

The Grumpy Libertarian's Guide to the New World Order

by Misty Peñuelas

Given the events that have transpired since January 3, 2026, when the US abducted the Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and then, on February 28th, launched an unprovoked attack on the Islamic Republic of Iran,⁴⁷ it would appear that the humanitarian cloak shrouding America's "Empire of Liberty" has finally rent.⁴⁸ Surely, these brazen acts finally reveal the moral bankruptcy of American liberalism as a just framework for the international order.⁴⁹ Iran's strategic checkmate of the US signals

⁴⁷ Hall, Richard. 2026. "Trump Says U.S. Has Captured Venezuelan President Following 'Large-Scale' Strikes." *TIME*. <https://time.com/7342864/venezuela-caracas-strikes-trump/>;

Anonymous. 2026. "US and Israel launch "pre-emptive" attack against Iran." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-says-it-launched-pre-emptive-attack-against-iran-2026-02-28/>.

⁴⁸ Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, 12-25, 1780 <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-04-02-0295>. Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2011.

⁴⁹ Jerome A Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; 2014. Brendan C. Lindsay, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873*. Lincoln, NE: University of

the emergence of a new civilizational paradigm. Writ large, liberals tend to advocate a social order that guarantees individual freedom and equality under the rule of law. However, discussions on the liberal world order reveal a widespread conceptual ambiguity between "liberalism" and "libertarianism." Yet, as this grumpy libertarian's guide to the new world order argues, these two concepts, defined in terms of how each aligns with their mutual, intellectual foundations in natural law, are as far apart as the east is from the west.

This essay begins with a brief account of property rights in the state of nature and then attempts to define libertarianism and liberalism in terms of those rights. With these concepts well-developed, the essay then considers some of the proposals under consideration as possible frameworks for a new international order.

Nebraska Press; 2012. Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2016. Rennard Strickland, "Friends and Enemies of the American Indian: An Essay Review on Native American Law and Public Policy." *American Indian Law Review* 3 (1975) pp. 313-331. Rennard Strickland, "Genocide-at-Law: An Historic and Contemporary View of the Native American Experience." *University of Kansas Law Review* 34 (1986) pp. 713-756.

In his *Second Treatise of Government*, John Locke explained that the state of nature is "a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license."⁵⁰ It is not the law of the jungle or blood feud, nor is it "anarchy."⁵¹ Indeed, the state of nature "has a law to govern it, which obliges everyone...being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions."⁵² It is only a somewhat gratuitous rhetorical elision that casts the truly radical self-government of the individual under natural law as "without government."⁵³ Nor is natural law any sort of democracy which allows for the will of the majority to run roughshod over the

⁵⁰ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*. Thomas P. Peardon, ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; 1985 [1690], p. 5.

⁵¹ John Phillip Reid, *A Better Kind of Hatchet: Law, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Early Years of European Contact*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press; 1976. John Phillip Reid, *A Law of Blood: The Primitive Law of the Cherokee Nation*. New York: New York University Press; 1970. Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 2006 [1973], pp. 276-279. Rennard Strickland, *Fire and Spirits: Cherokee Law from Clan to Court*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press; 1975.

⁵² Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 5.

⁵³ Vladimir Maltsev, "The Colonization Cost Theory of Anarchic Emergence." *Quarterly Journal of Austrian Economics* 24 (2021) pp. 450-466.

"life, health, liberty and possessions" of the individual. Thus, there are two inextricably linked legal principles at the foundation of natural law--absolute, inviolable individual property rights, and the equally absolute right to defend that property, by lethal force if necessary.⁵⁴

According to Locke's account, individual property rights are self-evident--a matter of logical necessity since every individual, in order to sustain their existence, must have the right to acquire, accumulate, and exchange private property. Thus, in the state of nature, *ceteris paribus*, private property is created when an individual appropriates resources from nature and improves them by an "admixture" of his labor, making them the legitimate and exclusive property of the individual.⁵⁵ Besides appropriation, there are three other legitimate means of acquiring private property--voluntary exchange, gift, or inheritance. Although both claim roots in natural law, a careful consideration of how both libertarianism and liberalism adhere to those principles shows that in fact they are entirely different. In short, one actually believes in property rights, while the other does not.

