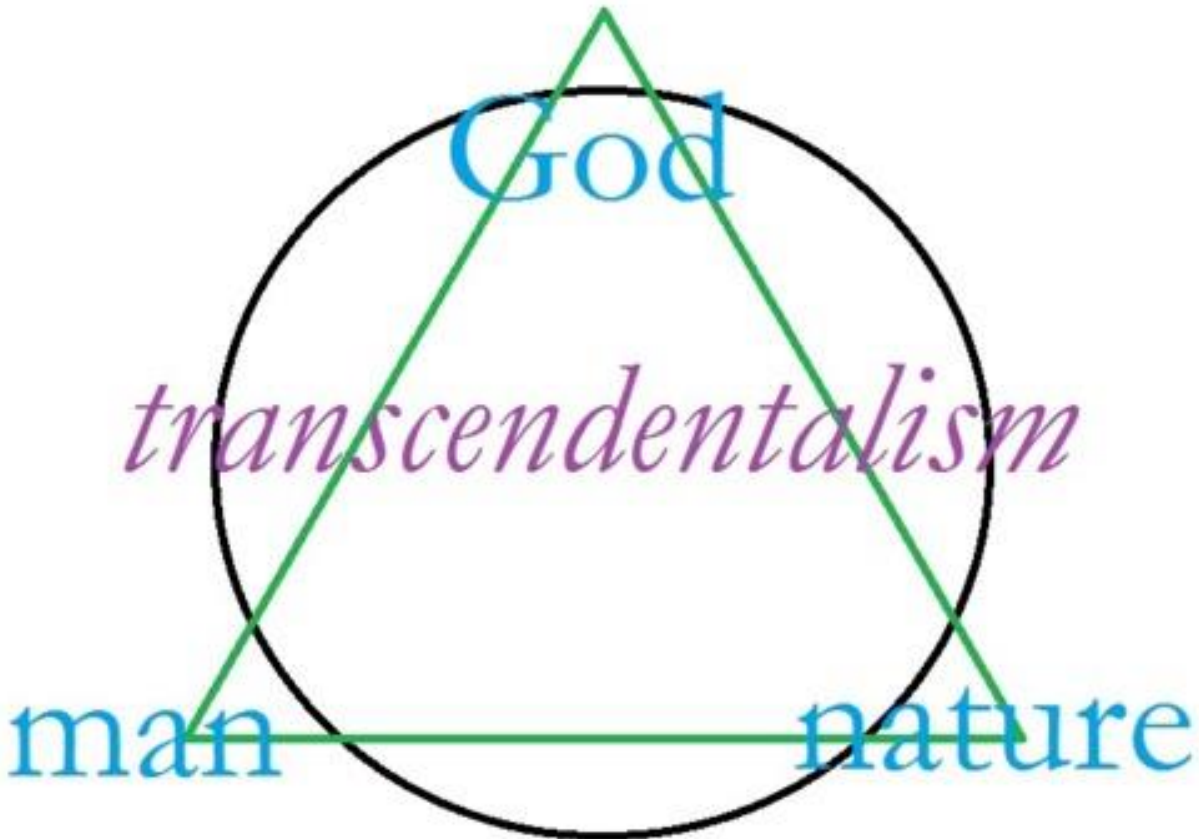


UU & Libertarianism, a Match Made in Heaven



What is Libertarianism?

The primary principle of Libertarianism is known as the non-aggression principle or NAP.

The **non-aggression principle** (also called the **non-aggression axiom**, or the **anti-coercion** or **zero aggression principle** or **non-initiation of force**) is an ethical stance which asserts that "[aggression](#)" is inherently illegitimate. "Aggression" is defined as the "initiation" of physical force against persons or property, the threat of such, or [fraud](#) upon persons or their property. In contrast to [pacifism](#), the non-aggression principle does not preclude [violent self-defense](#). The principle is a [deontological](#) (or rule-based) ethical stance.

