

Future Societies: Libertarian Alternative

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Suppose you are writing a Science Fiction story set in the future. You want one or more model societies to use as background and possibly contrast. One you consider is libertarian. What should it look like; more importantly, what should it *not* resemble.

Libertarian-like societies have been presented by Heinlein, LeGuin, Russell, Kornbluth, Anderson and others. None were written in light of the recent “explosion” of libertarian theory (since 1969); they were the author’s idea of a free society independent of the new scholarly literature and movement debates. Circa 1969 even my own Rann Gold Series is obsolete. One has the extreme of Larry Niven’s “Cloak of Anarchy,” which resembles libertarian thought just close enough to evoke howls of “smear” from the positions attributed to the anarchists not in fact held by radical libertarians.

What Do Libertarians Think?

If you’re going to write dialogue for libertarians, you should have some ideas of their precepts, jargons and obsessions. I’m not going to explain the philosophy here, just the *character* traits. Naturally, as individualists, libertarians have a great deal or variety and a great deal of differences between them, but there are some salients in common.

Libertarians are morality-conscious. Although a free speech, laissez-faire society is a result of libertarianism, libertarians are strongly concerned with morality. Usually their libertarian position derives from some higher precept: Natural Law, Objectivism, Christianity, or, in the case of the Stirnirites, *denial* of universal morality. Thus you could easily show a group of libertarians in a saloon or around a campfire or in a drawing room vociferously challenging each other in heated debate—but turning as one in scorn on any intruder who dared suggest resolving a disagreement by force, then happily returning to their strenuous arguments. Of course, some libertarians will disagree about *this*, and sit outside the talk sessions attempting to achieve a mellow state.

Libertarians are voluntarists. While a libertarian army is conceivable, and would probably be organized as a highly efficient business company with highly autonomous units using a high degree of independent judgment down the “ranks,” it would exist as anything more than a rudimentary appendix only if a clear and present danger (large State nearby) also existed. Some fans suggested in their fanfic a “libertarian police” pouncing on non-libertarians, exiling them, jailing them, or at least cutting off business with them (including feeding and sheltering). This is as absurd as a portrayal of a Christian medieval society with a “Christians for Satan” club. One might portray an “ex” libertarian society which has been taken over by statists and corrupting the name, but they will be recognized by many of the character is your society (probably from the underground).

Libertarians are marketeers. Even in the very “Left” anarchy of Anarres, Ursula LeGuin was forced to introduce a private press for her rebels to dissent from the collectivist anarchist line. The vast majority of libertarians today, even of socialistic leanings, expect a free trade society. Most see a highly commercial and technological organization in a libertarian society and view the very existence of government as grit in the gears and highly inefficient (as well as immoral).

Any attempt at business interference would strike your characters as counter-productive, competition would be exalted, and crime against life and property would arouse the populace immediately.

Libertarians are varied. While libertarians have many rigid ideologies as well as free-form positions there is no monolithic party line... which brings us to the next section.

What Kinds of Libertarian Societies Are There?

In *principle* all libertarian societies are alike. Culturally, however, one may not only conceive of many different libertarian societies but every libertarian society by its nature will have numerous subsocieties. From an SF author's point of view the use of a libertarian society for a setting offers the widest latitude to the imagination. Invent any non-coercive philosophy or religion and there's no reason why you cannot have several practitioners of it in your society.

A perfectly reasonable example would be to have an elite, Dorsai-like group of mercenaries coexisting on a planet (a "free port" perhaps with the other planets state-controlled) with pacifist businessmen, clannish communal farmers, and guildish scientists and engineers. Throw in a libertine entertainment district, some wandering freaks both religious and secular, and a few refugee revolutionaries from the other systems and presto! You've got more interactions, character growth, contrasts and "conflict" than you could possibly use, not to mention ample ideas for humour by juxtaposition.

In one sense, every individual in a libertarian society is an autonomous unit. To know one is to know almost nothing about the rest. In another sense, there cannot be more than one libertarian Society in the sense of distinctly separate units with defined borders or boundaries. Anyone can go anywhere he, she, or it can afford or get invited. Then again, one group may decide to withdraw from the rest and isolate them— selves anyway.

No Politics, No Wars, No Taxes, ...

For a writer, conflict is especially important. Alas, a libertarian society is particularly lacking in it. No unemployment since one needs a minimum wage law to keep people unemployed. No wars because you need governments to wage them. No elections or coups because there are no government leaders. No oppression because there are no police. No serious crime because property is protected efficiently as with any other business. No taxes because there is no government to collect or demand them.

Of course there are still challenges to living, over-coming natural obstacles, making money, innovating, personal tragedies and fights, eternal triangles and romances, errors and corrections, inventions and crackpottery. But if you want large scale social ills, you'll have to add a State or two.

There are problems you will have to deal with having a libertarian society bordering a statist one, such as why the State's subjects put up with it when they see the example of a working anarchy next door. But one can be imaginative about such things.

What Libertarian Societies Are Not

A libertarian society must have come from somewhere. Conceivably, it might have arisen on some alien planet never having known the State and discovering the non-aggression principle

early. One can have some obvious drama when this innocent society runs into their first statists—such as Terrans!

But if it arose from our present society, then the people must have developed libertarian behavior modes. Note I did not say libertarian theories. In order for a libertarian society to have developed, the libertarians in thought must have become libertarians in deed. This has nothing to do with signing up, voting, or declarations.

A society becomes libertarian when the populace refuses, en masse, to obey the State, to submit under threat, to pay taxes, to use State currency, or to accept handouts and subsidies. This self-sufficiency will be maintained as long as the society is, and this will be reflected in all customs, transactions, traditions and even the romances of the libertarians.

Thus behavior patterns at variance with an individual self-governance—of children, of parents, even of the “handicapped”—will be tolerated and could be found—but they would be clearly noted as aberrations.

Alien Libertarian Societies

The construction of libertarian alien societies has been about as common (or uncommon) as those of Terran human ones. Asimov had an anarchist society in *The Gods Themselves* (though I surprised him in an elevator by pointing it out to him); Anderson in *Winter of the World* (although the aliens were ex-human mutants). Many others mention alien societies in passing but “forget” to give them a government or politics.

Libertarianism is based on individual intelligence (free will) and its interaction with matter (property). Hence any beings with the smarts and material possessions can have a libertarian society. Whether or not they will be more or less likely to than humans are is the subject for a nice long letter or mailing comment debate. For starters, Anderson thought that mutants were more capable than humans to “handle anarchy” (*op. cit.*).

Since Ursula LeGuin has both functioning human anarchies and alien societies in her Ekumen, it will be interesting to see what she does with the interactions. Other well-known authors currently of libertarian leanings whose future works should be observed for anarchies are Heinlein, Van Vogt, Bester, Wilson (both), Moorcock and maybe even Richard E. Geis.

Pros you would *not* expect an anarchy from (except inadvertently) are Niven and Pournelle, Asimov, Herbert, and Reynolds. I don’t know what to expect of RA. Lafferty.

CONCLUDING DETAILS

There are a lot of technical questions one might want to follow up if building a libertarian society in close detail. There is simply no room to delve into all the possibilities. For example, how would a libertarian society fight a state that appeared suddenly? What kind of heavy philosophical debates would members of the libertarian society get hung up on? How could garbage be collected and murder mysteries solved? The answers to all these is that it depends on the context you have developed.

For those of you wanting expert consulting on libertarian technicalities, contact me at NLE. This article was written simply to prevent the most obvious errors and inadvertent smears (all

smears of libertarianism will henceforth be assumed advertent!). You may now start writing; class dismissed.

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