

## BOOKS

[*Radicals for Capitalism: A Freewheeling History of the Modern American Libertarian Movement*, Brian Doherty, PublicAffairs, 741 pages]

# Enemies of the State

By Daniel McCarthy

THE HISTORIAN JOHN LUKACS has remarked on the peculiarity of American conservatives who “believe in Progress even more than liberals” do. Like Ronald Reagan, they subscribe—at least implicitly—to Thomas Paine’s belief that “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.” Libertarians, who trace their lineage to the free-market classical liberals of the 19th century, have for the last 30-odd years been more progressive still, hailing the advance of technologies from the Internet to cloning for their potential to make the world new and to free men from the manacles of custom and government.

That’s one kind of libertarianism, anyway—what former *Reason* editor Virginia Postrel calls “dynamism.” It was, and maybe still is, the unofficial creed of Silicon Valley, and indeed, the link between libertarianism and the wired generation is made explicit in the person of Louis Rosetto, founder of *Wired* magazine, who as a Columbia University student in 1971 brought the philosophy of open minds and open markets into the pages of the *New York Times Magazine* with a cover story announcing “The New Right Credo: Libertarianism.” (“The movement is made!” exclaimed Murray Rothbard, Mr. Libertarian himself, over that coup.) The libertarian affinity for science fiction—from Robert Heinlein and Ayn Rand to Robert Anton Wilson of the absurdist *Illuminatus!* series—further attests to the movement’s futuristic disposition.

Doherty’s book, a massive, fact-packed history of more than five decades of libertarian thought and activism, serves as a reminder that this seemingly future-oriented philosophy has a rich and fascinating past. And what’s more, the libertarians of 30 or more years ago were not always optimists; nor were they progressive even when they were forward-looking. Some, like Karl Hess, the Goldwater speechwriter turned New Left radical and libertarian guru, were gadget-geeks alright—but of a different sort. *Community Technology* was the name of one of Hess’s books, and that was his passion—rooftop urban hydroponic gardens in Adams Morgan and, later, do-it-yourself living in rural West Virginia. When Hess received no takers on an offer to trade his library of political philosophy for more practical implements, he concluded, “The collective political wisdom of the ages was not worth a good set of forged-steel hand tools.” Ralph Borsodi, the “back to the land” movement leader who inspired many libertarians, might have said the same thing.

Fundamentally, libertarianism—popular perceptions and the hobbies of its exponents notwithstanding—is not about technology or progress, one way or the other, but about freedom, specifically freedom from the State. In the American context, that idea has always had some overlap with larger agendas. Doherty skips over the libertarian qualities in the thought of such prominent figures as Jefferson and Paine—those, he suggests, have been covered by others—and instead begins his account with the peculiarly American anarchists of the latter half of the 19th century, men like Benjamin Tucker and Lysander Spooner and women like the individualist feminist Voltairine de Cleyre. These “unterrified Jeffersonians” took seriously Thoreau’s observation that if the best government is that which governs least, then “that which governs least is no government at all.” Doherty’s first chapter shows well that American libertarianism is no 20th-cen-

tury innovation—nor is it an import from Europe.

But European émigrés, three in particular, re-established American libertarianism in the mid-20th century in the aftermath of the New Deal and the rise of garrison state. In the early 1940s, the writers of the so-called Old Right were liberty’s idiosyncratic spokesmen (and women—Doherty isn’t indulging in tokenism when he highlights Isabel Paterson and Rose Wilder Lane, women who made more comprehensive arguments for liberty than their male contemporaries). But they were dying off quickly, and following the “Keynesian revolution” in economics a more systematic defense of free markets was needed. It would be supplied by two Austrians, the economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, and a Russian, the novelist Ayn Rand. While the Old Right represented a rearguard action against the welfare-warfare state, Austrian economics and Randian philosophy opened new fronts in the war against collectivism. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Rand’s novels *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), and the many works of Mises, most importantly *Human Action* (1949), rallied America’s disheartened antistatists at the high tide of modern liberalism.

The “Austrian” school of economics represented almost the last and certainly the most intransigent expression of *laissez-faire* in the modern world, and it is thanks largely to the Austrians that libertarianism and free-market economics are so closely linked today. Mises, born in Lemberg (now Lvov, in Ukraine) in 1881 and raised in Vienna, was de facto dean of the Austrian school, having studied under leading Austrian economist and former finance minister Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk. Hayek, though never formally Mises’ student, was nonetheless a protégé of sorts, profoundly influenced by Mises’ writings and a junior colleague of his in the Austrian Chamber of Commerce.

