

A Proletariat of One: Libertarianism and the Psychosis of Authority

David L. Fisher

The Moral Injury Institute
2855 Beach Drive E.
Port Orchard 98366, WA, USA

e-mail: davidfisherenterprises@gmail.com

Abstract:

Libertarianism has a problem, perhaps an insurmountable one, and its problem lies squarely in the domain from which it is sourced: the intellectual and political elite of the West. As such, it rests on an ontological viewpoint far outside the purview and experience of quotidian man. Furthermore, it rests on an epistemology of the person as sovereign, Natural Law, which requires a concomitant education or understanding of the Classics, or at least self-awareness and the ability to think logically. Many non-intellectuals are either uninterested or incapable of following the Libertarian arguments of personal sovereignty and instead submit. This unconscious submission to the authority of a government, father figure, or other self-appointed “authority” relieves the individual of the psychological pain of breaking out of the herd. C. G. Jung (1875-1961) was adamant that to be an individual is a radical act: “To develop one’s own personality is indeed an unpopular undertaking, a deviation that is highly uncongenial to the herd, an eccentricity smelling of the cenobite, as it seems to the outsider [11, Para. 298]. Further, Alexander Hamilton (1755 or 1747-1804) noted that the elite are more than happy to have the masses submit to their authority without question as it advances their control: “a fondness for power is implanted in most men, and it is natural to abuse it when acquired” [9]. The rest of this article explores this psychosis of authority and how Libertarianism suffers in popularity as a result.

Keywords: libertarianism, depth psychology, political authority, natural law.

1. Introduction

Libertarianism has a problem, perhaps an insurmountable one, and its problem lies squarely in the domain from which it is sourced: the intellectual and religious elite of the West. As such, it rests on an ontological viewpoint far outside the purview and experience of quotidian man. Furthermore, it rests on

the person as sovereign, Natural Law. Though Libertarian intellectual antecedents precede the official formation of the Libertarian party in 1971, this article accepts the formation of the party on that date as a marker for its official existence and as a yardstick to examine its appeal to the body politic of the United States. Throughout its 48 years of existence as a cogent political movement, it has never reached the groundswell necessary to break into the mainstream. Its recent surge under Ron Paul's run for the presidency was co-opted by the Tea Party movement within the Republican party, effectively sounding its death knell in the wider public imagination. This is the closest the Libertarian party has come to a mainstream movement. This co-opting aside, why does Libertarianism as an idea and movement have such a hard time capturing the American public's attention? I posit that there is a psychosis of authority in the modern American polis. What is meant by a "psychosis of authority?" To set the context, the first move is a review of the ashlar of Libertarianism: Natural Law. From there, a depth psychological lens is used to frame an understanding of what authority means to the human psyche.

2. Unspoken Assumptions of Libertarianism

To begin, two unspoken assumptions of Libertarianism must be brought into the light and examined with an unblinking eye: namely the notion of the primacy of the individual and the self-reflectivity of the average individual.

First, let us explore the notion of individual primacy. Though this concept seems self-evident to many Libertarians, they forget what a radical act it was during the American revolution – what an absolute act of defiance to the authorities of both Church and king to declare: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" [21]. A little over a century later Lysander Spooner (1808-1887) echoes the "self-evident" sentiment of the *Declaration*: "honesty, justice, natural law, is usually a very plain and simple matter, easily understood by common minds" [22, p. 9]. Influential theologians also asserted the primacy of the individual – at least in respect to the authority of secular ruler and Church, specifically St. Thomas Aquinas (1274-1323) and Martin Luther (1483-1546). The rise of Communism in the early part of the 20th century and the resurgence of socialism in the imagination today's youth belie the notion that the American polis understands and internalizes the individualism inherent in the notion of Natural Law.

