

seemed quite ready to abandon his own very limited emancipation plans at the slightest sign of a Southern government, however anti-black, that wished to rejoin the Union.

Bennett hammers home the theme that Lincoln's real hope for blacks was their colonization outside the United States. "Even as Lincoln basked in the glow of the Emancipation . . . some 450 African-Americans, . . . were being deported, with their consent, we are told, and at Lincoln's direction to establish the first Lincoln colony" (p. 553). Contrary to Lincoln's many apologists, he did not abandon colonization in the last years of the Civil War. Quite the contrary, the scheme formed an essential part of his plan for a centralized state based on white ethnic identity.

Bennett mounts a formidable case, and is on only a few points open to challenge. He claims that had Lincoln adopted the policies of the most radical Republicans, he could have ended the war much sooner. But he fails to offer evidence for this contention, and one suspects his view merely expresses

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his own approval of Thaddeus Stevens and his ilk. Bennett makes very heavy weather of Lincoln's love of jokes about blacks. Is this really evidence of racism? Further, in his extravagant praise of Frantz Fanon, he ignores Fanon's calls for murder of Europeans. But in his central contentions about Lincoln, Bennett has proved his case to the hilt. ♦

## THE ROOTS OF ROTHBARD

*The Irrepressible Rothbard:  
The Rothbard-Rockwell Report  
Essays of Murray N. Rothbard*

EDITED BY LLEWELLYN H. ROCKWELL, JR.  
CENTER FOR LIBERTARIAN STUDIES, 2000  
XX + 431 PGS.

This indispensable selection of articles that Murray Rothbard wrote for the *Rothbard-Rockwell Report* contains the most insightful comment on foreign policy I have ever read. In a few paragraphs, Rothbard destroys the prevailing doctrine of twentieth-century American foreign policy.

According to the Accepted Picture, totalitarian powers twice threatened America during the past sixty years. Germany, under the maniacal leadership of Hitler, aimed at world conquest. When the United States and her allies succeeded in halting the Nazis, a new menace demanded attention.

The Soviet Union, a militantly expansionist state, had to be contained during the protracted cold war. At various times throughout the cold war, and continuing after it to the present, hostile and aggressive dictators presented America with problems. Saddam Hussein ranks perhaps as the most notorious of these tyrants.

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The Accepted Picture draws a lesson from all these events. An aggressive power, almost always led by a dictator, must be dealt with as one would handle a neighborhood bully. Only firm demands to the dictator can stave off war.

Since bullies generally are cowards, dictators will back down if directly challenged. The Munich Conference, September 29–30, 1938, perfectly illustrates how not to handle a dictator. Britain and France appeased Hitler; the result was war one year later. Had Britain and France acted when Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936,

the Nazis could have been overthrown virtually without cost.

Rothbard at once locates the fallacy in this oft-repeated line of thought. “Answer me this, war hawks: when, in history when, did one State, faced with belligerent, ultra-tough ultimatums by another, when did that State ever give up and in effect surrender—before any war was fought? When?” (p. 170).

Rothbard’s rhetorical question rests upon a simple point of psychology. The supposed “bully” cannot surrender to an ultimatum lest he be overthrown. “No head of State with any pride or self-respect, or who wishes to keep the respect of his citizens, will surrender to such an ultimatum” (p. 170).

The Gulf War perfectly illustrates Rothbard’s contention. Faced with an overwhelming show of force, Saddam Hussein did not back down. Rothbard’s apt generalization explains Saddam’s seemingly irrational response.

But have we not forgotten something? What about World War II? Does not the failure to confront Hitler over Czechoslovakia in 1938 prove conclusively the thesis of the anti-appeasers?

Our author’s response illustrates his ability to counter an opposing argument at its strongest point. “Neither was World War II in Europe a case where toughness worked. On the contrary, Hitler disregarded the English guarantee to Poland that brought England and France into the German–Polish war in September 1939” (p. 170).

A belligerent foreign policy, then, will most likely lead to the wars it

professes to deter. But who urges us toward this course? Rothbard arraigns the social democrats and their successors, the neoconservatives. These he accuses of support for statism at home and war abroad.

Rothbard tersely sums up the credo of social democracy in this way: "on all crucial issues, social democrats stand against liberty and tradition, and in favor of statism and Big Government. They are more dangerous in the long run than the communists, not simply because they have endured, but also because their program and their rhetorical appeals are far more insidious, since they claim to combine socialism with the appealing virtues of 'democracy' and freedom of inquiry" (p. 23).

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For Rothbard, the State always ranks as the principal enemy. The battle against the "massive welfare-warfare State" to him was no mere clash of abstractions. Quite the contrary, he aimed at particular targets who embodied the statist doctrines he abhorred. Sidney Hook occupied a place near the summit of his intellectual foes. A precocious communist in

the 1920s, Hook found the Soviet Union insufficiently revolutionary and soon beat the drums for militant anti-communism, though of a distinctly socialist cast. Throughout his long life, he called for war, first against Nazi Germany and then against Comrade Stalin. According to Rothbard, "one's attitude toward Sidney Hook . . . provides a convenient litmus test on whether someone is a genuine conservative, a paleo, or some form of neo" (p. 25).