Both men fled Austria as the country fell into Hitler’s orbit. Hayek headed to

the London School of Economics, where he wrote a short, popular book that would galvanize America upon its publication in 1944. *The Road to Serfdom* showed how Nazi totalitarianism had arisen in stages—and how it could happen here. Mises, meanwhile, first sought refuge in Geneva then emigrated to the United States in 1940. He found his uncompromising laissez-faire views and “Austrian” methodology—which treats economics as a logical rather than an empirical science—unwelcome among American academics. Only the support of private benefactors, who established a chair for him at New York University’s business school (the economics department wouldn’t have him), secured him a permanent post. Hayek encountered similar difficulties when he left LSE for the University of Chicago in 1950: he too was denied appointment to the economics department and instead joined Chicago’s interdisciplinary Committee on Social Thought.

From these seemingly inauspicious beginnings grew not one but two or even three intellectual movements. American students and admirers of Mises such as Murray Rothbard, a Columbia University graduate student, extended the work of their mentor and converted others, so that today the Austrian tradition flourishes in the United States, with strongholds at George Mason University and the Ludwig von Mises Institute in Auburn, Alabama—though even now, warns George Mason’s Peter Boettke, “You get involved in it and you’re like in the *X-Files* of academics.”

Through Rothbard, the transplantation of the Austrian tradition to the United States also gave rise to a reinvigorated libertarian political philosophy: Rothbard rightly emerges from Doherty’s narrative as one of the giants of modern libertarianism, both for his intellectual work (books such as *Man, Economy, and State* and the libertarian primer *For a New Liberty*) and for his movement-building—Rothbard named and helped establish the Cato Institute and was at one time deeply involved in the Libertarian Party. He also published a highly influential series of newsletters and small journals and sought, at various times, to build bridges to the Old Right and the New Left.

Austrian economics was also pivotal to the development of the conservative movement, though that is a story beyond the scope of Doherty’s book. As it is, these 741 densely packed pages can barely contain the libertarian story by itself. Regrettably, Doherty has little room to investigate the conjunctions and disjunctions between libertarianism, conservatism, and liberalism. But he does show the right-wing origins of many of the early libertarians. Rothbard, for example, as a Jewish student at Columbia, horrified his peers by organizing a Students for Strom Thurmond chapter, so staunchly did he believe in states’ rights. Similarly, the businessmen who admired Mises and supported the first free-market think tank, the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), were mostly right-of-center Chamber of Commerce types—though Doherty

reveals that the straight-laced businessmen of FEE had a spiritually adventurous side belied by their buttoned-down image. The hippies of the 1960s weren’t the first to discover New Age spirituality—or psychedelics.

That aside, libertarians are not “hippies of the Right,” as Ayn Rand, disowning her spiritual offspring, once called them. The libertarian students who followed Rothbard and Hess in the 1960s and 1970s were more like their counterparts in Students for a Democratic Society or Young Americans for Freedom than the flower children. That’s not to say there was any shortage of young men—and occasionally young women—who wanted to “live liberty” and tried to do so by adopting names like “Skye D’Aureous” and planning utopian communities or proto-survivalist retreats into the wilderness. Doherty provides wonderfully detailed accounts of these sorts of characters.

He is at his best, however, as an institutional historian showing who paid whom. Doherty details the work of the most important funding father of the libertarian movement, Kansas oil billionaire Charles Koch, who along with his brother David provided the seed money and early financing for the Cato Institute and Libertarian Party, among other projects. The Kochs have shaped the libertarian movement to a degree that is hard to overstate, though other individuals and institutions—most notably the now-defunct Volker Fund, which supported scholars like Rothbard in the 1950s and ‘60s—also played indispensable philanthropic roles.

Facts he has in abundance, but analysis is not Doherty’s strong suit. He develops only faint themes and never provides a satisfactory answer to the most basic question: Why? Why should the average reader care about this movement? Why did men like Mises and Rothbard—who was relegated to the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute for most of his career—sacrifice so much for the cause of liberty? The latter may not be a question Doherty is inclined to ask simply because his own sympathies lie with gradualist libertarians

## MOVING?

### Changing your address?

Simply go to **The American Conservative** website, [www.amconmag.com](http://www.amconmag.com). Click “subscribe” and then click “address change.”

To access your account make sure you have your TAC mailing label. You may also subscribe or renew online.

If you prefer to mail your address change send your TAC label with your new address to:

**The American Conservative**  
Subscription Department  
P.O. Box 9030  
Maple Shade, NJ 08052-9030

who have been more willing to compromise with the mainstream, an approach that netted Nobel Prizes for both Hayek and Milton Friedman.

