



**David M. Hart, “An Introduction to the Classical Liberal Tradition:
People, Ideas, and Movements”**

Mannkal Economic Education Foundation

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David Hart is an historian and a libertarian with interests in the history of the classical liberal tradition (especially the French), war and culture, libertarian class theory, and film. He has a PhD from King's College, Cambridge, a masters from Stanford University, and a BA Honours degree from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. He taught in the Department of History at the University of Adelaide in South Australia for 15 years before moving to the US where he designed, built, and managed the awarding website The Online Liberty of Liberty for a non-profit educational foundation. He is now an independent scholar and consultant. [\[Brief Bio\]](#) [\[A Bit More\]](#) [\[Current CV HTML or PDF\]](#) [\[Areas of Expertise and Scholarly Activity \(PDF\)\]](#)

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SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

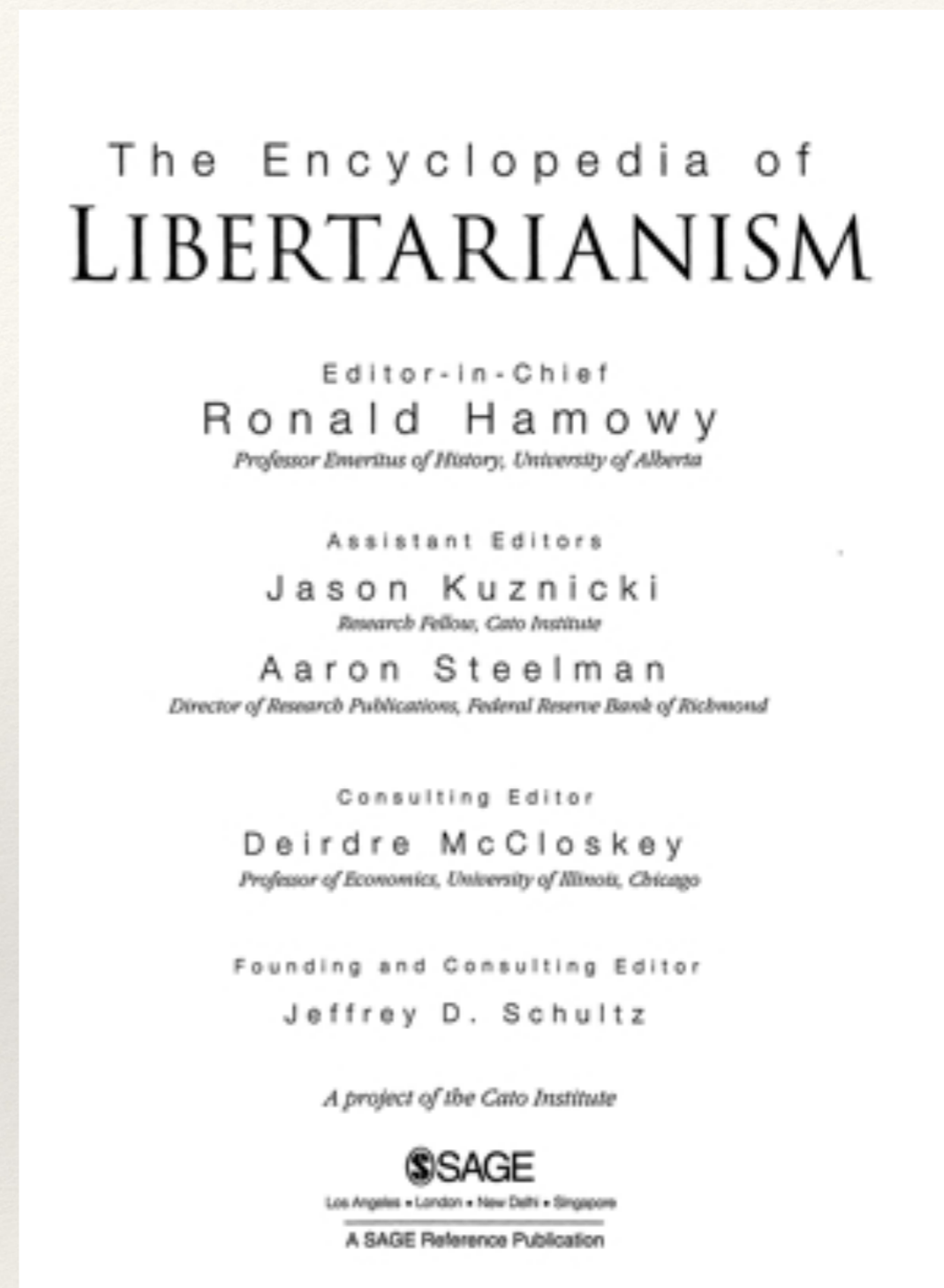
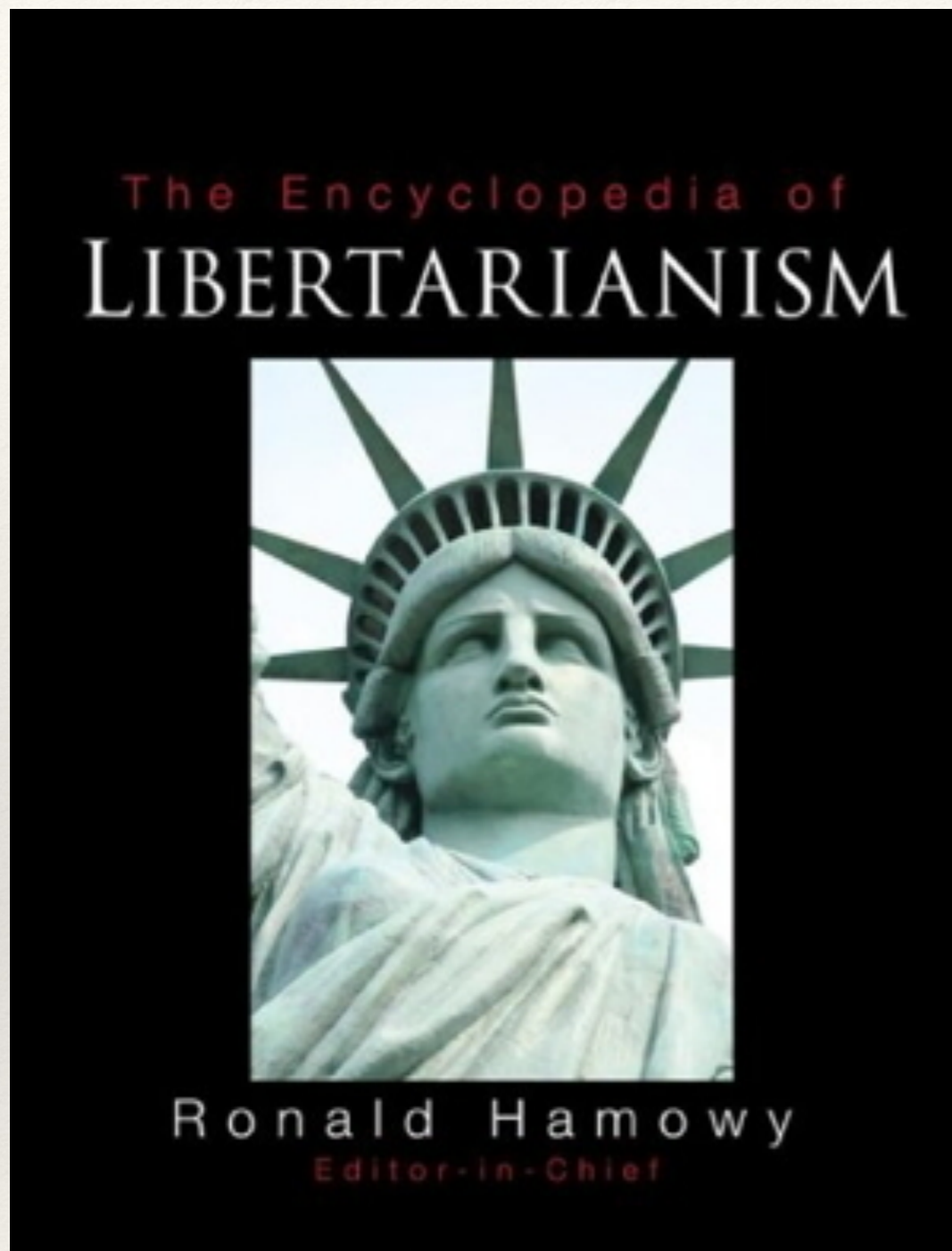
1. what do you understand by the word "liberalism"? "classical liberalism"? "libertarianism"? the "Liberal Party"? American "liberalism"? "neo-liberalism"?
2. where do you think CL lies on the political spectrum? "Left" or "Right"?
3. when and where did liberalism or "classical liberalism" (CL) first emerge?
4. can you name some of the
 1. great thinkers (political, economic) who wrote on CL theory? and what they thought?
 2. politicians or activists who worked to bring CL liberal policies into effect?
5. what reforms / changes did CLs bring about?
6. who advocates CL ideas today?
7. what are the prospects for CL in the current political climate?
8. what should CLs be doing to further their cause? and how should they be doing this?