Another undeclared assumption is that people are generally self-reflective and self-governing. That, as Spooner asserts: "Children learn the fundamental principles of natural law at a very early age... that one child must not assume any arbitrary control or domination over another." Though outside the scope of this essay, it is probably safe to assume that children today do not learn the fundamentals of Natural Law at an early age and especially not in public schools. Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) hierarchy of needs would also challenge the assumption that children (or adults) are naturally self-reflective. In his seminal paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" [16] he posited that a pyramid of needs exists and that the needs near the top are built on the foundation of other a priori needs that must be satisfied. Thus, the lowest foundation of physiological needs such as food and water must be met before safety (both physical and psychological) needs can be met. Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850) made the same observation 170 years earlier: "Thanks to the non-intervention of the state in private affairs, our wants and their satisfactions would develop themselves in a logical manner. We would not see poor families seeking literary instruction before they have bread" [3, p. 3]) The top of Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization, is dependent on all physiological and lesser psychological needs being met first. Therefore, in Maslow's formulation people are not naturally self-reflective. C. G. Jung (1875-1961) would concur about the relative lack of reflexivity in modern man: "A rather more pessimistic view would not be unjustified either, since the gift of reason and critical reflection is not

one of man's outstanding peculiarities, and even where it exists it proves to be wavering and inconstant, the more so, as a rule, the bigger the political groups are" [13, p. 4].

To this point the focus has been to show that there are unconscious assumptions that many Libertarians take as a given. In fact, the point has been to challenge these assumptions that Natural Law is naturally understood by quotidian man. The focus now pivots to a short review of Natural Law and its antecedents.

3. Natural Law

What differentiates Natural Law and law? To answer this question, one first must have a definition of law. Law, in its generic sense, is a body of rule of action or conduct prescribed by controlling authority and having binding legal force. That which must be obeyed and followed by citizens subject to sanctions or legal consequences is a law [8, p. 884].

Of import to this inquiry, this widely accepted definition of law takes the ontological stance that there is a controlling authority yet what is this ethereal controlling authority? It is not evident from this definition and so a look to antiquity is in order.

In the Greek tradition, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle argued that there is a distinction between *physis* and *nomos*. Thus, law or custom (*nomos*) differs from place to place or culture to culture but nature (*physis*) is universal. Aristotle makes the universality claim explicit in *On Rhetoric*: "[aside from] particular laws that each people has set up for itself, there is a 'common law' or 'higher law' that is according to nature" [2, 1373b2-8]. Nature in this context was ascribed to transcendent forces or the Greek pantheon. Turning to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions the answer is that God is the law giver, that we are "endowed by our Creator." St. Thomas Aquinas dedicated considerable attention to developing Natural Law moral theory which he posited is derived from the rationality of humans: "the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human action" [1, Q. 90].

From these principles is derived a universal moral code, applicable to all humans. This moral Natural Law is held separate from law in the jurisprudence context; Spooner asks and answers what is law: "What then is legislation? It is an assumption by one man, or body of men, of absolute, irresponsible dominion over all other men whom they can subject to their power" [22 p. 27]. Spooner's analysis of law comports with the Bolshevik formulation of "who, whom." Bastiat (1850/2012) views 'law' much as the framers of the U.S. Constitution: as a negation of legalized plunder, or the right to self-defense: "What, then, is law? It is the collective organization of the individual right to lawful defense" and "Life, liberty, and property do not exist because men have made laws. On the contrary, it was the fact that life, liberty, and property existed beforehand that caused men to make laws in the first place" [3, p. 2].

Natural Law derived from theological reasoning posits that the only submission to outside authority is to God. This comports with *physis* in the Greek formulation for it points to a creator of our rational consciousness with an innate, universal formulation. This ontology can be worked out individually if only one puts one's mind to the task. Yet, here is another implicit assumption: people are educated and introspective enough to even begin thinking about themselves and the problems of human interaction and organization at any level, much less engaging with understanding themselves and their own individual stance towards authority. Does the average individual possess the concomitant education or understanding of the Classics, or at least self-awareness and the ability to think logically? Given the state of education in the United States today, with 1 out of 7 adults functionally illiterate [15], it is questionable to affirm the hypothesis that the average person possesses the wherewithal to understand or engage with arguments regarding the sovereignty of the individual, as this has always been the domain of the educated elites in the Western tradition. Logically then, most people are either incapable or uninterested in following the Libertarian arguments on personal sovereignty. Instead, they submit consciously or unconsciously to some arbitrary authority. This submission to the authority of a

government, father-figure, or other self-appointed “authority” relieves the individual from the psychological pain of breaking out of the herd. C. G. Jung (1875-1961) was adamant that to be an individual is a radical act: “To develop one’s own personality is indeed an unpopular undertaking, a deviation that is highly uncongenial to the herd, an eccentricity smelling of the cenobite, as it seems to the outsider” [11, Para. 298].