Libertarians typically claim that the non-aggression principle includes [property](#) and [freedom of contract](#) as a part of self-ownership. The basis for this extension of self-ownership to one's property is [John Locke](#)'s argument (also called the [homestead principle](#)) that mixing of labor with an unowned resource makes that resource part of one's self. Subsequent [exchange](#) of such

property (e.g. sale, rental) simply transfers this right. Hence, to aggress against someone's property is to aggress against the individual. As for freedom of contract, the right of self-ownership is held to imply freedom of action in the absence of aggression (e.g. in the absence of false or duress contracts, and the absence of contracts stipulating aggression against third-parties).

If these two rights to private property and to freedom of contract are taken as given, then the non-aggression principle is held by its supporters to lead to the rejection of [theft](#), [vandalism](#), [assault](#), [fraud](#), [pollution](#) and the concept of [victimless crimes](#).

From David Boaz:

David Boaz is the executive vice president of the Cato Institute and has played a key role in both the Institute's development and the growth of the American libertarian movement at large. Prior to joining Cato in 1981, he served as editor of New Guard magazine and executive director of the Council for a Competitive Economy.

Key Concepts of Libertarianism

By [David Boaz](#)

January 1, 1999

The key concepts of libertarianism (or classical liberalism) have developed over many centuries. The first inklings of them can be found in ancient China, Greece, and Israel; they began to be developed into something resembling modern libertarian philosophy in the work of such seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers as John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine.

(Classical liberalism dominated the political philosophy of America's founders. The Nineteenth-century saw the United States become firmly established as a world leader in classical liberalism with such thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau as well as the rest of the transcendentalists, Walt Whitman and Lysander Spooner. Libertarians were the earliest among western peoples to call for the abolition of slavery and for equal rights for all people, including women.)

Individualism. Libertarians see the individual as the basic unit of social analysis. Only individuals make choices and are responsible for their actions. Libertarian thought emphasizes the dignity of each individual, which entails both rights and responsibility (**aligns with UU Principle #1**). The progressive extension of dignity to more people — to women, to people of different religions and different races — is one of the great libertarian triumphs of the Western world.

Individual Rights. Because individuals are moral agents, they have a right to be secure in their life, liberty, and property. These rights are not granted by government or by society; they are inherent in the nature of human beings. It is intuitively right that individuals enjoy the security of such rights; the burden of explanation should lie with those who would take rights away. **(elements of UU Principles #1 & 2).**

Spontaneous Order. A great degree of order in society is necessary for individuals to survive and flourish. It's easy to assume that order must be imposed by a central authority, the way we impose order on a stamp collection or a football team. The great insight of libertarian social analysis is that order in society arises spontaneously, out of the actions of thousands or millions of individuals who coordinate their actions with those of others in order to achieve their purposes. Over human history, we have gradually opted for more freedom and yet managed to develop a complex society with intricate organization. The most important institutions in human society — language, law, money, and markets — all developed spontaneously, without central direction. Civil society — the complex network of associations and connections among people — is another example of spontaneous order; the associations within civil society are formed for a purpose, but civil society itself is not an organization and does not have a purpose of its own. **(elements of UU Principles #1, 2 & 3).**

The Rule of Law. Libertarianism is not libertinism or hedonism. It is not a claim that “people can do anything they want to, and nobody else can say anything.” Rather, libertarianism proposes a society of liberty under law, in which individuals are free to pursue their own lives so long as they respect the equal rights of others. The rule of law means that individuals are governed by generally applicable and spontaneously developed legal rules, not by arbitrary commands; and that those rules should protect the freedom of individuals to pursue happiness in their own ways, not aim at any particular result or outcome. **(UU Principle #1, 2, 3 & 6)**