OVERVIEW OF THE KEY POINTS

- ❖ the Classical Liberal tradition (CL) has a **very long history** - 400 years
- ❖ it has **evolved** over this period in reaction to the different kinds of oppression people have suffered under - it is very **adaptable** (as is oppression)
- ❖ there is a **problem of definition** - “hyphenated” liberalism
- ❖ there have been **4 main periods** in this evolution of CL ideas
 - ❖ **1640s and 1680s**: the English Civil War and Revolution in the 1640s (1647-49); “Glorious Revolution” of 1688-89
 - ❖ **1750s-1790s**: the Enlightenment; American and French Revs.
 - ❖ the long liberal **19th century 1815-1914** - “**Classical Liberalism**”
 - ❖ the **post-WW2** liberal / libertarian renaissance
- ❖ the things CLs were **Against** and the things they were **For** (12 Key Concepts)
- ❖ the **achievements** of CL have been considerable
- ❖ but is CL **losing the battle of ideas** today?

THINGS WHICH MAKE UP THE CLT

- ❖ **people** (theorists and activists / politicians)
 - ❖ some were both theorist and activist / revolutionary - Lilburne, Jefferson, Bastiat, Rothbard)
- ❖ **texts** (theoretical, popular / propaganda)
- ❖ **ideas** (about liberty, power, society)
- ❖ **political documents** (constitutions, bills of rights, petitions / statements / declarations)
- ❖ **movements** (for specific reforms)
 - ❖ abolition of slavery and serfdom, free trade, right to vote, women's rights / vote, opposition to war
- ❖ participation in **revolutions**
 - ❖ English (x2 - 1649, 1688), American (1776), French (1789), 1848 across Europe (France, German states)



<<https://www.libertarianism.org/encyclopedia>>

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION: LIBERAL NGRAM



Daniel B. Klein, “The Origin of ‘Liberalism’”, *The Atlantic*, 2 February 2014

DAVID CONWAY ON CLASSICAL LIBERALISM (2008)

“Liberalism is a political ideology distinguishable from other ideologies by its assignment of a much greater political importance and value to human liberty, understood as a **condition of being subject to as few constraints and restraints imposed by others as possible.** All liberals agree that human beings will suffer deliberate constraint and restraint as each others’ hands if there is no system of law limiting their powers over each other. Accordingly , liberals regard laws that prohibit these constraints as being conducive to, rather than destructive of, liberty.”