This pivot to the psychological forms the crux of this paper’s argument: that because questioning others’ claims of authority over oneself is psychologically painful, it is easier to go along with the status quo. Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) described it as the tension between *amor* and *Roma*: The man under the influence of the Lover does not want to stop at socially created boundaries. He stands against the artificiality of such things. His life is often unconventional and “messy” – the artist’s studio, the creative scholar’s study, the “go for it” boss’s desk. Consequently, because he is opposed to “law” in this broad sense, we see enacted in his life of confrontation with the conventional, the old tension between sensuality and morality, between love and duty, between as Joseph Campbell poetically describes it, “amor and Roma” – “amor” standing for passionate experience and “Roma” standing for duty and responsibility to law and order. [17, pp. 125-126]

An understanding of how difficult it is for the individual to separate from the masses requires a turn towards depth psychology, particularly what it has to say about the individual and authority. This is what I call a psychosis of authority.

4. A Pivot to Depth Psychology

Depth psychology is grounded in the roots of psychoanalysis and analytical psychology. Already mentioned is a giant of analytical psychology, C. G. Jung. The other is Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud and Jung had different conceptions on the nature and purpose of human consciousness and thus divergent views on the authority question. This question of authority in psychoanalysis is obliquely addressed by Thomas Szasz (1920-2012). Libertarians have been generally skeptical of psychiatry, particularly psychoanalytic psychology for years, for which there are some fundamentally good reasons. Szasz delineated how psychiatry became a weapon of first the moneyed classes in England and eventually the State in general [24]. In his seminal essay *The Myth of Mental Illness* [25] he questioned the notion of mental illness in its entirety. Given the continued abuse that psychiatry enables every day as a tool of the state’s monopoly on force, it is not hard to understand why. Enabled by legislation, police (among other armed state actors) can involuntarily commit any individual under state law, the model example being California’s section 5150 of the *Welfare and Institutions Code* [23]. For an especially egregious, contemporary involuntary commitment, see the case of Brandon Raub [20]. Other abuses include the Veterans Administration putting 34,500 on New York’s no-guns list [10]. Then there is the so-called Frankfurt School (for a perspective on the history of the Frankfurt School, see Rolf Wiggerhaus’ *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* [26]). The School was started with the express purpose of developing Marxist theory and the application of psychology to shape the masses. Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) shifted from pure Marxist theory to today’s more famous Critical Theory as a tool to bring about world Marxism. Today he is the most remembered thinker of the school and his Critical Theory is at the forefront of many humanities curricula. Critical Theory is the bedrock of today’s social justice warriors. Given this sordid application of psychiatry in service to the state, how does depth psychology differ from psychiatry and what does it have to say about the individual and the individual *vis a vis* outside authority?

To begin the investigation, it is instructive to turn to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud and his signature theory: The Oedipus complex. To put the Oedipus complex into context requires a review of Freud’s conception of the structure of the human psyche. He posited a tripartite view composed of the id, ego and super-ego [5]. The id was Freud’s nomenclature for the archaic instincts of biological life, such as sex and aggression and conceptually sits under the ego, though there

are parts of the ego submerged into the id. Stated differently the id is moderated by the ego. In Freud's view:

The functional importance of the ego is manifested in the fact that normally control over the approaches to motility devolves from it. Thus in its relationship to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The analogy may be carried further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own [5, pp. 10-11].

Framed differently, the ego frustrates the id but is not morally developed – this is the job of the super-ego. To use another analogy, the id functions much as the bad angel on one shoulder while the super-ego functions as the good angel on the other. In Freud's conception, the super-ego has a component of morality to it "A differentiation within the ego, which may be called the ego ideal or super-ego" [5, p. 12].

