed to participate in was a rerun of the last debate.

And the debate you debated was a rerun of the last debate.

Also.

However I would point out that, with regard to the question I at least was debating about, if this room is filled with people, as I suspected it is, at least as other rooms of similar sorts have been, who believe that they can make straightforward ethical arguments which show it is unethical to do this or that because. And if, to those people, the line of argument they follow about ownership does lead to conclusions which they cannot live with and would prefer not to think about, such as that you can't light a match, that is evidence, not necessarily that you don't have moral philosophical arguments with which you could deal with these problems but that they don't. It follows that their opinion, an opinion that I have encountered unfortunately over and over again, that it is perfectly clear that the Socialists are wicked or the Socialist position is wicked and immoral and that ours is not, is an indefensible position, that is to say one that they cannot defend. And that therefore they ought to argue it on the grounds of consequences rather than on the grounds of principle.

Further I also think that if, as I have observed, the places where you feel the straightforward arguments don't lead to the conclusions that I raised — and incidentally you're unhappy with the term “catastrophic.” I introduced that term to these discussions to refer to the consequences of the doctrine that you cannot breathe without permission from everybody on the planet; I suspect you would agree that the consequences of that doctrine are catastrophic. I was not asserting then nor am I asserting now that these arguments imply that there cannot be a philosophy of natural rights. They do imply that the standard understanding of it as it exists in the libertarian community at large is not adequate and that it should not be used as a basis for saying that socialism, even if it worked, would be wrong.

I want to know to ask you directly where you got this information about everyone wanting, however you want to put it, the same general kind of society or whatever.

I didn't say the same kind of society.

You say it like you want it like I stated it before then you explain to me where you got the information.

I believe that people's objectives are sufficiently similar that something fairly close to the society that I want is optimal in terms of those differing objectives.

Why do you believe that?

There are two propositions in there. One of them is an economic statement, namely that capitalism will maximize the following list of things. The other is an observation about people, namely people want some part of that list of things maximized. It is the second one you want me to answer?

Right.

I have gotten that by talking with lots of people. I have gotten it partly by observing, as I was saying before, what the promises are that people make when they are trying to gain power, when they are trying to sell a philosophical position. I observe that the people who argued for fascism did not say fascism will result in you being pushed around a whole lot and being dirt poor and fighting lots of wars. They said quite a number of other things. What I claim to observe is not that people's objectives are identical, certainly not that their views of the ideal society are identical,

but only that, given how much better something reasonably close to laissez-faire capitalism is than something reasonably distant from it, that looking at how people act, looking at what people who want power promise, I conclude that, for a range covering the enormous majority of the human race, laissez-faire capitalism will be very close to the best thing that they can have.