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION: LIBERALISM & HYPHENATED LIBERALISM

1. "classical" vs. other types of "hyphenated liberalism":
 1. **Classical Liberalism:** period 1815-1914 (peak 1840s-1880s); Liberal Party (Britain) formed 1859; two schools of CL thought: utilitarianism (English) and natural rights (French)
 2. **"New" Liberalism:** late 19thC, advocated more extensive govt. intervention on utilitarian grounds (Hobhouse, Green)
 3. **American liberalism:** more like British / Australian social democracy / labourism
 4. **Australian liberalism:** Liberal Party formed 1943; "liberal" in some respects but supported protectionism, subsidies to industry & farmers
 5. **neo-liberalism**
 6. **"bleeding-heart liberalism"**

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION: LIBERALISM, HYPHENATED LIBERALISM

other names:

1. **voluntaryism**,
2. **Libertarianism**: emerged in last 1 / 4 or 1 / 3 of 20thC in USA
3. **anarcho-capitalism**: version inspired by Murray Rothbard
4. **individualism** (Steve Davies)

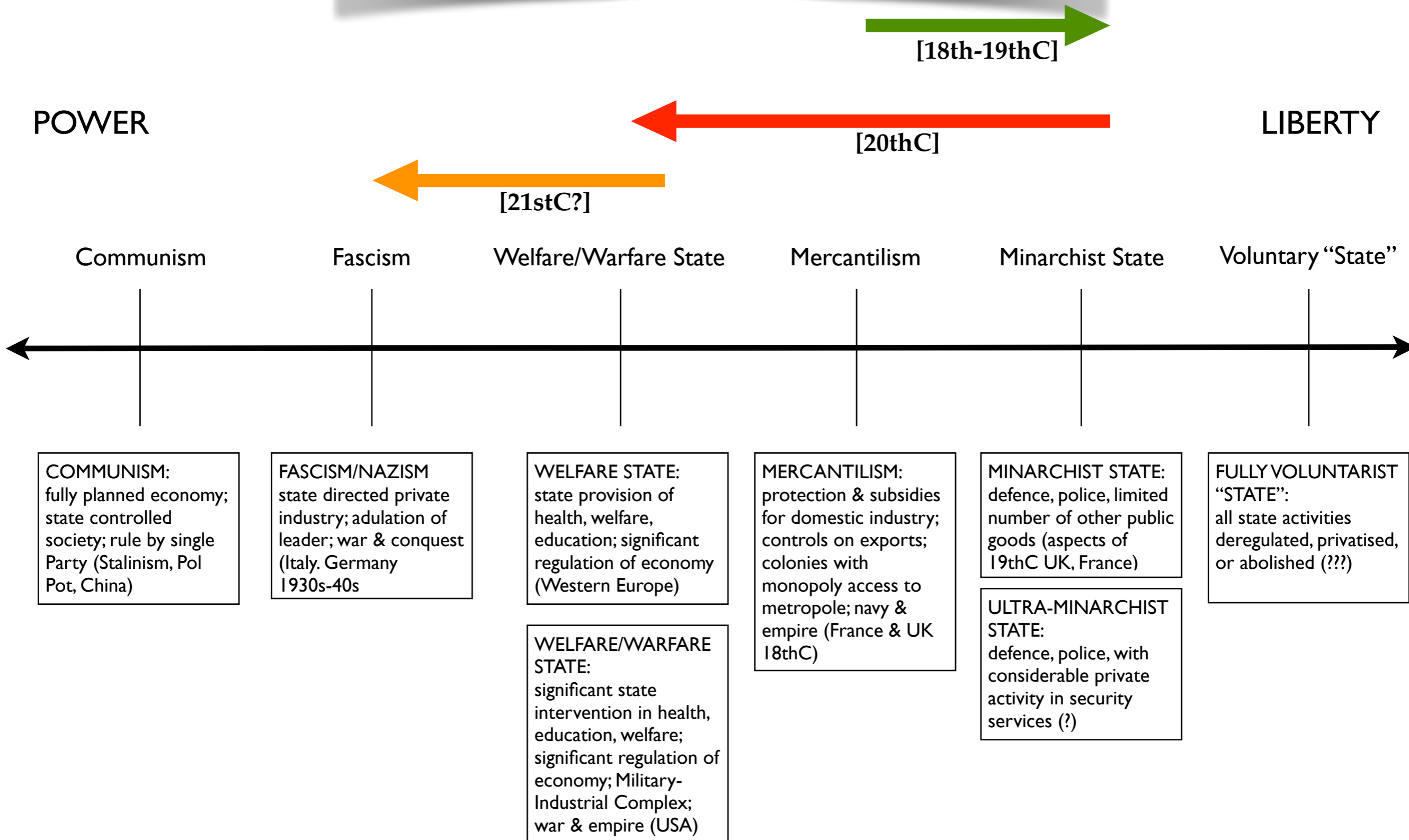
is CL the same as Libertarianism?

what is the connection between modern libertarianism, American
“Conservatism”, Australian liberalism (Liberal Party)?