Limited Government. To protect rights, individuals form governments. But government is a dangerous institution. Libertarians have a great antipathy to concentrated power, for as Lord Acton said, “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Thus they want to divide and limit power, and that means especially to limit government, generally through a written constitution enumerating and limiting the powers that the people delegate to government. Limited government is the basic *political* implication of libertarianism, and libertarians point to the historical fact that it was the dispersion of power in Europe — more than other parts of the world — that led to individual liberty and sustained economic growth. **(UU Principle #1, 2, 3 & 6)**

Free Markets. To survive and to flourish, individuals need to engage in economic activity. The right to property entails the right to exchange property by mutual agreement. Free markets are the economic system of free individuals, and they are necessary to create wealth. Libertarians believe that people will be both freer and more prosperous if government intervention in people's economic choices is minimized. **(UU Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7)**

The Virtue of Production. Much of the impetus for libertarianism in the seventeenth century was a reaction against monarchs and aristocrats who lived off the productive labor of other people. Libertarians defended the right of people to keep the fruits of their labor. This effort developed into a respect for the dignity of work and production and especially for the growing middle class, who were looked down upon by aristocrats. Libertarians developed a pre-Marxist class analysis that divided society into two basic classes: those who produced wealth and those who took it by force from others. Thomas Paine, for instance, wrote, “There are two distinct classes of men in the nation, those who pay taxes, and those who receive and live upon the taxes.” Similarly, Jefferson wrote in 1824, “We have more machinery of government than is necessary, too many parasites living on the labor of the industrious.” Modern libertarians defend the right of productive people to keep what they earn, against a new class of politicians and bureaucrats who would seize their earnings to transfer them to non-producers. (UU Principles 2, 6 & 7)

Natural Harmony of Interests. Libertarians believe that there is a natural harmony of interests among peaceful, productive people in a just society. One person’s individual plans — which may involve getting a job, starting a business, buying a house, and so on — may conflict with the plans of others, so the market makes many of us change our plans. But we all prosper from the operation of the free market, and there are no necessary conflicts between farmers and merchants, manufacturers and importers. Only when government begins to hand out rewards on the basis of political pressure do we find ourselves involved in group conflict, pushed to organize and contend with other groups for a piece of political power. (UU Principle 6).

Peace. Libertarians have always battled the age-old scourge of war. They understood that war brought death and destruction on a grand scale, disrupted family and economic life, and put more power in the hands of the ruling class — which might explain why the rulers did not always share the popular sentiment for peace. Free men and women, of course, have often had to defend their own societies against foreign threats; but throughout history, war has usually been the common enemy of peaceful, productive people on all sides of the conflict.

... It may be appropriate to acknowledge at this point the reader’s likely suspicion that libertarianism seems to be just the standard framework of modern thought — individualism, private property, capitalism, equality under the law. Indeed, after centuries of intellectual, political, and sometimes violent struggle, these core libertarian principles have become the basic structure of modern political thought and of modern government, at least in the West and increasingly in other parts of the world.

However, three additional points need to be made: first, libertarianism is not *just* these broad liberal principles. Libertarianism *applies* these principles fully and consistently, far more so than most modern thinkers and certainly more so than any modern government. Second, while our society remains generally based on equal rights and capitalism, every day new exceptions to those principles are carved out in Washington and in Albany, Sacramento, and Austin (not to

mention London, Bonn, Tokyo, and elsewhere). Each new government directive takes a little bit of our freedom, and we should think carefully before giving up any liberty. Third, liberal society is resilient; it can withstand many burdens and continue to flourish; but it is not infinitely resilient. Those who claim to believe in liberal principles but advocate more and more confiscation of the wealth created by productive people, more and more restrictions on voluntary interaction, more and more exceptions to property rights and the rule of law, more and more transfer of power from society to state, are unwittingly engaged in the ultimately deadly undermining of civilization.

Types of Libertarians:

Most libertarians fall into either the consequentialist or deontologist camp. That is, they believe libertarianism is best justified by showing how it produces superior consequences to alternatives or by showing how it comports with certain moral rules such as self-ownership. A handful more take a contractarian approach, seeing libertarianism as what you'd get if everyone rationally debated and came to unanimous agreement on a set of rules to govern society. (Voluntarism or Voluntarianism).