George's Second Rebuttal

Okay and I perceive death well I just wanted to recapitulate a few points here and try to emphasize the most important aspects of ethical case and again I hope it's as clear by now I really have leaving nothing against the economic arguments I use them a lot myself when they're appropriate because I said at the beginning I think the issue here is how do we represent libertarianism as a general philosophy or attitude towards social relationships and as I said in the beginning I think that we have really no choice but to present it as basically a moral philosophy trying to say to people who speak to people when they communicate libertarianism is and should be there is a right way to deal with people there is a wrong way to deal with people killing somebody is a wrong way enslaving somebody is a wrong-way stealing somebody's money is a wrong way dealing with involuntarily is a right way that seems to me to be the basis of what we're trying to communicate of course there is a further question can we justify that I happen to think that we can and that we have largely Justified those are so statements but if we cannot justify its in fact this is some kind of Illusion if we're just kidding ourselves and the natural rights philosophy is after all with Jeremy Bentham called that nonsense app on stilts then I would say we have no case for libertarianism another was I don't see that there's an option here supposed to natural rights case is not strong then what would I say that was your doctor you can Onix is the foundation know what I say is libertarianism is there by destroy there is no case for if you cannot have some type of statement with a nod or shouldn't as David freely admits economics cannot do this then you have no basis for what in any recognizable since we call the libertarian movement now David maybe talking about a movement he would like to see but with regard to the present movement there is no question but that its roots and its present manifestations are largely based on ethical and moral arguments that is simply an empirical fact read the literature talk to the people who come to these conventions read the history of libertarianism it has always been and it still is primarily a moral movement now as I said if we drop that moral aspect libertarianism as we know it will disintegrate we may have something instead that David might be perfectly happy with but I would suggest it if we lose that moral Force at 3 p to point I made earlier we will be arguing primarily economic efficiency points and the very important radical social causes such as victimless crime laws those sorts of things will go by the wayside because there are not good economic arguments against those sorts of things are stand on foreign policy will go by the wayside because those are largely moral arguments having to do with interventionism and so forth our position on nuclear warfare all of these things which are very very essential to the libertarian movement today will simply drop out for the most part. Maybe David thinks he can come up with some kind of elaborate economic argument as to why there should be no should not be laws against prostitution or why there should not be compulsory schooling laws but I would suggest to you that first of all you're not going to build a movement amount along those arguments even if they're valid and secondly I would suggest that there's a very questionable sense in which those arguments can even said to be said to be valid because people's desires their wishes are subjective valuations are so radically different if there's no way you're going to get the sword of unanimity the David seems to think is necessary and in fact seems to think is actually the case now so as I said this is a very crucial issue I I hope that Libertarians are not going to start going away from natural rights arguments I will grant that there are some problems in the natural

rights philosophy but there are some problems with physics chemistry that are unexplained problems that even the hard Sciences can't solve and when you confront those problems you don't overthrow the whole science to say let's take stuff get something else what you do is you work within that science and you improve on it you apply at the problems that have not previously been solved so you have an ongoing process of intellectual Improvement intellectual that's what in fact has been happening for many years now in the area of libertarian moral philosophy there been some enormously important contributions at that I have been made and are continuing to be mad so let's not just dragged out a few problems and say well obviously there's something wrong with the returning moral philosophy there's something wrong in the sense that there's some unanswered questions that confront any theoretical system economics physics Epix you name it it's got problems thank you very much

My Second Rebuttal

I think there may be a fundamental difference between the way George looks at the universe and the way I do. I am perhaps attributing to him, from things he said, too much of the view that I perceive in people like Ayn Rand, to take one very prominent example.

One way of looking at the world is as a theorem. There are a few axioms and you build up from them, hopefully with certainty or near certainty, and everything rests on a nice firm foundation, to use a word that I am less happy with than George is. The other is to say that the world is more complicated than that, that some things you aren't at all sure of, some things we agree it's either this or this or this but we are not sure which, other things we understand pretty well, that we're looking at a very complicated picture and we make sense out of this part of it and this part of it and not that part of it. That I think is the way, unfortunately, the world at the moment is.

So that there is one sense in which I agree with George that the foundation of libertarianism is moral philosophy, only I would say would be moral philosophy if it was there. In order to prove that a free society is good you would have to show what good is. My claim, and it's a claim which you can try to satisfy by working through arguments for yourselves, thinking about things in your own head, is that we do not know enough about what good is and why to follow that very attractive course or procedure. What we have are a lot of different views about goodness, views which are not wholly different — there are very few people who believe that torturing babies to death is good — but which are not perfectly identical. If we are lucky enough to be able to show that certain sorts of social arrangements will be good in terms of many of these differing views of goodness, that is a sensible basis to use to make our argument.