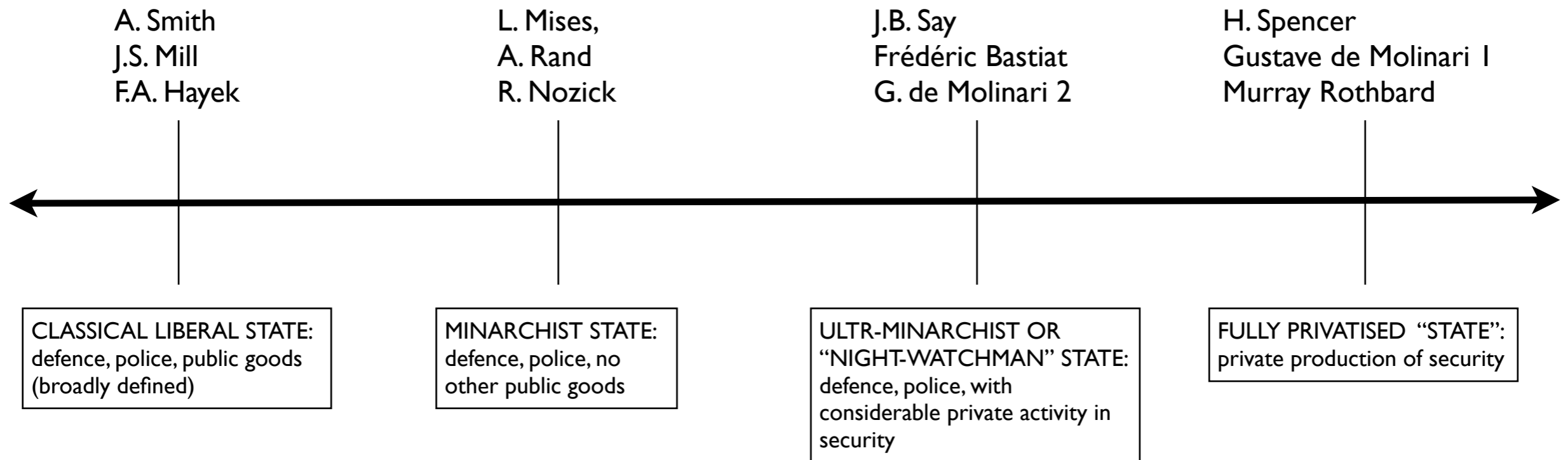
DAVID BOAZ ON LIBERTARIANISM (1997)

“We might define libertarianism as a species of (classical liberalism), an advocacy of individual liberty, free markets, and limited government rooted in a commitment to self-ownership, imprescriptible rights, and the moral autonomy of the individual.”