⁵⁴ Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 48.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Libertarianism, in accordance with natural law, affirms that individual property rights are absolute. In books such as *For a New Liberty* and the *Ethics of Liberty*, Murray N. Rothbard created a systematic architecture for the application of natural law principles in the modern context, and thus both defined the world view of and outlined a program for modern libertarianism.⁵⁶ In order to remain consistent with the worldview of absolute property rights, Rothbard argued that the libertarian program in the modern context had to be *abolition*. In his 1973 "libertarian manifesto," *For a New Liberty*, Rothbard insisted that

The libertarian, then, should be a person who would push the button, if it existed, for the instantaneous abolition of *all invasions of liberty*. Of course, he knows, too, that such a magic button does not exist, but his fundamental preference colors and *shapes his entire strategic perspective* [emphasis added].⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Murray N. Rothbard, *For a New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 2006 [1973]. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*. NY: New York University Press; 2002 [1998], pp. 21-22.

⁵⁷ Rothbard, *Manifesto*, p. 379.

Citing the prototypical abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, Rothbard reminded the reader, "Gradualism in theory is perpetuity in practice."⁵⁸ In eschewing the abolition of "all invasions of liberty," Rothbard affirmed the absolute rights of each and every individual in accordance with self-evident natural law.

The goal of abolition applied not only specific policies, but indeed to the entirety of the coercive state. The state, Rothbard observed, is the only "organization in society that obtains its revenue," not by voluntary exchange, "but by coercion."⁵⁹ Defined as the "organization of the political means," the state is the "systematization of the predatory process over a given territory," and provides "a legal, orderly, systematic channel for the predation of private property: it renders certain, secure, and relatively 'peaceful' the lifeline of the parasitic caste in society."⁶⁰ Rothbard dramatically demonstrated the logical absurdity of conditional property rights: "We are not the government;" he stated,"the

⁵⁸ Rothbard, *Manifesto*, p. 380.

⁵⁹ Murray N. Rothbard, *The Anatomy of the State*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 2009 [1974], pp. 11-12.

⁶⁰ Rothbard, *Anatomy*, pp. 15-16.

government is not 'us.'" The government, he continued,

does not in any accurate sense "represent" the majority of the people. But, even if it did, even if 70 percent of the people decided to murder the remaining 30 percent, this would still be murder and would not be voluntary suicide on the part of the slaughtered minority. No organicist metaphor, no irrelevant bromide that 'we are all part of one another,' must be permitted to obscure this basic fact.⁶¹

Thus, in its strict adherence to the core principle of non-aggression (non-coercion) and the absolute property rights of each individual, libertarianism rejects *en toto* the legitimacy of the state, which is predicated on coercion, and thus always aims to abolish it. Tentatively then, it makes sense to apply the term "libertarian" only to those governing paradigms that entirely reject the principle of coercion.

In his Ralph Raico Memorial Lecture, delivered at the 2026 Libertarian Scholars Conference, Ryan

⁶¹ Rothbard, *Anatomy*, pp. 10-11.

McMaken outlined a useful taxonomy of liberalism based on Ralph Raico's book, *The Struggle for Liberty*.⁶² McMaken identified two distinct schools of classical liberal thought: the "realist" or "exploitation" school and the "naive" or "conventional" school. Represented by authors such as Vilfredo Pareto, Frederick Bastiat, Gustave de Molinari on the Continent, and Richard Cobden and John Bright in England, the core principle of the exploitation school held that the "state employs war, taxation, money printing, and a plutocratic relationship with the wealthy elite to carry out the exploitation of the general population." By contrast, "naive liberalism" held a "pluralist idea of political representation in which a regime works as a neutral arbitrator, of sorts, to endure a relatively fair distribution of resources, brought about by peaceful Compromise."