I want to go on to talk very briefly about George's comment that stealing someone's money is bad. Because, of course, if you put it that way everybody agrees, but in the words he has used he has assumed away a whole host of what I think he would agree are difficult, and I would suspect are unsolved, problems. When you said it was his money you already assumed you knew how he acquired it. The production of that particular money was done by the U.S. government with a printing press. He got it by exchanging goods for it. In producing those goods he used the cooperation of many other people. Some of that co-operation was gotten voluntarily, some of it involuntarily — he used roads built with tax money, for example. He used land, which he believes is his land, although he certainly didn't create it. He was involved in a very complicated interaction with other people, and we sum it up by saying it is his money and you shouldn't steal it. That means that we assume away the whole set of questions determining what is his. I believe that one could,

without a great deal of effort, construct a lot of different moral philosophical argument for differing opinions about what is his.

I want to go back to the question of agreement in economics versus agreement in philosophy which George sluffed off with what I think I can call, in his words, a debater's trick. It is indeed true that most philosophers agree that murder is bad. It is also true that everybody else would agree that murder is bad, or very nearly everybody. Therefore their agreement is no evidence at all of the power of philosophy to compel agreement on things libertarians believe in. On the other hand, most people do not believe that minimum wage laws cause unemployment. Most people do not believe that rent controls cause housing shortages. Most people do not believe that tariffs on Japanese goods make Americans worse off. And an overwhelming majority of economists do believe these things.

So that the real question is, if it's true, as George seems to think, that philosophy is a science, a word he is fond of using, or that moral philosophy is, if it's true that if only people like me knew enough, if we had only read the right books, it would be clear that there were straightforward arguments to libertarian conclusions, I'm a little bit curious why all the professional philosophers haven't read the books.

I would be disturbed if I found that a large majority of professional economists disagreed with most of the core body of economic analysis, which I believe to be a science. I am not disturbed that they disagree with lots of conclusions, but that's because I believe the world is a very complicated place as I said before, and that the correct economic arguments don't tell you absolutely 100% for certain that anarcho-capitalism is the way to go. They only give you some fairly strong reasons for suspecting that it might be the way to go. Now if, as George seems to think, the right arguments are all down in the right books, it seems to me odd that the only libertarian propositions that the libertarian philosophers have persuaded the rest of the philosophers about are those libertarian propositions that they believed to begin with.

[End of Debate]

[Questions]

(Questioner)

I must say, I have pretty much enjoyed the debate, but I came here for the purpose of trying to decide which way to approach Libertyville. I came to the Libertarian party from the economic side.

My question is this. It seems like the philosophical approach leads to a dead end. Take the example of the slaves. Could you not also argue that it's immoral for the slaveholders to own slaves, but once we emancipate the slaves, wasn't their other capital stock created by the work of the slaves? Shouldn't we also steal that? Yeah, we should. So that with the philosophical approach, where do we draw the line? Where does it become right to let someone maintain their capital?

After all, from the beginning, it was the guy with the big stick who collected the capital. So from a philosophical point of view it's morally right for us to redistribute the capital stock any time we see fit.

(George)

The issue you raise actually was discussed quite widely among abolitionists. Now I'm not denying that there are complex issues arising out of this kind of problem, but let me just point out that at least the moral approach solves the question of whether there should be slavery. It does solve that much, which economics doesn't even do. But now on to the issue about should the slaves be compensated, what about the capital that was created, and so on and so forth. The line given by Lysander Spooner, which I think was the correct line on that, was that in effect the land the slaves worked should be turned over to them in the form of restitution. In other words the plantation and the resources of the plantation should at that point belong to the slaves. In regard to goods actually produced by slave labor, you have a similar problem today if you want to talk about a moral problem of say Goods produced by slave labor in the Soviet Union for example. Unless there is a way whereby the actual producer of that good can reclaim it and be compensated then in effect that good becomes unowned property. In other words, the labor of the slave, once it got mixed in with a lot of produce and products and so forth, went out into the market and one was no longer able to distinguish this slave made that and this is what belongs to this slave. Then in effect the homesteader of that good, whoever claimed it, in other words the legitimate buyer of it, would be the owner unless there's some way of tracing that particular piece of property back the particulars play this is MSP complex problem but the point is slave made that and this is what belongs to this play Then in effect a homesteader of that good who ever claimed it another was legitimate buyer of it would be the owner unless there's some way of tracing back particular piece of property back to protect it play Alice is a massively complex problem but the point I'm raising his I think that they're off of General guidelines because you followed