Libertarians vs Modern Liberals (or Progressives)

The primary difference between libertarians and modern liberals is the belief in negative vs positive rights. [Philosophers](#) and [political scientists](#) make a distinction between **negative and positive rights** (not to be confused with the distinction between [negative](#) and [positive liberties](#)). According to this view, *positive rights* usually oblige action, whereas *negative rights* usually oblige inaction. These obligations may be of either a [legal or moral](#) character.

Rights considered *negative rights* may include [civil and political rights](#) such as [freedom of speech](#), life, [private property](#), freedom from [violent crime](#), [freedom of religion](#), [habeas corpus](#), a [fair trial](#), freedom from [slavery](#). Rights considered *positive rights*, as initially proposed in 1979 by the Czech jurist [Karel Vasak](#), may include other civil and political rights such as [police protection of person and property](#) and the [right to counsel](#), as well as [economic, social and cultural rights](#) such as [food](#), [housing](#), [public education](#), [employment](#), [national security](#), [military](#), [health care](#), [social security](#), [internet access](#), and a minimum [standard of living](#). (Positive rights require the use of coercive force in order to bring them about.)

Most libertarians believe that positive rights violate the Non-Aggression Principle because they require aggression in order to be fulfilled. Requiring that the property or labor of one person be surrendered to someone else or to the state amounts to theft or slavery.

The Modern Libertarian Movement

An intellectual opposition really starts to develop in the era of the New Deal. Franklin Roosevelt becomes president in 1933. He says, "Give me the power you would give me if we were at war, and I will fix this depression. I will lead the country as an army." A lot of people like that idea.

We were deep in depression. But a lot of people didn't, and a movement in opposition to the New Deal starts that's based on constitutional liberty, individualism, and free enterprise.

Around that same time, but somewhat independently, the Austrian school of economics is developing, first in Austria, then other places. Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek start writing in the 1920s, 1930s. But at first, their books are published in German, so they're not really known in the wider world, not in England and America. But Austrian economics is developing. It develops the most powerful critique of socialism, which is not all that strong in America. But in Europe, the idea of socialism is very significant. And obviously, starting in 1917, the Soviet Union actually sees its state power.

The New Deal opposition includes, notably for libertarians, three amazing women who all wrote books and published them in 1943. And some people say this is when the modern libertarian movement started. In 1943, Rose Wilder Lane writes *The Discovery of Freedom*, Isabel Paterson writes *The God of the Machine*, and Ayn Rand, who becomes the most famous of these writers, writes *The Fountainhead*. They all knew each other. They all came from different parts of the world: Ayn Rand from St. Petersburg, Russia, Isabel Paterson from Western Canada, and of course Rose Wilder Lane from the little house on the prairie because her mother was Laura Ingalls Wilder. They all end up in New York at various times. They come to know each other. They write these books. A few people read them.

The next year, Friedrich Hayek, a future Nobel laureate in economics, writes *The Road to Serfdom*, his most popular and readable book. It's a big political sensation. It gets excerpted in the *Reader's Digest*, the country's largest magazine. Somebody publishes a cartoon version of *The Road to Serfdom*. A lot of people read it. Now when I say a lot of people, I'm not talking about what we consider a lot of people these days, but a lot more than had been reading any libertarian ideas.

1946, just three years after the three remarkable women, Leonard Reed forms the Foundation for Economic Education, the first free-market think tank. And he actually seems to be the person who started using the word libertarian to mean the ideas that we understand as modern libertarianism because he saw that liberal could no longer be used in that way. Friedrich Hayek, and even Milton Friedman a generation later, still prefer to be called liberals. But to a lot of people, the term liberal just no longer meant individual rights, limited government, and free enterprise. So Reed started saying libertarian is the word for these ideas. A few people read these books. A few of them go to places like New York University to study Austrian Economics.