Although McMaken argues that, for historical reasons, it is necessary to maintain the "classical" terminology for both realist and naive versions of

⁶² McMaken, Ryan. "Classical Liberalism Has Not Failed and We Need It Now More than Ever." Ralph Raico Memorial Lecture, Libertarian Scholars Conference March 2026. <https://mises.org/podcasts/libertarian-scholars-conference-2026/classical-liberalism-has-not-failed-and-we-need-it-now-more-ever>.

liberalism, the realist school of liberalism, intransigent in its absolute rejection of the state, is nevertheless essentially the same as libertarianism.⁶³ Accordingly then liberalism here refers to the naive school, from which American liberalism emerged.

Thus far I have tried to characterize libertarianism according to its distinctive absolutist and abolitionist qualities, rooted in natural law. Next, I likewise discuss the nature of liberalism in terms of its adherence to natural law property rights, which supposedly also had philosophical foundations in natural law.

Because John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, was arguably an *Ur* text of American Liberalism, cited almost word for word in Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, it is important to recognize that Locke's treatise ultimately repudiated the principles of natural law.

Surely, Locke's theory of the social contract has to be an "inversion of values" of the highest order in

⁶³ Ryan McMaken, "Libertarian' Is Just Another Word for (Classical) Liberal." *Mises Wire* September 12, 2019. <https://mises.org/mises-wire/libertarian-just-another-word-classical-liberal>

the canon of Western intellectual history.⁶⁴ According to Locke, the liberty guaranteed in the state of nature was a grievous inconvenience. Locke asserted that in such a state, the "enjoyment" of one's property was "very uncertain and constantly exposed to the invasion of others" and thus "very unsafe, very unsecure." Thus, individuals readily agreed, he argued, "to quit a condition which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers" and "to join in society with others...for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and...property."⁶⁵ Consequently, when "any number of men are so united into one society as to quit every one his executive power of the law of nature, and to resign it to the public," each man in effect abdicates all responsibility over his property and instead "authorizes the society or...the legislative thereof to make laws for him as the public good of society shall require, to the execution whereof his own assistance, as to his own decrees, is due." Joining this social contract "puts men out of a state of nature and into that of a commonwealth."⁶⁶ "And

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*. Francis Golffing, trans. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company; 1956 [1871, 1887], pp. 167-169.

⁶⁵ Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

in this," Locke announced, "we have the original right of both the legislative and the executive power, as well as of the governments and societies themselves."⁶⁷

Locke insisted that the agreement was, in theory, voluntary because the people always had to resort to the only "true remedy of force without authority is to oppose force to it."⁶⁸ Thus, having entered voluntarily into a commonwealth, if some persons "should take upon them to make laws, whom the people have not appointed so to do, they make laws without authority, which the people are not therefore bound to obey." Retaining the natural law right to self-defense, "the people" could justify revolution "whenever the legislators endeavor to take away...the property of the people...or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power" and thus enter again into a state of nature.⁶⁹ Upon overthrowing a tyrannical legislature, the people would be "thereupon absolved from any further obedience, and...left to the common refuge which

⁶⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 120 and 124.

God has provided for all men against force and violence."⁷⁰

Locke recognizes that the individual would only relinquish his liberty under natural law, "with an intention...better to preserve himself, his liberty, and property," since "no rational creature can be supposed to change his condition with an intention to be worse." Much of the consent under girding the social contract derives from the assumption that "formal law ought not to violate self-ownership and property rights."⁷¹ Yet the social contract does precisely that.

The social contract undermines individual agency in demanding that the individual part "with as much of his natural liberty...as the good, prosperity, and safety of the society shall require." Clearly, under the social contract, it is "society," not the individual, that decides what is "good" and what constitutes the "prosperity" and "security" of the individual, Rothbard's "thirty percent" be damned.⁷²

⁷⁰ Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 124.

⁷¹ David Gordon and Wanjiru Njoya, *Redressing Historical Injustice: Self-Ownership, Property Rights and Economic Equality*. NY: Palgrave MacMillan; 2022, p. 102.

⁷² Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 73.