Also and I think this is a problem with David to you about this and by the way the reason I mentioned about have you ready are General guideline to can be followed to solve your problem let me point out also and I think this is a problem with David's view of ethics and by the way the reason I mentioned this point about have you read that text was not because I think all the answers are there are no I have to do is read the literature it's because I don't think David has much of a feel for what moral philosophers try to do and how they operate a potato that has kind of under eye Colour Moses view of ethics and he wants it out in the Ten Commandments you want sit there for a natural lot where does it say you can't do this you can't do this you should do this well in a similar way to sort of question you raise I would point out that when you apply general principles of ownership and so forth to highly sprayed gave it has kind of a what I call a Moses view available in case he wants it out and about Commandments you want sat there for an app for lot where does it say you can't do this you can't do this you should do this well in a similar way to sort of question you raise I would point out that when you applied general principles of ownership and so forth to highly complex variable, which way should I face the Ten Commandments you want sit there for a nap for a while. Where does it say you can't do this you can't do this you should do this well in a similar way to sort of question you raise I would point out that when you apply general principles of ownership and so forth to highly complex variable concrete situations the particular Solutions are often times quite difficult to arrive at.

(Questioner)

Are we not denying the libertarian principle of ownership? For example, the textile industry is located in the southern parts of this state. It exists primarily because of the textile restrictions. Without those laws that industry would have exited this country long ago. So okay, Libertarians come to power. They say "well, let's throw out all these these tariff restrictions, now what shall we do with those plants. They don't belong to the current owners, not by any philosophical justification.

(George)

Why?

Well, because it's ill gotten gains. They didn't create that capital stock. it was created by an unfair law. Just as the gains of the slave owner is ill gotten. You've already stated that you're willing to turn over the plantation to the slaves. Well, let's turn those Mills over to someone and then where do we stop?

Okay, the point is past wrongs are always difficult to rectify whether they use moral standards to do it or whether you use economic standards. The same problem can be raised with an economist how do you decide who gets what you know how do you divide up the pie so to speak? Crown the point is a difficult problem for anyone to answer my point is it at least after death death it's all very clearly and satisfactorily present moral dilemmas and I am perfectly willing to concede that rectifying past injustices can be a complex in some cases it's straightforward and some cases it's not if it's a matter of your land having been stolen and here's my point is that at least ethics Consaul very clearly and satisfactorily present moral dilemmas 10 years ago and you want to get it back there in that case it's pretty clear it was a matter of haven't you having to force to help build something and you will you can't find the person who forced you to do it if you want to recover the property as too much more difficult kind of question

(Questioner)

I'm kind of confused about what the debate is about and I am hoping that I can kind of state two things that I think are happening and then ask two questions directed to each individual. It seems to me that David Friedman is arguing that the best way to sell libertarian philosophy is to argue on economic grounds, accept the person's moral philosophy and then argue from their moral philosophy that the libertarian economic system will reach their moral ideas. It seems to me that George Smith is arguing that the fundamental or the basis, the root of libertarianism, is moral philosophy and that without that moral philosophy, libertarianism would not be a potent force. I think that both statements are true but I don't understand why we're arguing with each other. A question I'd like to ask David Friedman is do you believe that libertarianism would be a force without a moral statement behind it? The question I would like to ask to George Smith is, if you are arguing with somebody that had maybe not a natural rights conception but that believed generally that murder is bad and stealing is wrong, would you try to argue natural rights or would you make a, for instance a minimum wage law or something like that, or would you use economic arguments to convince them that libertarianism is right.