Spectrum of State Power

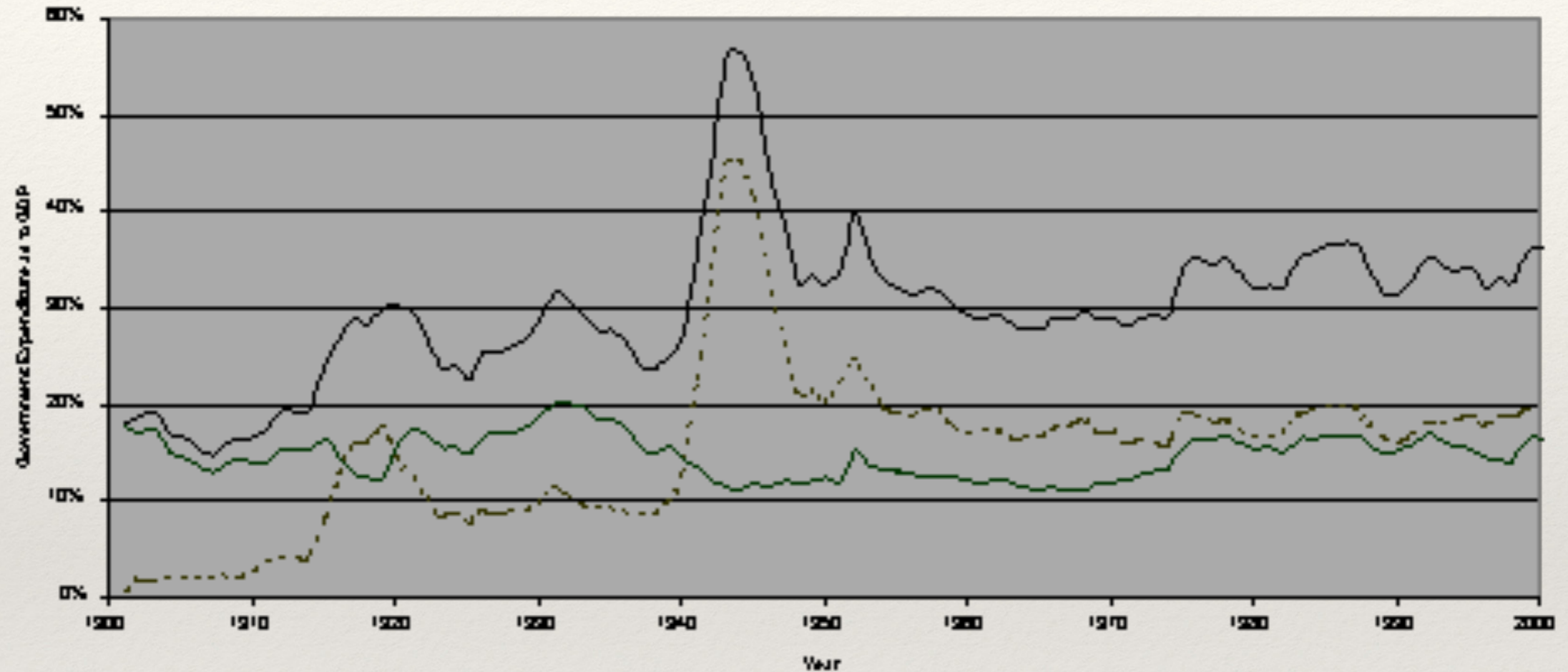


Functions of the Classical Liberal State



AUSTRALIA: STARTING HIGH & ENDING AVERAGE

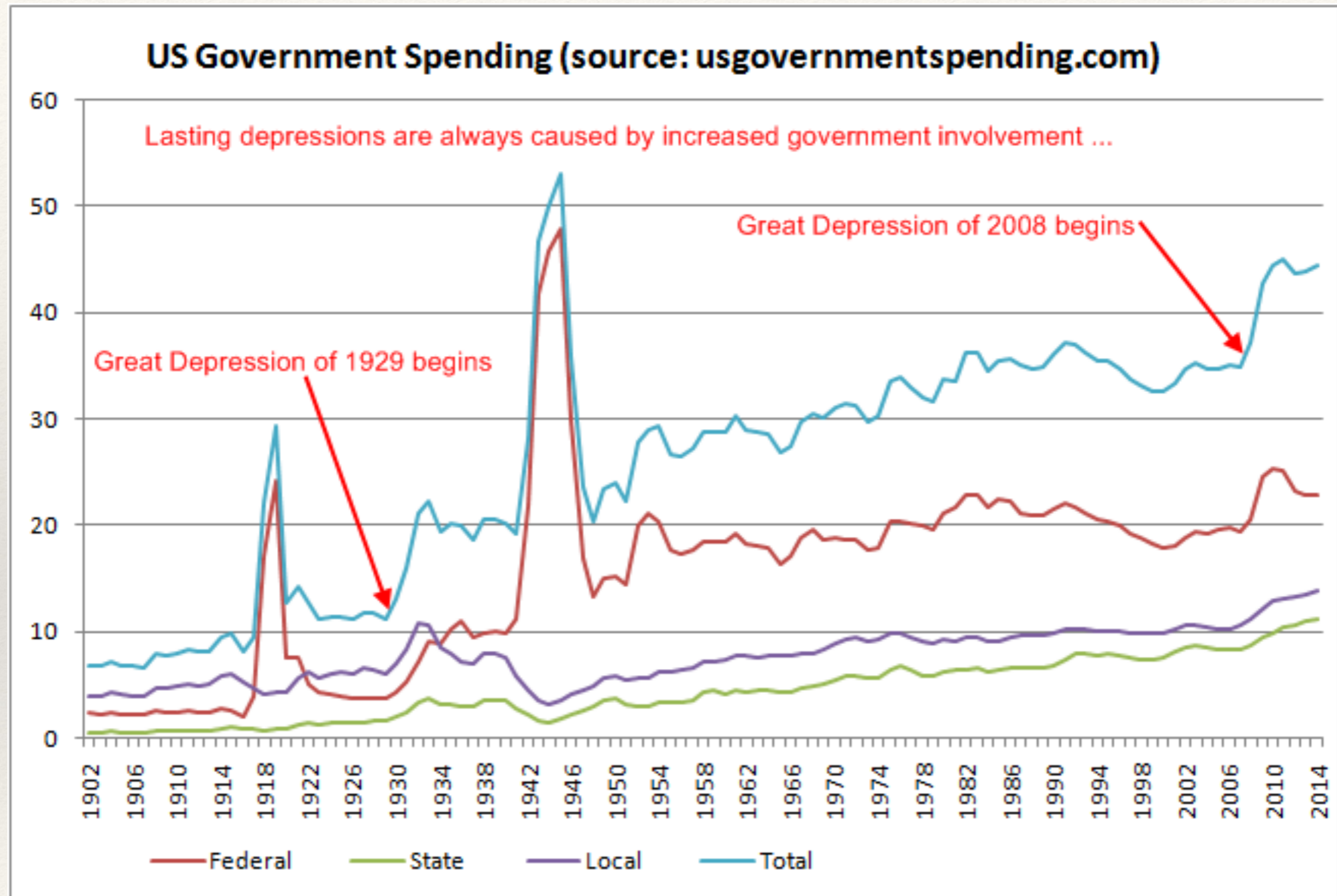
Expenditure as a Proportion of GDP by Level of Government



--- Commonwealth Gov expenditure (total minus transfers) - (1901-81 op. of . Barrow, Table 5, 1982-95 op. of . FSA, Table 2.8, 1996-2000 op. of . ABS, col. no. 5512.0) divided by national GDP (ABS, Australian National Accounts, col. no. 5204.0)
— State/Local Gov Expenditure (1901-81 op. of . Barrow, Table 5, 1982-95 op. of . FSA, Table 2.7, 1996-2000 op. of . ABS) divided by national GDP (op. of . ABS)
— Aggregate Commonwealth and State/Local Gov expenditure divided by national GDP

Pincus, Australian Total Govt Expenditure (State/Local & Federal) 1900-2000

USA: STARTING LOW AND ENDING HIGH



Total US Govt Expenditure (State/Local & Federal) 1902-2014

WHAT CLS WERE AGAINST

By historical period:

1. The Early Modern Period (17th and 18th Centuries) - Throne, Altar, Barracks, Mercantilism / Cronyism, Serfdom
2. The 19th Century - Conservatism, Militarism, Protectionism, Imperialism / Colonialism, Socialism
3. The 20th Century to the Present - Socialism, Bolshevism / Communism, Fascism, Keynesianism, Welfare / Warfare / Surveillance State, Green Socialism



Frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (1651).
Motto: "Non est potestas Super Terram quae Comparetur ei"
(There is no power on earth to be compared to him).