Not only have individuals lost their liberty under the social contract, but also, having agreed to live under a "civil government...have excluded force" as a means of self-defense and instead "introduced laws for the preservation of property, peace, and unity amongst themselves."⁷³ Under the liberal social contract, the state assumes a monopoly on violence, fully usurping the individual's executive power to punish under natural law. Putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, Locke's social contract redefines any exercise of the right to self-defense as a criminal act of rebellion, whereby individuals attempt to "set up force again in opposition to the laws."⁷⁴ Thus, the social "compact" was a manifest repudiation of self-evident, natural law property rights, depriving individuals of the surest means for securing their property, namely, the right to self-ownership and the power to punish (right to self-defense).

The social contract was not only a theoretical repudiation of natural law, but offered a practical repudiation of natural law property rights as well. In response to critics who charged that Locke's liberal program would lay the "foundation of the

⁷³ Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 126-127.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

government in the uncertain humor of the people," and thus ultimately "expose it to certain ruin," Locke argued that, in reality, the consent of the governed and the right to rebel were purely theoretical, posing no practical threat to the hegemonic power of the state. Rather than cauldrons of social upheaval and revolutions, liberal governments, based on the consent of the governed under the rule of law were, in actual fact, the "best fence against rebellion, and the probablest means to hinder it."⁷⁵

"People," Locke observed, "are not got out so easily of their old forms...they are hardly to be prevailed with amending the acknowledged faults in the frame they have been accustomed to." Even when governments have become entirely corrupt, "it is not an easy thing to get them changed, even when all the world sees there is an opportunity for it." There is, Locke insisted, a "slowness and aversion in the people to quit their old constitutions."⁷⁶ Indeed, quotidian occupations and the complacency of the people meant that Revolutions, "happen not upon every little mismanagement in public affairs." Instead, people will accept even "great mistakes in

⁷⁵ Locke, *Second Treatise*, pp. 126-127.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

the ruling part, many wrong and inconvenient laws...without mutiny or murmur," provided that the greed and corruption of the governing class are never made "visible" or "sensible" to the people.⁷⁷ Neither righteous indignation nor human empathy would be powerful enough to raise any serious, wide-spread challenge to public acquiescence because,

as often as it shall please a busy head or turbulent spirit to desire the alteration of the government...such men may stir whenever they please, but it will be only to their own just ruin and perdition; for till the mischief be grown general, and the ill designs of the rulers become visible, or their attempts sensible to the greater part, the people, who are more disposed to suffer than right themselves by resistance, are not apt to stir. The examples of particular injustice or oppression of here and there an unfortunate man moves them not.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 126.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

Given the complacency of a people "more disposed to suffer" under a liberal social contract predicated on the "consent of the governed," Locke informed the ruling class that they had only themselves to blame if the people were "universally" persuaded by "manifest evidence" and "a long train of abuses" that the "designs...carrying on against their liberties" finally warranted violent revolution⁷⁹ Far from defending individual property rights, Locke provides instruction to the ruling class in how to best secure a "legal, orderly, systematic channel" for their perpetual predation.⁸⁰

Whereas the libertarian worldview revolves around the individual, the liberal worldview deifies the abstract, fictional construct of the state or society. Far from having any absolute value in his own right, simply by virtue of being human, as would be self-evident under natural law, the value of the individual in the liberal worldview depends entirely on his unconditional loyalty and abject submission to the (inherently corrupt) state:

Whoever, either ruler or subject, by
force goes about to invade the rights

⁷⁹ Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 126.

⁸⁰ Rothbard, "Anatomy," pp. 15-16.

either prince or people...lays the foundation for overturning the constitution...is highly guilty of the greatest crime I think a man is capable of...and he who does it is justly to be esteemed the common enemy and pest of mankind....⁸¹

Because liberalism treats property rights as conditional rather than absolute, any individual who exercises rights against the arbitrary diktats of the state can then be declared a criminal, a "common enemy," a sub-human "pest" of mankind, whose depravity in defying the state meant that his rights and his property were forfeit.