(David)

I think a moral conclusion is an essential part of libertarianism but I do not believe that any particular moral argument to that conclusion is. You spoke a moment ago about a root. It would seem a little odd to say that a tree had three roots, and yet if I look around me at libertarians I am sure that there are people who would reach that same conclusion from very diverse starting points. While the moral conclusion is a part of the essence of what we call libertarianism, I don't think that moral philosophy, some particular theory of where terms like right and wrong come from, of why stealing is wrong and so forth, is at the root of libertarianism. If it is, then quite a large fraction of libertarians must be rootless, because there is no single such theory, I believe, which any large majority of libertarians subscribe to, just a conclusion they subscribe to.

(George)

Yes, I agree to some extent we debated at cross-purposes. Now I took the title of the debate literally. The last time we debated the topic was somewhat different and some of the arguments were somewhat different. "Which is the proper foundation" for libertarianism not "Which is the most efficient argument." Now I would as I mentioned briefly in my original statement I think in many cases economic arguments are better, depending on the person you're talking to, your own particular skills. An economist might be much more comfortable with the economic arguments, a

moralist might be more comfortable with moral arguments. And if you want an example, from my very early college days I used an argument like you ask a person "would you think it would be wrong for you to go up and knock me over the head and take my money" and they say "of course." Then you say "well, would it be wrong for you to hire someone to do it" and then they say "of course." and then you go on and show how they can affect their do the government now there you have kind of a few projects pression to Friedman s kind of arguing that you're saying we basically we agree on moral grounds and what what I'm showing you is merely the consistency in Baldwinville different than the same kind of thing that's perfectly fine whatever argument is best suited to the particular person and problem you're confronting. Use a moral argument using economically argument use a religious argument I really don't care how the person gets their best basically but I still think ethics is the philosophical Foundation rather than economics.

1:36:20

(Questioner: Russell Turpin)

I have not so much a question as a critique of George Smith. I think you have misled people as to the current state of natural rights theory. I think most people who have read the books that you mention, including most professional philosophers, will tell you that natural rights theory cannot be based solely on the canons of logic, basic facts about human nature, and other empirical evidence. They will tell you that there must be a moral premise which is to some extent arbitrary, which seems to me not to lay a very good foundation for anything.

Now remember, when I talk about philosophers, there's a lot in natural rights theory and natural law theory other than the usual cadre of libertarian philosophers, Machan, Mack, these people. There are the Thomists like Henry VIII, Mortimer Adler, the whole Aristotelian tradition. You can even go back and read Thomas Aquinas. There's a lot of good ethics in his *Summa Theologica*. There's a whole tradition of natural law philosophy. So I'm not confining it just to that. I'll grant you that that sort of thing is out of fashion today. It happens to be coming back into fashion, judging by the number of books that have recently come out on the subject, but it is out of fashion. But I think philosophy simply took a wrong turn and it's regrettable.

(Questioner: Russell Turpin)

But the modern philosophers who are doing natural rights philosophy, like Nozick and Rawls, do accept some sort of premise that really is more or less arbitrary. The one philosopher I can think of who tried to argue solely from logic and basic empirical facts is Allen Gewirth, and he simply makes a logical mistake.

Yeah, this one involves a technical argument about can you get a normative proposition from the descriptive proposition, can you get an ought from an is. It's a classic statement in philosophy, you cannot derive an ought from an is. Apparently what philosophers are saying you can't do this is a fact, therefor you ought not to argue that way, thereby getting an ought from any is. In other words I would point out that I think that there's just some logical ... we have a lot of oughts that we get from is's all the time. And when you point those sorts of oughts out to philosophers and they say okay well that's not a moral ought. You can't get moral oughts from is's. or alot and can't do this at the fact there for you off not to argue that way there by getting it off from any of his other words and define the whole problem in an in a way it is impossible to solve but but short of giving you a long-ass position as to why I think you can get an ought not from an is, I just have to rest content with that.