The struggle against the State needed to be waged on many fronts. Rothbard saw a disturbing trend among certain left-libertarians. Although libertarianism quintessentially opposes State power, some doctrinal deviants allowed the enemy to enter through the back door.

They did so by holding that public agencies must observe rules of nondiscriminatory treatment. These rules have nothing to do with the free market, but everything to do with the slogans of the contemporary Left. Rothbard expertly locates the central fallacy in the argument of the libertarian heretics. Since nearly everything nowadays partakes to a degree of the State, the new doctrine leads to total government control.

Rothbard states his point with characteristic panache: "But not only literal government operations are subject to this egalitarian doctrine. It also applies to any activities which are tarred with the public brush, with the use, for example, of government streets, or any acceptance of taxpayer funds . . . sometimes, libertarians fall back on the

angry argument that, nowadays, you can't really distinguish between public and private anyway" (p. 103).

We have, then, an all out statist attack on liberty. How has this assault managed to do so well? Rothbard's answer exposes the philosophical roots of our problem. No longer does the academic elite believe in objective morality, grasped by right reason. Lacking a rational basis for moral values, our supposed intellectual leaders readily fall prey to statist fallacy.

The beginning stage of nihilism, Rothbard maintains, occurred in art. "First, the left-liberals preached *l'art pour l'art* in aesthetics, and, as a corollary in ethics, trumpeted the new view that there is no such thing as a revealed or objective ethics, that all ethics are 'subjective,' that all of life's choices are only personal, emotive 'preferences'" (p. 296).

The denial of objective standards in the name of freedom led to death and destruction. Rothbard maintains that ethical nihilism results in the overthrow of the most basic human rights, including the right not to be murdered. He has not the slightest sympathy for the rampant pro-euthanasia movement. "No, the mask is off, and Doctor Assisted Death and Mr. Liberal Death with Dignity, and all the rest of the crew turn out to be Doctor or Mister Murder. Watch out Mr. and Ms. America: liberal humanists, lay and medical, are . . . out to kill you" (p. 303).

What can be done to combat statism and nihilism? Rothbard views populism with great sympathy. As so

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often in his work, he rethought and deepened his position. He determined that a common libertarian strategy, looking to the courts to enforce rights, was mistaken.

Even in cases in which courts enforce the "correct" position, the imperatives of local control and states rights should not be overturned. Thus, Rothbard favored a "pro-choice" position on abortion. But he was loath to have courts enforce abortion rights against recalcitrant states.

"No; libertarians should no longer be complacent about centralization and national jurisdiction—the equivalent," he writes, "of foreign intervention or of reaching for global dictatorship. Kansans henceforth should take their chances in Kansas; Nevadans in Nevada, etc. And if women find that abortion clinics are not defended in Kansas, they can travel to New York or Nevada" (p. 306).

Although Rothbard found great merit in populism, he did not defend the movement uncritically. He saw danger in leftist populism: a true populist movement must not abandon the

free market in favor of crackpot panaceas. In one of the last articles he wrote, he warned Pat Buchanan against this danger. "In this murky and volatile situation, the important thing for us paleopopulists is that we find a candidate as soon as possible who will lead and develop the cause and the movement of right-wing populism, to raise the standard of the Old, free, decentralized, and strictly limited Republic" (p. 141). ♦

## DWORKIN: INADVERTENT LIBERTARIAN?

*Sovereign Virtue: The Theory  
and Practice of Equality*

RONALD DWORKIN  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2000  
511 PGS.

Ronald Dworkin gets off to a poor start, but things are not so bad as they first appear. He tells us that equality is the sovereign political virtue. What could be more anti-libertarian?

But we must not move too quickly: his "sovereign virtue" need not be taken in a conventionally egalitarian way. Dworkin's basic principle states: "[n]o government is legitimate that does not show equal concern for the fate of all those citizens over whom it

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claims dominion and from whom it claims allegiance" (p. 1).

Oddly enough, this principle can be read in a way that makes it entirely consistent with strict adherence to the free market. A libertarian should respond to Dworkin that in a free market, the government (or, as Rothbardians prefer, the private protection agencies) does treat everyone under its jurisdiction with equal concern. It does so by respecting everyone's rights to life, liberty, and property. This, not the elaborately detailed schemes for redistribution our author sets forward, is the correct understanding of equal concern.

Dworkin, who rarely misses a philosophical trick, anticipates this objection. "Those who embrace it [laissez-faire] can also accept the abstract egalitarian principle and claim their theory as the best interpretation of that principle" (p. 481).

Unfortunately, Dworkin has little directly to say about this theory: perhaps to him it is obviously wrong. But it is not too difficult to see why he