According to Locke, the "end of law" in a liberal world order was not to secure individual property rights, but rather, it was to "preserve and enlarge freedom." Again, Locke repudiates the principles of natural law in redefining freedom, or self-ownership, as its opposite, state coercion, to wit:

where there is no law, there is no freedom. For liberty is to be free from restraint and violence of others; which cannot be where there is no

⁸¹ Locke, *Second Treatise*, p. 129.

law: and is not...a liberty for every man to do what he lists.⁸²

For Locke, and the American-style, naive liberalism that drew from his work, law is by definition, coercive; thus freedom does not mean-self ownership, but rather its opposite, coercion, wielded arbitrarily, precisely by those who promise to make us "free from restraint and violence of others."

Finally, using property rights as the sole measure of its merits, liberalism can no longer be held as either distinct from, or more ethically sound than, its historical nemesis--socialism. Hans-Hermann Hoppe demonstrated this principle by comparing Communism and Socialism. "The degree of expropriation of private producers' income," Hoppe observed, "is a matter of expediency." This ought to finally prove, "once and for all," that the only difference between the two was "only a matter of degree." Obviously, then, in asserting that property rights are conditional, liberalism is in fact essentially the same thing as socialism because regardless of how "low the presently fixed degree of expropriation might be," the individual property

⁸² Cited in Gordon and Njoya, *Redressing Historical Injustice*, p, 101.

owner nevertheless operates, "under the ever-present threat that in the future the income share which must be handed over to society will be raised unilaterally."⁸³ In short, there are really only two distinct socioeconomic systems: libertarianism that, without exception, adheres to the principle of absolute property rights, and the varying degrees of interventionist state models that enforce a system of conditional property rights.

As noted above, McMaken and Raico did not find it necessary in their shared taxonomy of liberalism to make overly rigid distinctions between classical liberalism and libertarianism, as I have here. Yet, in delightfully characterizing these classical liberals of the exploitation school as "grumpy libertarians," McMaken has provided a metaphor that encapsulates the absolutist and abolitionist libertarianism, derived from natural law property rights, that I have described here.⁸⁴ McMaken's grumpy libertarian is forever decrying the injustice perpetrated by the state and refuses to acknowledge

⁸³ Hans-Hermann Hoppe, "Social Democracy." Auburn, AL: Mises Institute; 2018 [2010], p. 12.

⁸⁴ McMaken, Ryan. 2026.

<https://mises.org/podcasts/libertarian-scholars-conference-2026/classical-liberalism-has-not-failed-and-we-need-it-now-more-ever>

even the meager, albeit "relatively tasty," benefits that sometimes accrue in spite of the state's exploitation. According to Raico, the grumpy libertarians of the Manchester school were seen by their contemporaries as "harping critics," "constant naggers" and "incessant complainers," incapable of just enjoying the "tinsel-symbols of British world power."⁸⁵ In short, these grumpy libertarians from Manchester were "simply not fun people." As a metaphor personified, the grumpy libertarian represents that unique strain of libertarianism, strictly defined in terms of absolute property rights under natural law, and so serves as both a foil and guide in determining the normative desirability of any particular framework.

The grumpy libertarian's guide to the new world order would handily dismiss dystopian schemes such as the World Economic Forum's "Fourth Industrial Revolution," Transhumanism, and China's Social Credit System as patently antithetical to individual property rights.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ McMaken 2026.

⁸⁶ see, for example, Schwab 2016, Thomas 2024, and Karsten & West 2018.

Measured in terms of property rights, the grumpy libertarian would see little difference between models such as economic development, reservation capitalism, or polycentrism, because all allow the state to aggress against the private property of the individual.⁸⁷ Despite their apparent novelty, these models, just as Hans-Hermann Hoppe explained in the context of socialism, differ only in matters of degree, not in principle. Because such schemes follow Lockean principles of liberalism, the grumpy libertarian would not consider these neo-liberal frameworks any more suitable than their paleo-liberal predecessors in erecting a libertarian world order rooted in the self-evident principles of natural law.

