



ANTI-WAR?

A REJOINDER TO ANTIWAR.COM, LEW ROCKWELL, TOM DILORENZO, AND THE MISES CAUCUS OF THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY

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Abstract

To be opposed to war, to all war, sounds eminently reasonable. War is a horrible undertaking, not only for the soldiers who lose their lives pursuing it, but, also, even more tragic, for the civilians who are no part of it, and perish from it anyway. To be in favor of war sounds, at the outset, like the view of a particularly nasty misanthrope. And, yet, on the basis of libertarianism, properly understood, it is improper to oppose all wars. Rather, we must distinguish between proper and improper wars. If country A gratuitously, with no justification whatsoever, launches a military attack on country B, it is indeed unwarranted. However, if B engages in a defensive war in response to A's improper attack, B is engaging in a just war. The only people who oppose all wars, indeed, all violence, are pacifists, and libertarianism, the basis upon which the present essay is built, is not a synonym for pacifism.

Keywords: War; defense; offense; libertarianism

1 INTRODUCTION

Libertarianism is based upon three foundations. First, the non-aggression principle. The NAP declares it shall be illegal for anyone to initiate violence against anyone else. If they do so, they should be punished to the full extent of the law.

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Thus, only laws against murder, rape, theft, arson, kidnapping, slavery, fraud, et.al. are justified. Second, private property rights based upon initial homesteading of virgin land, and subsequently predicated on any voluntary interaction, such as buying, selling, renting, gambling, gift giving, investing, bartering, etc. Third, free association: no one should be compelled to associate with anyone else against his will. Thus, secession would always be justified, at least *ceteris paribus*.¹

¹ It is important to add the caveat that other things much be at least roughly equal. For, suppose, that the seceding provinces, or states, will be able to perpetuate great evil if they are freed from their masters, the central

state, whereas, as present, under the control of the latter, they are rendered impotent. Then reassessment must be called for.



What is the libertarian perspective on violence in general? If it is unleashed at an unwilling recipient, it constitutes assault and battery, and is a crime. If both parties agree to it, as in boxing or voluntary sado-masochism, it is not. What is the libertarian perspective on war? Whoever initiates it is a criminal; whoever fights back in self-defense, is not.

These comments seem pretty straight-forward. They are no more and no less than logical implications of the three basic principles of libertarianism, particularly the NAP. And yet, and yet. There are the leaders of several high profile and prestigious libertarian organizations, who ought to know better, who articulate views that are incompatible with these very foundations of this philosophy.

In section II we criticize antiwar.com for its mislabeling. Section III is given over to a censure the motto of LewRockwell.com. The burden of section IV is to condemn the Mises Caucus of the Libertarian Party for a similar violation of linguistic clarity. The thesis of section V is that Tom DiLorenzo is guilty of a similar error. We conclude in section VI.

2 ANTIWAR.COM

Consider, first, Antiwar.com. It is one of the most libertarian organizations on the face of the earth. In many ways, it is head and shoulders above any other libertarian establishment in that it focuses, solely, on just about the worst occurrence afflicting mankind. But it errs in an important manner. Its very name is incompatible with libertarianism. Followers of this philosophy cannot logically oppose war per se. They can only reject offensive war, not the defensive variety, thereof.

Antiwar.com if it wishes to be considered libertarian, is misnamed. Only pacifists are truly anti war. Some libertarians may well, also be pacifists, but this is hardly a requirement. To think so is to engage in thick libertarianism of a pacifist variety.

3 LEWROCKWELL.COM

This flaw holds true, also, for the motto of LewRockwell.com, another prestigious libertarian blog. Its adage is: “ANTI-STATE•ANTI-WAR•PRO-MARKET.” It is the second of these, “anti-war,” that is problematic. There is nothing wrong at all with anti-statism nor free markets, certainly not from a libertarian perspective.

What is wrong with that, pray tell? Opposing war will sound just fine, thank you, in the ears of most decent people. Who, after all, can favor war?