WHAT CLS WERE AGAINST

1. arbitrary political power - "Throne"
2. arbitrary religious power - "Altar"
3. war & conscription - "Barracks"
4. slavery & serfdom
5. taxation
6. national debt
7. tariffs, subsidies & monopolies to favoured industries - "Cronyism"
8. central bank & fiat money
9. empire & colonies
10. censorship
11. torture, arbitrary arrest & imprisonment, execution
12. socialism, communism, welfare state



Frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (1651).
Motto: "Non est potestas Super Terram quae Comparetur ei"
(There is no power on earth to be compared to him).

RICHARD OVERTON SHOOTS “AN ARROW AGAINST ALL TYRANTS” (1646)

“To every individual in nature is given an individual property by nature not to be invaded or usurped by any. For every one, as he is himself, so he has a self-propriety, else could he not be himself; and of this no second may presume to deprive any of without manifest violation and affront to the very principles of nature and of the rules of equity and justice between man and man. Mine and thine cannot be, except this be. No man has power over my rights and liberties, and I over no man’s. I may be but an individual, enjoy my self and my self-propriety and may right myself no more than my self, or presume any further; if I do, I am an encroacher and an invader upon another man’s right — to which I have no right. For by natural birth all men are equally and alike born to like propriety, liberty and freedom; and as we are delivered of God by the hand of nature into this world, every one with a natural, innate freedom and propriety — as it were writ in the table of every man’s heart, never to be obliterated — even so are we to live, everyone equally and alike to enjoy his birthright and privilege; even all whereof God by nature has made him free.”

WHAT CLS WERE FOR



Revolutionary Playing Card, “The Spirit of Peace (Prosperity)” (1793)

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES
 1. Life
 2. Liberty
 3. Property
2. THE GROUNDS FOR LIBERTY
 1. Natural Rights, or
 2. Utility
3. PROCESSES FOR LIVING FREELY
 1. Non-aggression principle, Voluntarism
 2. Free Trade, domestic and international
 3. Arbitration of disputes
 4. Spontaneous Orders
4. POLITICAL LIBERTY
 1. Freedom of Speech
 2. Limited Government
 3. Rule of Law
 4. Religious Toleration
 5. Freedom of movement (exit & entry)

WHAT CLS WERE FOR



Revolutionary Playing Card, “Equality of Coloured People (Courage)” (1793)

5. ECONOMIC LIBERTY

1. Domestic Free Markets & International Free Trade
2. Freedom of movement of people and goods (laissez-faire, laissez-passer)
3. Private ownership of economic assets
4. Low taxes, balanced government budgets
5. Private provision of “public goods”
6. Progress

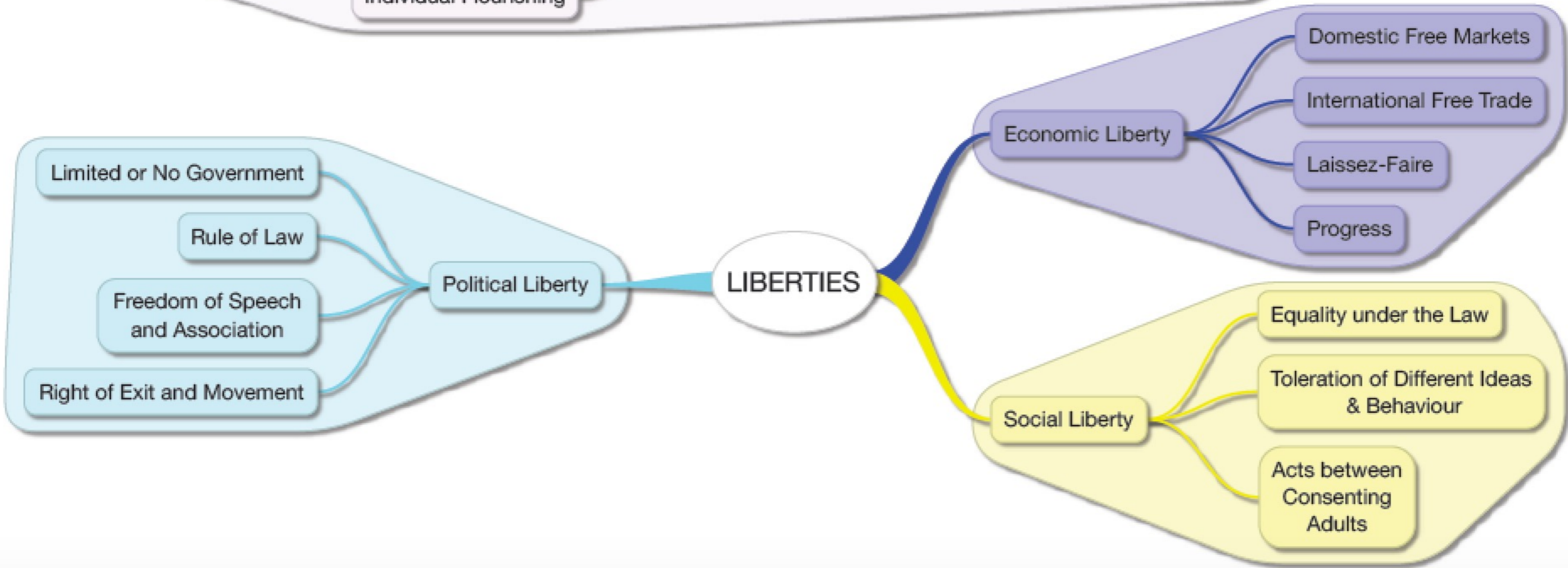
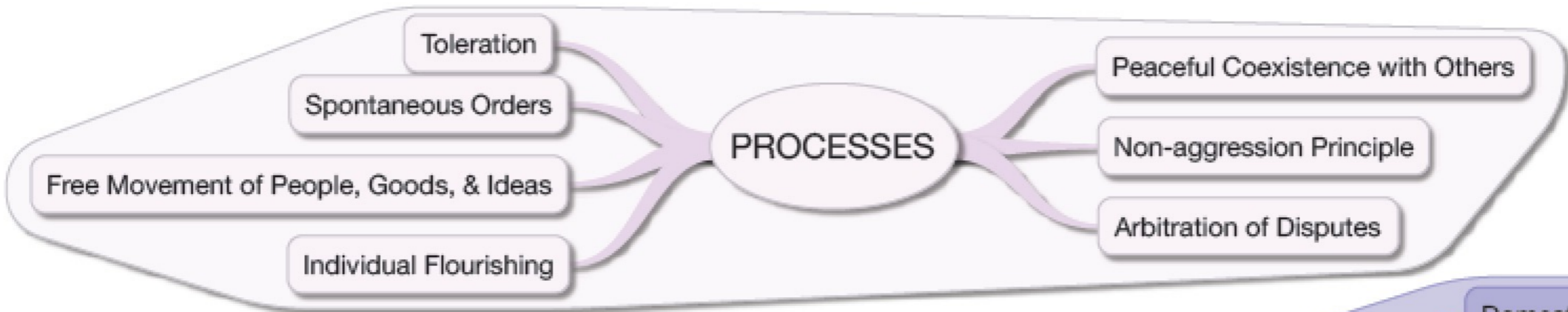
6. SOCIAL LIBERTY