More promising for the grumpy libertarian would be the well-worn Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states governed by international law. The

⁸⁷ Gary C. Anders, "Theories of Underdevelopment and the American Indian." *Journal of Economic Issues* 14 (1980) pp. 681-701. Peter J. Boettke, and Rosolino A. Candela, "Rivalry, Polycentrism and Institutional Evolution." *New Thinking in Austrian Political Economy*. Published online: 04 Aug 2015. Adam Creppelle and Ilia Murtazashvili, "Polycentricity: A Simple Rule for Governing Indian Country." *Cosmos and Taxis* 10 (2022) pp. 68-80. Robert J. Miller, *Reservation Capitalism: Economic Development in Indian Country*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger; 2012.

problem of conceptualization notwithstanding, the Westphalian state system could in theory, despite its rather dismal historical record, provide a framework for a principled libertarian international order. To evaluate its potential viability, the grumpy libertarian need only apply the principles of natural law to the interactions of each state within the system. If all the states can in fact defend their sovereignty by force of arms, meaning that no other state can "give the law" unto them, then those states could be said to exercise absolute sovereignty within a libertarian state system.⁸⁸

Westphalian notions of sovereignty are also evident in increasing calls for Multipolarism, not to be confused with the essentially liberal concept of polycentrism.⁸⁹ Exemplified in organizations of international cooperation such as BRICS and China's Belt and Road Initiative, multipolarism might superficially be characterized as an attempt to revive the Westphalian order, but execute it correctly.⁹⁰ In the multipolar order emerging in

⁸⁸ Sophus A. Reinert, *Translating Empire: Emulation and the Origins of Political Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 2011.

⁸⁹ see, for example, Shamim 2026.

⁹⁰ see, for example, Ferragamo 2025.

Asia around Russia, China and Iran, it currently appears that each nation does in fact honor the sovereignty of the others. As suggested above, in defending their sovereignty by force of arms, Iran could be seen as a real-world example of a Westphalian nation-state exercising natural law property rights in a libertarian world order. If in fact, all the nations within the multipolar orbit do, in fact, have the capability of effective self-defense, then multipolarism may be an attractive option for the new libertarian world order--Grumpy Libertarians, watch this space!

A grumpy libertarian might well marvel at the skill with which Scott Duryea executed his "Libertarian Defense of Non-Interventionism." Beginning with the fundamental libertarian principle of non-aggression (which is the flip side of the absolute right to self-defense) engages in a systematic application of that principle to a multitude of potential interstate interactions, demonstrating that it was not only possible, but also imperative that the Westphalian nation states adopt the libertarian principle of non-aggression into their

diplomatic and foreign policy objectives.⁹¹ Using Rothbard's 1963, "War, Peace, and the State" as a set of fundamental libertarian principles applied to states, Duryea is careful to note the conceptualization problem in discussing libertarian state systems. In short, in a genuinely libertarian society, there would be no state, so there would be no need for a world order. In addition, despite the fact that each sovereign state in the system is itself exercising coercion over individuals, individual states believe that their individual national sovereignty will be honored. Thus, observed Duryea, "while Rothbard by no means accepts the existence of the state as legitimate, it is the primary unit of analysis for international relations and must be taken as a given in the current state of affairs in the world." Nevertheless, the grumpy libertarian may fret that in normalizing the existence of the state, even for the sake of argument, Duryea precludes any possibility that there could be such a thing as a stateless society, which must always be the aim of the abolitionist libertarian. Duryea's

⁹¹ Scott Duryea, 2024. "A Libertarian Defense of Non-Interventionism."

<https://isonomiaquarterly.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/duryea-pfwo.pdf>

account, however inadvertently, subtly normalizes and reinforces the inevitability of the state.