However, we libertarians are *not* anti-war. We only, properly, oppose *offensive* war. In sharp contrast, we favor defensive wars. For example, wars of secession.² This follows, directly, from one of our three basis principles, the third of them. What are they? First, is the non-aggression principle. It should be illegal to threaten or initiate violence. Second, private property rights should be based upon initial homesteading, and anything voluntary after that. Third, the law of free association; no one should be compelled to associate with anyone else against his will. So, if you want to separate from someone else, you have every right to do so. If they prevent you from so doing, by using coercion, it is legitimate to make war against them.

Ditto for LewRockwell.com’s motto opposing war, all war. Some wars, defensive ones, are fully justified, in this philosophy.

A supposed libertarian opposition to war, all war that is, strictly speaking is thus not the proper libertarian position. Only opposition to offensive war is compatible with this philosophy. As a matter of fact, libertarianism favors defensive war. The greatest libertarian of them all, Mr. Libertarian, favored two wars: that of the thirteen colonies to separate from Great Britain, and that of the South to seceded from the North in 1861.

But wars of secession hardly exhaust all just wars. Suppose that country A gratuitously, with no justification at all, invades country B. What should be the libertarian position on this matter? It is surely to favor B and oppose A. Only the pacifist rejects B’s right to defend itself. It cannot be

² No less a libertarian than Murray N. Rothbard, widely acknowledged as “Mr. Libertarian,” favored the war of secession of the 13 colonies against the England in

1776, and the secession of the South against the North in 1861. See Stromberg, 1979.

denied that some libertarians are also pacifists. However, it strains credulity to think that this must apply to all supporters of this political philosophy. Suppose that at the end of the war B occupies some territory that previously belonged to A. Must B then return to its previous borders, and give up this real estate it has conquered? Not if libertarian punishment theory is to be respected.

The proper libertarian position is thus not anti war. Rather, it is an anti-invasive war, and favors defensive war.

4 THE MISES CAUCUS OF THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY.

Consider the views on this matter of the Mises Caucus of the Libertarian Party. In a recent missive they have described themselves as follows: "... radical decentralists who oppose war, central banking, lockdowns, and globalism" (Harris, 2024)

But it cannot possibly be overemphasized libertarians need not at all oppose every possible war. Very much to the contrary, we can favor defensive wars, all of them. Defensive war is only and merely a type of self-defense writ large and thus is entirely justified. Yes, it is a nice sounding shorthand to be opposed to "war" but it is not compatible with this philosophy.

Here is a letter that I wrote to this group, in response to theirs to me:

From: LP Mises Caucus
<newsletter@misescaucus.com>
Sent: Saturday, April 27, 2024 5:47 PM
To: wblock@loyno.edu
Subject: Should the LP be "liberal" or libertarian?
4/27/24

Dear LPMC:

You say this, we are: "radical decentralists who oppose war, central banking, lockdowns, and globalism."

But that is not quite right. We are not necessarily pacifists, as "opposing war" would imply. Rather, we oppose offensive war, but favor defensive war. For example, in the war between the 13 colonies and the UK in 1775, we favored the defensive war of the former, correct?

Unhappily they vouchsafed me no response, at least not by the time of this writing, 5/17/24, almost one month later.

5 TOM DILORENZO.

Last but not least in terms of erroneous interpretations of libertarian theory is Dr. Thomas DiLorenzo, an eminent economist and historian. He is also the President of the Mises Institute, one of the pre-eminent thinks tanks which study, espouse and promote the libertarian philosophy.

Here is letter from him to the present author, followed by my response.

From: Tom DiLorenzo <tomd@mises.org>
Sent: Monday, April 15, 2024 10:03 AM
To: Walter Block <wblock@loyno.edu>
Subject: Senior Fellow

Walter:

Since your views on war have become so fundamentally incompatible with the mission of the Mises Institute you are no longer a senior fellow of the Mises Institute.

--

Dr. Thomas DiLorenzo
PRESIDENT, THE MISES INSTITUTE
tomd@mises.org | 334.321.2114
MISES INSTITUTE
518 West Magnolia Avenue
Auburn, Alabama 36832-4501

From: Walter Block <wblock@loyno.edu>
Sent: Monday, April 15, 2024 11:58 AM
To: 'Tom DiLorenzo' <tomd@mises.org>
Subject: RE: Senior Fellow

Dear Tom:

I greatly regret this. I have been a Senior Fellow at the MI for decades now.