This model of the psyche is foundational to Freud's Oedipus complex. As a tragic figure in Greek mythology, Oedipus ends up unwittingly killing his father and marrying his mother. Viewing the psyche through this lens, Freud hypothesized that normal development involves a sexual tension between a male child, mother, and father in a triangle:

In its simplified form the case of a male child may be described as follows. At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis for his mother, which originally related to the mother's breast and is the prototype of an object choice on the anaclitic model; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile coloring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother [5, pp. 14-15].

For Freud then, the male child must initially submit to the authority of his father. Similarly, female children must submit to the authority of the mother's claim on the father's sexual attention. Thus, she must transition her relationship to her father from one rooted in sexuality to affection. What is clear here is that in Freud's view, the strong person wins; the parents are in a position of authority until such time as the child becomes sexually aware, transitions into adulthood, and accepts the responsibility to stand on their own freed from the bonds of parental authority. This freedom from parental authority comes with the new burden that non-neurotic adults must now submit to the authority of civilization. In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud makes this explicit "Human life in communities only becomes possible when a number of men unite together in strength to any single individual and remain united against all single individuals" [6, p. 72]. Here we see civilization conceptualized a mob arrogating a monopoly on violence. This comports with the Libertarian concept of the State. Freud was also contemptuous of a transcendent authority such as God, where moral authority is derived. His view on religion:

I was concerned [in *The Future of an Illusion*] much less with the deepest sources of the religious feeling than with what the common man understands by his religion – with the system of doctrines and promises which on the one hand explains to him the riddles of this world with enviable completeness, and, on the other, assures him that a careful Providence will watch over his life and will compensate him in a future existence for any frustrations he suffers here. The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the

figure of an enormously exalted father...the whole thing is so patently infantile, so foreign to reality, that to anyone whose attitude to humanity is friendly it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life [7, p. 22].

From this it is possible to adduce that Freud is neither a friend of Natural Law, nor a friend of the Libertarian principle of non-aggression, for it is obvious that Freud felt the child first must submit to the authority of his or her parents and then later in life to a mob that keeps the strong man individual in check thus reifying the primacy of the State over the individual negating Natural Law. However, while Freud may be considered the father of psychoanalysis, but C. G. Jung greatly expanded, amplified and eventually split from his mentor. The next section therefore turns to two of Jung's central tenants: the notion of individuation and the religious function of the psyche.

Jung contra Freud postulated that the individual psyche was oriented towards solving its dilemma of "why am I here" in a religious way. By this he did not mean that the individual had to subscribe to any particular religion or conception of God, rather, that it is incumbent upon the individual to recognize an internal submission to the nature of their own being. This is different from Freud's theory, where psychological submission was self-evidently a submission to an external authority. Jung describes the call to vocation, or in his lexicon, the setting onto the path of individuation as an individual submitting to his own nature. He explains:

There are not a few who are called awake by the summons of the voice, whereupon they are at once set apart from the others, feeling themselves confronted with a problem about which the others know nothing. In most cases it is impossible to explain to the others what has happened, for any understanding is walled off by impenetrable prejudices. "You are no different from anybody else," they will chorus or, "there's no such thing," and even if there is such a thing, it is immediately branded as 'morbid' [11, para. 308].

Those called however face backlash from the authority of the mob State: "He is at once set apart and isolated, as he has resolved to obey the law that commands him from within. 'His own law!' everybody will cry. But he knows better: it is the law" [11, Para. 304]. Here, we see a profound difference between Freud and Jung. Whether consciously or not, Jung has invoked the specter of Natural Law and placed it firmly within the individual's psyche. This process of awakening and hearing the call of one's psyche is what Jung referred to as individuation. Not coincidentally, in Jung's conception it is imperative that individuals individuate – that is to say enact a lifetime process of those who hear the clarion call of breaking from the herd. "To the extent that a man is untrue to the law of his being he has failed to realize his own life's meaning" [11, para. 314].

Jung advanced the primacy of the individual as counterbalance to the herd, for example, specifically responding to the ascension of Hitler arising from groupthink. "Insofar as society is itself composed of de-individualized human beings, it is completely at the mercy of ruthless individualists. Let it band together into groups and organizations as much as it likes – it is just this banding together and the resultant extinction of the individual personality that makes it succumb so readily to a dictator. A million zeros joined together do not, unfortunately, add up to one" [12, p. 301].