Finally, other principled libertarian views have suggested what the genuinely libertarian nation-state would look like, and not surprisingly, they envision no state at all. Although not strictly libertarian as herein defined, in 1919, Ludwig von Mises laid the foundation for the later libertarian secessionist literature of Ralph Raico in 2004 and 2018 and Ryan McMaken, whose influence on this essay has been considerable.⁹² First Mises pointed out that language was the only legitimate, feasible foundation for political unions. Likewise, observing first hand the balkanization of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the aftermath of World War I, Mises concluded that the right of secession was critical for securing peace in a region where arbitrary boundaries grouped different linguistic

⁹² Ryan McMaken, *Breaking Away: The Case for Secession, Radical Decentralization, and Smaller Polities*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 2022. Ludwig Von Mises. *Nation, State, and Economy: Contributions to the Politics and History of Our Time*. Leland B Yeager, trans. Institute for Humane Studies, 1983 [1919]. Ralph Raico, "The European Miracle." *Mises Wire* July 24, 2018. Ralph Raico, *The Struggle for Liberty: A Libertarian History of Political Thought*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 2025 [2004].

groups together artificially. Drawing on this work, later libertarian theories of the state favored smaller, homogeneous communities, political decentralization, and the right to secede across any political jurisdiction. Indeed, if there was ever any meaning in the social contract, then surely it was this. Yet, this is a far cry from Locke's mystical deification of the state that criminalized the natural law principles of self-ownership and the right to self-defense. Indeed, radical decentralization is like a refreshing spring rain for the always harping and incessantly nagging, grumpy libertarian. Secession is an imminently practical strategy for erecting a libertarian new world order and entirely consistent with the natural law property rights of self ownership and self defense.

Precise definitions for the concepts of liberal and libertarian are a critical analytical tool for discerning which systems claim to be "libertarian" but are not. Some liberals assert the supremacy of a supra-national, global government. Brandon Christensen proposed a world government based on the "American Proposal," which he called a

"libertarian interstate federalism."⁹³ Martin Van Staden also believed that it would be possible to secure individual liberty in a global state, which he dubbed "a neo(libertarian) world order."⁹⁴ Yet, upon close reading, neither of these systems is libertarian, strictly speaking.

On the contrary, these two systems are classic examples of the naive liberal intellectual tradition, both accepting without question the premise that laws can actually restrain the arbitrary, coercive power of the state. This unfounded assumption flatly contradicts a fundamental tenet of realist liberalism, as explained at length above, namely, that the state was inherently predatory, and irreparably so. Thus at almost every point, Christensen's plan for global government, rooted in archetypal, Madisonian American liberalism, directly contradicts realist libertarian principles derived from natural law.

⁹³ Brandon L. Christensen, "Reviving the Libertarian Interstate Federalist Tradition: The American Proposal." *The Independent Review* 26 (2021) pp. 429-450.

⁹⁴ Martin Van Staden, 2025. "Globalism and Limited Government – Contrary or Complementary?: A New Agenda for a Neo(libertarian) World Order."
<https://isonomiaquarterly.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/van-staden-pfwo.pdf>.

Anticipating an outcry from the grumpy libertarians at such magical thinking--that more government begets more liberty--Christensen emphatically insists that the reader adopt "a counter-intuitive logic," strive for a "shift of vision" and finally "accept a new principle for social order."⁹⁵ With a disregard for empirical reality symptomatic of naive liberalism, both Christensen and Van Staden simply dismiss libertarian concerns, fully justified by the historical record, that a world government might potentially cause "a catastrophic outcome for human liberty and dignity" or lead to the "possibility of a totalitarian regime...with no hope of escape or revolution."⁹⁶ At the most fundamental level, between liberals and libertarians, there are two mutually exclusive visions of reality--they do not live in the same universe.

Although more cosmopolitan, Van Staden is no less liberal than Christensen, fully accepting his argument that interstate federalism was the only feasible framework for a global government. Van Staden's essay is a convenient demonstration of the need for conceptual clarity. Initially, Van Staden

⁹⁵ Christensen, p. 444 and 445.

⁹⁶ Jason Sorens, "Against Global Federalism." *Isonomia Quarterly* 2 (2024) p. 102.

recognizes the centrality of individual property rights, but, in the end, Van Staden's strategic agenda for establishing a neo(libertarian) world order constitutes an abject capitulation to the state. Whereas Christensen actively sought out the world government and the dissolution of Westphalian national sovereignties, Van Staden believed the (fallacious) premise that a global, world government was inevitable, whether folks wanted it or not. Therefore, it was imperative that libertarians participate in the process so that they would have "some (even minimal) influence" on the eventual outcome. This is not simply a question of "working from within the system," which Rothbard agreed was possible.⁹⁷ The real danger is that, having assumed the inevitability of the global government, Van Staden then embraces with wild abandon the statism of naive liberalism. Clearly, understanding the essential difference between liberal and libertarian, neither global interstate federalism nor the neoliberal world order could be rightly called a "libertarian" state system.