I greatly regret that there is room at the MI for divergent opinions on several important issues, but not war.

For example, both Murray Rothbard and Ron Paul are welcomed, even though they had opposite views on abortion, the former prochoice, the latter prolife. Here is yet another case: Hans Hoppe and Gary North have very different views on homosexuality (the latter went so far as to call for their death, the former wants them back in the closet), while Ron

Hamowy, Ralph Raico and Justin Raimondo had very different views on this matter. All were always welcomed at the Mises Institute.

In any case, I regard you as a friend of mine and hope and trust this departure of mine from the MI will not in the slightest negatively impact that relationship. I hope that in future we can again co author something together on any subject in which we agree, which I think is everything under the sun except war.

Please clarify my new status. Does this mean I am disinvited from the Supporters Summit in October in Hilton Head? Can I still blog on LRC? Will I be welcome at future AERC meetings (I promised Lew I would keep a low profile on war at the last AERC meeting and I did keep my word)? What about Mises U? Etc.

A word of clarification. There is not a “dime’s worth of difference” between me and the MI on war. We all support defensive wars, and oppose offensive wars. All good libertarians must necessarily take this position. Our only divergence is with regard to the present, specific, war, between Israel and its enemies, concerning which is which.

Best regards,

Walter

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Unhappily, Tom DiLorenzo, too, has not seen fit to respond to my letter of response to this missive of his. I would only add that the dispute between us has, literally, nothing to do with “war” per se. I regard it as no more than a typographical error on his part to characterize it in that manner. All eminent libertarians, certainly including him,

oppose offensive war, but favor the defensive variety thereof.

Rather, the undeniable fact of the matter is that we seriously diverge on a specific war: the one between Israel and Hamas, which was begun on October 7, 2023, a day that shall live forever in infamy. Dr. DiLorenzo, along with many other leaders of the Mises Institute, maintain that Israel was in the wrong in this conflagration. I, in very sharp contrast take the very opposite position.³

6 CONCLUSION

What, then, should be done to ameliorate this mislabeling? It is simple. The organization antiwar.com should change its name to anti-offensivewar.com. The motto of the Mises Institute should be altered to ANTI-STATE•ANTI-OFFENSIVEMARKET•PRO-MARKET.” The Mises Caucus of the Libertarian Party should announce, instead of their initial statement, that they are: “... radical decentralists who oppose *offensive* war, central banking, lockdowns, and globalism.”⁴

Of course, there are arguments any such changes. For one thing, the plain “war” nomenclature is hoary with tradition. The anti-war phraseology has been used almost since time immemorial, at least in the libertarian community. Antiwar.com has been used since it first began and the Mises Institute has been calling for anti-war since its very inception. That is one reason in behalf of not disturbing the status quo. Another is that the alternative suggested herein is at best awkward, and at worst, perhaps, actually off-putting. Anti-offensivewar.com just does not ring well to the ear, or trip off the lips anywhere near as well as does antiwar.com. Ditto with changing the motto on LewRockwell.com, or asking the Mises Caucus to rephrase.

However, there are far more important considerations for libertarians than adhering to tradition or aesthetics. One of them is our unwillingness to commit fraud. If the foregoing analysis is true, and it is, then it is the case that the present situation constitutes mislabeling. So, unless verbiage that better complies with aesthetic

³ Block, 2024A, 2024B; Block and Futerman, 2021, 2023, 2024; Fischer and Block, 2021; Futerman and Block, 2023, 2024.

⁴ A careful analysis of “lockdowns” would take us far too afield from the topic of the present paper, but these people could profitably consult Block, 2013, 2020A, 2020B.

considerations can be concocted, I urge that this marketing proposal be adopted. No less than compliance with libertarian principle is at stake.

What suggestions do I have for Professor DiLorenzo? He might consider becoming a bit more clear on why he is throwing a staunch libertarian under the Mises Institute bus.

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