(Questioner)

I think both of you would agree there are some people who have a fundamental moral or whatever view that is totally antithetical to libertarianism. That there are some socialists or whatever who

don't have the same goals, really do want to be poor. They have a moral view that everybody ought to be poor and things like that.

There are very few people like that, I don't think I have met more than one, but there are some. Now if you meet somebody like that, what I want to ask both of you is what can you do. Because you can't take David's view and say "look you know you accept the same premises so here's the best way to do it and you are going about it in the wrong way" and you can't take your view and go to the philosophy thing because — let's assume this is an intelligent person who has thought about it and he knows all your views on philosophy and he just disagrees with them. What, in that case, with these 1 out of 4 billion people or whatever it is, the very few perhaps that there are, what do you do in that case, with a person like that, to try and convince him of the error of their ways? Either one first.

(David)

I suppose I would try to find out whether these things he wanted were really means to more fundamental things such as happiness or wisdom or whatever. You might be able to untangle the structure of arguments in such a way that you could show that he was wrong about the connections.

But ultimately I have to say that if you meet somebody who fundamentally wants things that are incompatible with capitalism, that you then persuade other people not to follow that person, because those people don't want those things. If that person tries to use force to prevent capitalism you shoot him. Ultimately, fundamental disagreements lead to conflicts of force. One of the reasons that I want to try to keep as far as possible away from winning the argument in that form is because I don't like to be shooting at people and have people shooting at me.

You know in the early medieval period, you had kind of an ascetic idea, of people who would go up and sit on poles thirty feet high. Even natural phenomena throughout history I think the most you could probably argue depends on what you want to argue personalized text or social ethics in other words what do you want to argue that this is not good for him on a personal level and what do you want to argue about a kind of a Libertarian ascetic ideal love people who go up and sit on Whole 30 feet high and let the Nazi get their flashing this is kind of in your talk about there have been that sort of that I have in that sort of phenomena throughout history I think the most you could probably argue depends on what do you want to argue person social ethics in other words what do you want to argue that this is not good for him on a personal level or what he want to argue about it kind of a Libertarian case now he just wants to live a life of poverty and even point out to him that a free society would leave him open that option and he could exercise his moral ideals to the full extent under that kind of society the question arises what if he wants to implement his particular moral ideal and force it on everyone else well ultimately you have to use any kind of argument you can't I think what this amounts to is a moral disagreement now I think you can make the claim that he's morally incorrect which is a philosophical claim if he wants to force everyone to live his particular lifestyle there is the Practical problem of can you persuade him personally now that I don't know you have to sit down to him you have to find out why he I think you can make the claim that he's morally incorrect which is a philosophical claim if he wants to force everyone to live his particular lifestyle there is the Practical problem of can you persuade him personally now that I don't know you have to sit down to him you have to find out why he believes what he believes with the premises are of it if there's any sort of moral police he has that you can get a hook into and try to show that the natural rights philosophy is better would Implement that moral premise there any might be any number was it's very difficult to answer independent of knowing the particular person you're talking about

(David)

I want to say one more thing in answer to that. Suppose you meet somebody who says you are a little green man from Alpha Centauri and you are here trying to blow up the world and therefore I'm going to try to kill you because of that. I presume you deal with him by using force against him. How do you describe a person like that?

(Questioner)

Well, being a firm believer in Szasz's theories I wouldn't try to describe him how I think you want me to try and describe him.

(David)

I would say he was crazy.

(Questioner)

I thought that was what you wanted.

(David)

One of the things that very much influenced my philosophical views was, about 16 years ago, losing an argument to Isaiah Berlin.⁵ Isaiah Berlin was arguing that there were some moral views for which you should describe somebody as crazy, on very similar grounds to those on which you would describe people with some positive views as crazy. Since then my own view of moral philosophy, which I am less uncomfortable with than all the other ones I've seen, although I'm not all that comfortable with it, is that judgments on oughts ultimately have the same sort of basis as judgements on is's, that the disagreement you observe is of the same sort in the two cases, and therefore in that sense I guess I believe both in natural rights and in some sense in absolutism,⁶ ethically speaking, that is that there are true and false ethical statements.