Christensen and Van Staden, fully cognizant of the libertarian objections to large states, simply ignored

⁹⁷ Rothbard, *Manifesto*, pp. 382-386.

or dismissed them. From their perspective, the uncompromising, principled stance of the grumpy libertarian was antiquated and provincial at best, but potentially misguided and even dangerous at worst.⁹⁸ Christensen admonishes the grumpy libertarians to eschew "stale dichotomies" and "accept a new principle for social order," while Van Staden condescends that the grumpy libertarian needs to be "less hysterically opposed" to global government, that he must modify his absolutist, abolitionist stance or risk losing a seat at the new world order table. Because a genuine libertarian society governed by the natural law principles of self-ownership and the right to self-defense is impossible, any proposal that does not accommodate and capitulate to its inevitable existence is simplistic, unrealistic, Utopian, and so, lacking in "philosophical merit."⁹⁹ Assuming the inevitability of the state thus neutralizes the primary directive of principled libertarianism, namely, the abolition of the state.

⁹⁸ Christensen, p. 445.

⁹⁹ Matt Zwolinski, "Libertarianism, Oversimplified." *The Independent Review* 28 (2024) p. 540. Rothbard, *Manifesto*, pp. 380-381.
https://www.independent.org/wp-content/uploads/tir/2024/03/tir_28_4_03_zwolinski.pdf

In this essay, I have argued that libertarian and liberal, when defined according to the principles of natural law property rights, are entirely different and mutually exclusive. Therefore only those state systems which adhere to those principles ought to be rightly called "libertarian." Yet, this is precisely the stale, reductionist, provincialism of the grumpy libertarian that the supposedly more sophisticated, cosmopolitan liberal eschews. In his recent article, "Why Libertarianism Keeps Splintering," Matt Zwolinski, cited numerous instances where so-called libertarians, arguing from principle, had reached radically different conclusions on important policies, from tariffs to the genocide in Gaza.¹⁰⁰ He argued that property rights "aren't [sic] powerful enough to settle the contested questions of our politics" because even a commitment to property rights "doesn't tell you what property is, how it gets acquired, whether it's inheritable, or what to do when property-based claims conflict." Yet these principles do actually address those questions.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Matt Zwolinski, "Why Libertarianism Keeps Splintering." *The Daily Economy* May 20, 2026. <https://thedailyeconomy.org/article/why-libertarianism-keeps-splintering/>

¹⁰¹ Rothbard, *Manifesto*, pp. 52-53. Wanjiru Njoya, "Defending Private Property: Principles of Justice." Rothbard

The problem here is not libertarian principles, but rather "our politics," which presume the existence of a state that has the power to impose "definite political conclusions" for all regions, locales and individuals. Absent the arbitrary and remote intervention and coercive power of the state, property rights would be determined by the individuals concerned in the matter on a case by case basis.

For this reason, I argue that what is needed is not new, more sophisticated ways of thinking about the socioeconomic order that assume individual property rights can be violated for some arbitrary greater good, but rather a return to the old ways of thinking, however stale and unsophisticated, rooted in natural law, that guaranteed the individual's absolute right to control his own life and property. Ironically, Zwolinski concludes that intellectual humility requires that libertarianism ought not be "deduced from a single axiom," but rather from "provisional positions." Yet, what could be more humble, or more self-evident, than "taking seriously" the axiomatic truth that no individual or group of individuals has the power, right, or

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knowledge, under any circumstances, to decide, let alone enforce, what policies are in the best economic interest of any other individual?¹⁰²

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¹⁰² Ludwig Von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*. Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute; 2020 [1949], pp. 17-21.

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