1. Equal Treatment of all under the Law
2. Toleration of Unpopular Ideas
3. Freedom for Acts between Consenting Adults - no “victimless crimes” (alcohol, drugs, suicide)

7. PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE WITH OTHER PEOPLE/ STATES

1. Peace - non-interference in the affairs of other nations
2. Free Movement of People, Goods, Capital, Ideas across International Borders
3. International Arbitration

KEY IDEAS OF CLASSICAL LIBERALISM



FRÉDÉRIC BASTIAT ON LIBERTY AS THE COMBINATION OF ALL FREEDOMS (1850)



“And what is liberty, this word that has the power of making all hearts beat faster and causing agitation around the world, if it is not **the sum of all freedoms**: freedom of conscience, teaching, and association; freedom of the press; freedom to travel, work, and trade; in other words, **the free exercise of all inoffensive faculties by all men** and, in still other terms, **the destruction of all despotic regimes, even legal despotism**, and the reduction of the law to its sole rational attribution, which is to regulate the individual law of legitimate defense or to punish injustice.”

SUMMARY: 12 KEY CONCEPTS

See <<http://davidmhart.com/liberty/ClassicalLiberalism/HistoryCL.html>>



1. Natural Law and Natural Rights
2. Private Property
3. Individual Liberty
4. Idea of Spontaneous Order
5. Free Markets
6. Limited Government
7. Rule of Law
8. Freedom of Speech & Religion
9. Free Trade
10. Peace
11. Progress
12. Freedom of movement ("exit" and "entry")

Revolutionary Playing Card, "The Spirit of Peace (Prosperity)" (1793)

RICHARD COBDEN ON FREE TRADE (1846)



“I see in the Free-trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe,—drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace. I have looked even farther. I have speculated, and probably dreamt, in the dim future—ay, a thousand years hence—I have speculated on what the effect of the triumph of this principle may be. I believe that the effect will be **to change the face of the world, so as to introduce a system of government entirely distinct from that which now prevails.**”

RICHARD COBDEN ON FREE TRADE (1846)



“I believe that the desire and the motive for large and mighty empires; for gigantic armies and great navies—for those materials which are used for the destruction of life and the desolation of the rewards of labour—will die away; I believe that such things will cease to be necessary, or to be used, **when man becomes one family, and freely exchanges the fruits of his labour with his brother man.** I believe that, if we could be allowed to reappear on this sublunary scene, we should see, at a far distant period, the governing system of this world revert to something like **the municipal system;** and I believe that the speculative philosopher of a thousand years hence will date **the greatest revolution that ever happened in the world’s history** from the triumph of the principle which we have met here to advocate.”

Richard Cobden, “Speech at Manchester” (5 Jan. 1846)

KEY POLITICAL DOCUMENTS

1. Magna Carta (1215)
2. Charters of the Free Cities
3. Petition of Right (1628)
4. Agreements of the People (1647-49)
5. The English Bill of Rights (1689)
6. American Declaration of Independence (1776)
7. American Constitution (1787) and Bill of Rights (1789)
8. French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789)

See the collection at the OLL: "Key Documents of Liberty"
<<https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/key-documents>>

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (1.)

The “prehistory” of CL

- ❖ ancient world (Greek democracy, Roman natural law, Stoics, Cicero)
- ❖ medieval period - Magna Carta, School of Salamanca, charters of the free cities
- ❖ Renaissance / Reformation: classical republicanism, Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch Revolt (1568) and Republic (1581)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (2.)

1640s and 1680s in England

- ❖ the English Civil War and Revolution in the 1640s (1647-49): the Levellers (John Lilburne, Richard Overton, William Walwyn), John Milton; Agreements of the People (1647-49)
- ❖ the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688: John Locke, Algernon Sidney, the Bill of Rights (1689); Whigs, Commonwealthmen

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (3.)