(Questioner)

Well let me follow up with George there. Would you go along with what David said? When you do come to this brick wall and they do try to implement it rather than just believing everybody ought to be forced to be poor, when it gets down to it do you use force on them?

Yes. I use force on them.

(Questioner: Jeff Hummel)

My question is addressed to David. if I can sort of restate your position, it sounds to me like you're arguing that coercion is not a very efficient producers good, that most ends that people aim at can be achieved more effectively by using other means rather than coercion. It is true that a lot of people who use coercion do so because of the ends that they're aiming at, like the thief who is stealing money just to live off, but there are people who treat coercion as a consumption good. There are people who lust after power.

I would argue, or I would at least entertain the proposition, that most murderers, or a lot of murderers, don't do it because they're aiming at other ends but because they enjoy the actual act. And so what I would like to ask you is first of all do you believe that there are a significant number of people who think of coercion as a consumption good ...

(David)

Yes

⁵ Described in Chapter 61 of the third edition of *The Machinery of Freedom*. A late draft is webbed at: http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Machinery_3d_Edition/An%20Argument%20I%20Lost.htm

⁶ I should have described my position as moral realism rather than absolutism.

(Jeff Hummel)

and the second question is how effective do you think the economic arguments would be against them?

(David)

In many cases, very effective. My guess would be that if you somehow knew all the people who were going to commit murder in the next two years and polled them now on whether murder should be illegal, that a great majority of them would say that it should be. Saying something is a consumption good does not mean you value it about everything else in the world. I would guess that for most of the people who value coercion as a consumption good the cost to them of any plausible way of having a society in which they could commit coercion would be very much greater than the value to them of the good.

Of course, from the standpoint of an individual murderer, a society in which he could commit murder and nobody else could might be ideal, but if he is a reasonable man he will realize that it is very unlikely that he can sell that particular set of Institutions to anybody else, that that is not one of the options. So the argument I think you could use for most of these people would be that the cost of a set of institutions in which you can coerce is, first, that you can also be coerced, and second that the society as a whole would be very much poorer, therefore there would be lots less of things you want other than coercion.

Now there might well be a few people who would say "Well, that may be true, but it is so important to me to be able to coerce that I am willing to take one chance in a million of being the dictator even though if I lose someone else will dictate to me. Those people again you could only fight. But I think that would be a rather rare case, that the normal case is the murderer who is in favor of laws against murder and even the thief who is in favor of laws against theft.

After all, he wants to have some security in his ill gotten property.

(Questioner: Jeff Hummel)

Okay. Let me try and make the problem just a little bit harder. I think that murder and theft may be too easy cases. I would argue that most conservatives, when you get them down to their underlying fundamental beliefs, believe in coercion as a consumption good. Those people who really are disturbed by other people engaging in drug use or sexual practices that they disapprove of fall into that category.

But let's take the case that George brought up. There are people who are racist, okay. There are people who want to live in — and I've met them you know — and it's very important to them to be able to live in a society where they can exclude people that they disapprove of. Okay. How would you argue with them?

(David)

I suspect that for most of those people it is very important to be able to exclude people they disapprove of from their neighborhood, mildly nice to be able to exclude them from their city, and not very important to be able to exclude them from their universe. My argument for them would be that, in a Libertarian Society, restrictive covenants will be enforced by the courts. If there are any substantial number of people like you there will be lily-white districts in which the developer has made it illegal to sell to any black because ...

(Questioner: Jeff Hummel)

Your answer, if I can paraphrase it, is that the market would be the most efficient institution at providing racism ...

(David)

Providing racism is a funny way of putting it. I think it is a dangerous mistake to think that people who hold these views are mostly holding them for altruistic reasons.