From this brief survey it is clear that Jung not only fervently believed in the primacy of the individual, he felt it was an imperative to civilization for individuals to individuate – to answer the call of vocation while separating from the mass of humanity. "This apparently unique life [Christ] became a sacred symbol because it is the psychological prototype of the only meaningful life, that is, of a life that strives for the individual realization – absolute and unconditional – of its own particular law. Well may we exclaim with Tertullian: *anima naturaliter christiana!*" [12, p. 204]

Pythagoras would agree. "No one is free who has not obtained the empire of himself. No man is free who cannot command himself" [18]. However, as Jung makes clear, very few obtain the empire of

themselves. Instead, the psychosis of authority rears its head in the average persons' submission to the state. This consent was the central conundrum Etienne de La Boettie (1530-1563) addressed in *The Politics of Obedience: A Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*:

I should like merely to understand how it happens that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations, sometimes suffer under a single tyrant who has no other power than the power they give; who is able to harm them only to the extent to which they have the willingness to bear with him; who could do them absolutely no injury unless they preferred to put up with him rather than contradict him. Surely a striking situation! Yet is so common that one must grieve the more and wonder the less at the spectacle of a million men serving in wretchedness, their necks under the yoke, not constrained by a greater multitude than they [4, pp. 40-41].

Bastiat's offered this incisive paragraph:

Man can live and satisfy his wants only by ceaseless labor; by the ceaseless application of his faculties to natural resources. This process is the origin of property. But it is also true that a man may live and satisfy his wants by seizing and consuming the products of the labor of others. This process is the origin of plunder. Now since man is naturally inclined to avoid pain – and since labor is pain in itself – it follows that men will resort to plunder whenever plunder is easier than work [3, p. 5].

He observes further that legal [State] plunder becomes irresistible to the masses. “Sometimes the law defends plunder and participates in it. Thus the beneficiaries are spared the shame, danger, and scruple which acts would otherwise involve” [3, p. 13].

5. Conclusion

This examination has now come full circle. The problem with Libertarianism's appeal to the masses is what Freud outlined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: that man is basically psychologically lazy and seeks the least resistant path to pleasure. Every political philosopher cited concurs in some way with this conclusion. If people are being plundered, not only do they consent to it, they aspire to be the plunderer in concordance with Freud, Bastiat, and de La Boeite. C. G. Jung frames the diagnosis differently yet has the same observation. Namely, it is rare for a person to separate himself from the masses and sustain the mental energy necessary to be true to himself, to individuate. Further, he points out that modern man no longer lives a philosophical life. “Today, our basic convictions have become increasingly rationalistic. Our philosophy is no longer a way of life, as it was in antiquity; it has turned into an exclusively intellectual and academic affair” [14, p. 72]. He concludes,

Far too little attention has been paid to the fact that our age, for all its irreligiousness, is hereditarily burdened with the specific achievement of the Christian epoch: *the supremacy of the word*, of the Logos, which stands for the central figure of our Christian faith. The word has literally become our god and so it has remained, even if we know of Christianity only from hearsay. Words like “society” and “State” are so concretized that they are almost personified. In the opinion of the man in the street, the “State,” far more than any king in history, is the inexhaustible giver of all good; the “State” is invoked, made responsible, grumbled at, and so on and so forth. Society is elevated to the rank of a supreme ethical principle; indeed, it is credited with positively creative capacities [14, p. 75].

This then, is the problem facing Libertarianism: resisting arbitrary authority and taking responsibility for oneself is psychologically exhausting to the many. This psychosis of authority makes it psychologically easier to submit to the State, especially as we have moved away from living our philosophy. The masses have been placated with their breads, circuses, and the promises to spend other people's money for their benefit. I wish I were as optimistic as Murray Rothbard (1926-1995) who felt that the prime directive of Libertarians was to “*debamboozle the public on the entire nature and procedures of the despotic State*” [emphasis in the original] [19, p. 35]. The fact that the masses have been bamboozled throughout history and very rarely show any sign of withdrawing consent to the authority of the State leaves me slightly pessimistic. However, the fight against statism must be fought: *Dum Spiro, pugnare!*

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