1750s-1790s

- ❖ the Enlightenment
 - ❖ French Enlightenment: the Physiocrats, Turgot, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot
 - ❖ Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, David Hume
 - ❖ the American Enlightenment: Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, James Madison
- ❖ Revolutions
 - ❖ the American Revolution: Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution (1787) and Bill of Rights (1789)
 - ❖ the French Revolution: Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), the Girondons, Lafayette, Condorcet, Destutt de Tracy

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (4A.)

the 19th century 1815-1914 - "Classical" liberalism

- ❖ the English Classical Liberals:
 - ❖ the Philosophic Radicals and Utilitarians (Jeremy Bentham, James Mill);
 - ❖ the school of classical economics (J.S. Mill);
 - ❖ the Radical Individualists (Thomas Hodgskin, Herbert Spencer, Auberon Herbert)
- ❖ the French Classical Liberals: Jean-Baptiste Say, Benjamin Constant, Charles Comte, Charles Dunoyer, Alexis de Tocqueville, Frédéric Bastiat, Gustave de Molinari
- ❖ the 1848 Revolutions - constitutionalism and abolition of serfdom; Frédéric Bastiat, Gustave de Molinari

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (4B.)

the 19th century 1815-1914 - "Classical" liberalism

- ❖ important 19thC movements
 - ❖ the Free Trade Movement: The Anti-Corn Law League, Richard Cobden, John Bright
 - ❖ Abolition of Slavery and Serfdom: Abolitionism, William Wilberforce, William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Lysander Spooner
 - ❖ Feminism and Women's Rights: Condorcet, Mary Wollstonecraft, J.S. Mill
- ❖ The Austrian School of Economics
 - ❖ 1st generation - Carl Menger, Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk
 - ❖ 20thC interwar years - Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (5A.)

the post-WW2 liberal / libertarian renaissance

- ❖ Important organizations
 - ❖ Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) (1946) - Leonard Read
 - ❖ Mont Pelerin Society (1947) - Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Karl Poppe, James Buchanan
 - ❖ Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) (1955) - Antony Fisher, Arthur Seldon
 - ❖ Liberty Fund (1960) - Pierre Goodrich
 - ❖ Institute for Humane Studies (1961) - F.A. Harper

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLT (5B.)

the post-WW2 liberal / libertarian renaissance

- ❖ the revival of free market economics
 - ❖ The Austrian School of Economics II: the post-WW2 2nd generation - Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Murray N. Rothbard, Israel Kirzner
 - ❖ Chicago School of Economics - Milton Friedman
 - ❖ Public Choice Economics - James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock
- ❖ Objectivism - Ayn Rand
- ❖ the Libertarian Party (US 1971); the Workers Party (Australia, 1975)

BRUCE SMITH (1851-1937) LAYS DOWN SOME VERY STRICT RULES WHICH SHOULD GOVERN THE ACTIONS OF ANY LEGISLATOR (1888)



The broad principles, then, which I should venture to lay down as guides for any one assuming the responsible position of a legislator are three in number.

1. The state should not impose taxes, or use the public revenue for any purpose other than that of securing **equal freedom to all citizens.**

2. The state should not interfere with the legally acquired property of any section of its citizens for any other purpose than that of securing **equal freedom to all citizens**; and in the event of any such justifiable interference amounting to appropriation; then, only conditional upon the lawful owner being fully compensated.

3. The state should not in any way restrict the personal liberty of citizens for any other purpose than that of securing **equal freedom to all citizens.**

LYSANDER SPOONER (1808-1887) ON THE IDEA THAT LAWS AGAINST “VICE” (VICTIMLESS CRIMES) ARE UNJUST (1875)



VICES are those acts by which a man harms himself or his property.

Crimes are those acts by which one man harms the person or property of another.

Vices are simply the errors which a man makes in his search after his own happiness. Unlike crimes, they imply no malice toward others, and no interference with their persons or property.

In vices, the very essence of crime—that is, the design to injure the person or property of another—is wanting.

LYSANDER SPOONER (1808-1887) ON THE IDEA THAT LAWS AGAINST “VICE” (VICTIMLESS CRIMES) ARE UNJUST (1875)



It is a maxim of the law that there can be no crime without a criminal intent; that is, without the intent to invade the person or property of another. But no one ever practises a vice with any such criminal intent. He **practises his vice for his own happiness solely**, and not from any malice toward others.

Unless this clear distinction between vices and crimes be made and recognized by the laws, there can be on earth no such thing as individual right, liberty, or property; no such things as the right of one man to the control of his own person and property, and the corresponding and co-equal rights of another man to the control of his own person and property.

For a government to declare a vice to be a crime, and to punish it as such, is an attempt to falsify the very nature of things. It is as absurd as it would be to declare truth to be falsehood, or falsehood truth.

Lysander Spooner, Vices are not Crimes (1875)

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

1. limiting the power of the state: rule of law; constitutions; self-government
2. the abolition of slavery / serfdom
3. civil liberties - freedom of speech / religion; toleration of diversity; freedom of movement
4. economic freedom - free trade; property rights; choice of career
5. economic prosperity - the "Great Enrichment" (McCloskey)
6. political liberty - liberal democracy, political representation
7. social liberty - women's rights, gays
8. international peace: international arbitration; rules / laws of war
9. the civilizing consequences of trading / markets

ARE CLS LOSING THE BATTLE OF IDEAS?

1. government manipulation of money and interest / credit (Great Financial Crisis)
2. the surveillance state post 9 / 11
3. the growth of presidential power (US)
4. the revival of socialism - green socialism
5. the revival of protectionism (Trumpism)
6. the continuing power of vested interests (crony capitalism, MIC)
7. government intervention in other countries' affairs ("liberal interventionism")

MERRIE MELODIES

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

"That's all folks!"

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