Perhaps a larger number rally around the ideas that Ayn Rand is writing. And she writes a bigger book, *Atlas Shrugged*, in 1957. Technology was such in those days that first you had to go to the bookstore and get the book, and then you had to read it. And then if you wanted to get in touch with other objectivists, you had to put ads in magazines or something. And eventually, they organized groups where people would drive for many miles to get together, sitting around a

table or in a lecture hall to listen to a lecture on tape. They wouldn't even have a speaker because there are not many speakers. There's Ayn Rand. She doesn't travel much. And there's Nathaniel Branden, her disciple. But they give lectures and they record them on audio tape. And then people in Peoria and Nashville drive somewhere to sit in a hotel room or a personal home and listen to these lectures on tape. This small number of people continues to develop as the welfare State in America develops and as the Cold War develops. First, the notion of a constitutional republic, liberalism, still had to defeat the Nazis. Now it's engaged in a battle with the Soviet communist movement. Through that time, these books are being written. A few people are reading them.

1969 to 1971 is another point that you could call the birth of a real modern libertarian movement. 1969, there's a big split in the conservative student group Young Americans for Freedom. And all the libertarians leave and go form little libertarian organizations like the Society for Individual Liberty. 1971, the Libertarian Party is created. A lot of what's going on here, it seems to me, is what we call Vietnam, Watergate, and stagflation. Why did more people become libertarians in the 1970s? Well, it's not like any real intellectual like a Larry White or a Russell Roberts, economist you may know, said, "Because of Vietnam, Watergate, and stagflation, I have decided to become a Rothbardian libertarian." But the failure of the United States in Vietnam, the huge cost of that failed war, the corruption symbolized by Watergate in the Nixon administration, and then the breakdown of the government's attempt to micromanage the economy, which came to be known as stagflation. It had been thought that there was a trade-off between inflation and unemployment. If you have more inflation, you can bring down unemployment. But then you might get too much inflation, so you bring that down a little, and you'll get more unemployment. They tried that for a couple of decades, and they ended up with what came to be known as stagflation, a stagnant economy, no growth, few jobs, and inflation.

And so a lot of people wanted to look for an alternative economic system, and some of them discovered Austrian Economics. Others discovered Milton Friedman's Chicago School of Economics at that time. A lot of libertarian organizations created in 1970s, the Reason Foundation then, the Cato Institute, the Libertarian Party also. The libertarian party ran its first presidential candidates and started again drawing more people to this banner.

Also in the 1970s, there was a huge step forward for recognition of libertarian ideas in the intellectual world. I was in college when Hayek won the Nobel Prize in economics. This was stunning. We never thought a free-market economist could win this award from the Scandinavians, but he did. And two years later, Milton Friedman won the Nobel Prize in economics. And in fact, what we didn't know at the time was that over the next few decades, something like seven economists at the university of Chicago, all of them essentially libertarian, would win the Nobel Prize in economics. But when Hayek won and Friedman won it, I think it was in the year between those two Nobel Prizes that Robert Nozick the National Book Award for his book, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. So right there in the mid 1970s, an academic

community that has wanted to rule libertarian ideas, simply out of bounds, those are old 19th-century ideas, 18th-century ideas. Hubert Humphrey said of Barry Goldwater back in the 1960s, “Barry Goldwater is so handsome, 18th Century Fox wants to make a movie with him.” Now you might say it’s not really an insult to be called a man of the 18th century, a man who adheres to the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the American Revolution. But it was obviously intended to say, “These ideas about rugged individualism and limited government and free enterprise belong in the 18th century, not in the 20th century.” Suddenly, these prizes for the work of Hayek Nozick and Friedman really tell the academic community you can’t just dismiss these ideas. And you do start seeing more notice being paid to the challenge from libertarianism.

What UU and Libertarianism Have in Common

1. Both were founded outside the US
2. Both were prevalent with our nation’s founders
3. The US is uniquely fertile ground for both
4. Both are now head-quartered in the US
5. The Transcendentalists merged the two together