To Doherty, Friedman is perhaps the most heroic, and certainly the most influential, libertarian of all, a man who helped convince Nixon to end conscription and who brought libertarianism to millions through his biweekly *Newsweek* column and PBS documentary "Free to Choose." But while Rothbard and Rand were fired by a passion for natural rights, Friedman saw the case for liberty in simple utilitarian terms: freedom just works better.

There is much more to Doherty's book, too much in fact for this review to cover. The author capably limns the differences between the Austrian and Chicago schools of economics, for example. A passing remark on Rand, applying to her the Burkean idea of the "moral imagination"—that is, literature's ability to shape human ideals and character—is equal parts tantalizing and provocative. And there are dozens, even hundreds, of other threads within *Radicals for Capitalism*, all of them derived from meticulous research. Despite its flaws, this book is a stunning achievement.

*Radicals for Capitalism* shows that libertarianism is not at all a species of techno-utopianism; "dynamism" is but one facet of an astonishingly pluralistic tradition. And Doherty foresees more diversification in the future as libertarianism becomes further popularized—or further watered-down and compromised, as some might see it. It seems to me, however, that Doherty misses at least one great change already in the offing. With the failure of the grand ideological projects of the Right—from the culture war to the war in Iraq—many chastened conservatives may at last be coming around to the view that the government that governs best really is that which governs least. It used to be that a libertarian who grew up became a Republican. Now it might be the other way around. ■

*Daniel McCarthy is senior editor of ISI Books.*

[*War Made New: War, Technology, and the Course of History: 1500 to Today, Max Boot, Gotham Books, 624 pages*]

## On War It's Not

By Martin Sieff

HISTORICAL SURVEYS of war and the way technological developments change the way it is fought are common—from the tours de force of major military historians like Martin Van Creveld and William O'Neill to potboilers marketed to 12-year-old boys. In his new book, Max Boot certainly aspires to be among the former, and the enthusiastic recommendations on the book's dust jacket from no less than Sen. John McCain, Robert Kaplan, retired Lt. Gen. Bernard Trainor, and Paul Kennedy certainly add to this impression. But *War Made New* is remarkably superficial and filled with the most extraordinary lacunae. It ignores—by accident or design—the most important developments in modern military technology.

Boot follows the familiar pattern of taking supposedly pivotal battles that changed military history, describing them in a dramatic and easily accessible outline, and then briefly discussing the forces that were their deciding factors. Yet his choice of battles is very bizarre. No chapter in his book covers any major battle of World War I. The Korean War and the Vietnam War are ignored, even though the former is a classic example of a theme Boot celebrates: the superiority of militaries with advanced technology.

With such technology in Korea, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps virtually annihilated the Chinese forces that vastly outnumbered them. Vietnam was different: there, the most advanced military technology, however profusely used, could not end a politically and tactically complex guerrilla conflict. Though the latter example is quite relevant to the United States' conundrums

in Iraq, Boot attempts no significant discussion of the topic. Nor does he discuss any of the anticolonial guerrilla wars, which defined major conflicts for most of the second half of the 20th century, or the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, which demonstrated the vulnerability of close support aircraft and main battle tanks to handheld missiles fired by poorly trained conscript soldiers.

But Boot does include a stirring account—filled with simplistic martial clichés that would have made Richard Harding Davis blush—of the combination of horse cavalry and high tech that supposedly worked unprecedented wonders in 2001 to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan. The trouble is, as Boot never notes, that conquering Afghanistan is extremely easy. The British did so three times in just over 80 years. In 1979, the Red Army pulled it off 20 times faster than American and Afghan allied forces did in 2001.

There was nothing epochal or revolutionary about the way the 2001 campaign was fought. In fact, it was disastrously bungled. The squeamishness and incompetence of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his right-hand man, Paul Wolfowitz, meant that insufficient U.S. Special Forces were used in the Tora Bora and Anaconda operations, allowing the key command cadres of al-Qaeda to escape—a strategic development with most disastrous consequences for the long-term war on terrorism.

Boot's chapter on Iraq is even more inept, misleading, and downright wrong than the one on Afghanistan. The chapter's climax is May 1, 2003, the day President Bush declared "Mission Accomplished" aboard the *USS Abraham Lincoln*—which is like ending an account of World War II with the Nazis' conquest of France or cutting off "Hamlet" in the first act and claiming that the play had a happy ending. Since that day, of course, the unending violence in Iraq has confounded the Rumsfeld-neocon contention that super-advanced technology has indeed made war new, as Boot claims in his book.