What I mean is the following. You would say a conservative is against people doing certain things. But when you start listening to the arguments they use, about 5% of it is being worried about the soul of the person who's doing those things and about 95% is worrying about the effect on my kids, or someone mugging me, or raping my daughter after being excited by pornography, and so forth. I would guess, though I may be wrong, that you would find that the value to them of simply keeping people from reading pornography somewhere where they can't see it in a society where you have laws well enforced so that no rapists get away with committing rape, would not be very high.

I think that, in the case of drug addiction, all you would have to do is to persuade the conservative of what is almost certainly true, that the crime rate from drug addiction would disappear if you legalized heroin, and he would then say "All right, let those wicked drug addicts destroy themselves with the drugs as long as they leave me alone." I think that would be the typical, although not universal, reaction.

There is a sense in which I am willing, institutionally, to put this to the test. As those if you who have read my book *The Machinery of Freedom* know, I argue there that, in an anarcho-capitalist society, the laws would end up reflecting the tastes and desires of the population for market reasons, just as automobiles reflect tastes in our society. It follows that an anarcho-capitalist society would not be libertarian by definition, since it could end up enforcing laws against drug use and the like. But I predict that it would be libertarian in practice, because I believe that there are very few cases where the amount that the bigot is willing to spend in order to take your freedom away is a sizable fraction of the amount you would be willing to pay in order to defend it.

(Questioner: Wendy McElroy)

At the original debate that went on in San Diego, I asked you a question that I am going to follow up on. In the course of dealing with a lot of feminists, and feminism is not a libertarian stronghold, I come across people whose goals are very well spelled out by the equally nebulous term, happiness is very nebulous, but equally ambiguous term Justice. I told you that justice as defined by them was egalitarianism, egalitarianism in reference not to everyone being rich but everyone being equal, irrespective of whether it was poorer or richer. And you asked me "Well, in fact, have they considered the economic arguments." In dealing with people subsequently and asking them that question, they said that even if people were poorer that in fact they want justice which is egalitarianism. Do you figure that there's any way at all to economically approach these people who say, and it's a large ... I find it very predominant in a very large movement ... that in fact egalitarianism, even if it is poor, is their goal which is justice.

(David)

The first problem is to find out whether they are lying to you. Because I think that in facing hypothetical questions a lot of us do tell lies, sometimes sort of unintentionally. I am curious whether it is your impression that any of these people actually believe that equality means making the poor poorer and making the rich even more poorer so to speak

(Questioner: Wendy)

They think that making people richer should be an optimal State, however they consider that to be a secondary issue to what they consider to be justice.

(David)

That's not what I'm asking. I'm asking are there any among this group who not only say that if we had to choose we would choose justice over people being better off, who not only say that but who really believe that they do have to choose. Are there any people there who actually think that their arrangements will make the people who are now oppressed worse off?

(Questioner: Wendy)

When people come up to me and give me a very systematic approach to their preferences and say this is my preference and are consistent in it and can systematically show me why it's their preference, I take their word. And that's what they say. And I believe it, yes.

(David)

All I am saying is that one has to distinguish between the, let us say the libertarian, who says "let right be done though the skies fall" and is quite sure the skies aren't going to fall.

(Questioner: Wendy)

Well, they're doing the same version of "Let right be done."

(David)

And the question I'm asking is, is it only because they are sure the sky won't fall that they take that position? And you think not. You think that even if some of them did believe that they would make the people they wanted to help worse off they would still be in favor of equality.

(Questioner: Wendy)

You can point out to them the example of Soviet Russia, which is considered by most feminists to be a far better society than America in terms of their ideal, and you can point out to them that it is substantially poorer, and they will say "Well yes, nevertheless it is just and that is my ideal."

(David)

I would say that would be evidence and in that case I would suggest you had probably better argue moral philosophy with those people.

(Questioner: Wendy)

Okay.