

# Ask Aristotle ... on Politics!

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*Q: "I have a question about genetic engineering. Suppose some farmers in an area are farming with genetically modified plants, while their neighbors do not. Then the next year, the company who modified the plants discovers that some of their own products are growing on the farms that had not been using their products before. The company then sues the farmers for patent infringement. The company claims that the organic farmers stole their product and have to pay for it. The organic farmers claim that the plants got there naturally and that the company should pay for their removal, because they only want to grow completely organic food. Who is right?"*

**A: First of all, this is not a question about genetic engineering. This is a legal question involving property rights. You can substitute any number of manmade products into this scenario, however genetic engineering just happens to be convenient for the sake of vilifying it. As is often the case when new technologies are introduced, people come up with myriad hypothetical scenarios as a means to vilify them, when in fact these scenarios have little to do with the technology itself. The implicit idea here is that manmade advances lead to hardships and conflicts among people in society, and that these cannot be resolved and will outweigh any benefits the new technology may provide.**

**As for the question of who is right, this cannot be determined from the little information that you have provided. You have indicated what each side claims, but you have not indicated what proof either side has to substantiate their claim. In a court of law, where this question should rightfully be answered if it were to ever arise, both sides would be required to state their case with facts, and the evidence would determine who is or is not at fault. Since each side is making a charge against the other, each will have the burden of proof to substantiate their respective charges.**

**Your Friend in Reason,  
Aristotle**

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*Q: "What rights are reserved to the people according to you?"*

**A: All of them.**

**Your Friend in Reason,  
Aristotle**

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*Q: "Dear Aristotle,*

*My [question] is derived from this comment you made when addressing the issue of [Dagny killing the guard](#):*

*"If and when an organization begins to change its fundamental philosophy and commit actions that are immoral, then the proper response is to discontinue one's association with it. In the case of the guard, he should have turned in his weapon long ago and declared that he would have no part of this."*

*Could this not be said for our current (USA) police force? (It could be said about the entire welfare state as well... but who wants to have their life ruined by refusing to support such policies [with our tax dollars]?) How much of the police force's time, money, and manpower is spent on immoral activities such as the "war on drugs" that violate individual rights and move us closer to a totalitarian state? I'd be willing to bet it is more than 50% of the budget if fixed administrative costs are deducted first. Care to take the other side?*

*Given this, can a rational and moral individual work for the police force? My thought is that if working in a legitimate and necessary unit ([e.g.] homicide) yes, but if transferred to a non legitimate unit such as narcotics, you would have to quit."*

**A: I would have to agree for the most part with how you have answered your own question. As a police officer, one should refrain from joining departments such as the vice squad if at all possible. My only contention is that most police officers are patrol men and are not necessarily part of a specific unit. In the line of duty these men have to enforce all laws including arresting people for drug use, drug possession, and other victimless crimes. Also, even men in legitimate departments such as homicide are obligated to uphold these laws.**

**So how does one reconcile this? One must first realize that our police force, despite the many flaws of our legal system, is primarily an agency necessary for insuring our liberty and for establishing order as opposed to anarchy. It is not an agency devoted to the violation of rights as such. While it is true that laws against drugs, prostitution, etc. are immoral, they are not primary threats to life and freedom.**

**People who commit these crimes are in no mortal danger by complying with such laws. These criminals know the laws they are breaking and choose to break them anyway not for the furtherance of their lives, but despite the obvious danger that exists should they get caught. I do not mean to imply that they deserve what they get. I fully agree that such laws are immoral. But the disvalue that comes from having to comply with these laws is insignificant by comparison to the immeasurable value we receive by having a police force.**

**The fact remains that we are still free to speak out against these laws--even if one is a police officer. A member of the police force who must enforce these laws is completely moral so long as he is opposed to them and works within the system to change them. The guard in Atlas Shrugged was part of an entirely different context. It would not have been proper for Dagny to have shot him if John Galt was merely being held for drug possession and was in no mortal danger. But this was not the context. The guard was part of a socialist Nazi-like**

regime, John Galt's crime was that he would not sacrifice his life, and he was in mortal danger.

I want to stress that I fully agree that laws against victimless crimes are immoral. But these are not a reason to disassociate from the police or military. These two agencies are legitimate functions of government and open rebellion against them is the last resort. Only when our society has fallen into a totalitarian police state where people are not free to work within the system will it be proper to openly rebel and for the moral members of the police and military to quit and take up arms in opposition.

But by definition, this is revolution. And a revolution is not something people start just because they want to smoke dope and buy hookers. One starts a revolution when rights are being violated at a much more fundamental level.

Your Friend in Reason,  
Aristotle

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*Q: "Why do you refer to Libertarians as "creepy?" Could you please elaborate on the differences you perceive between the Libertarian political agenda and the fundamentals of Objectivism as you perceive it?"*

**A: First of all, this is a conceptual matter rather than a perceptual one. Secondly, the fundamentals of Objectivism cannot be compared to the concretes of any political agenda based on differences or similarities, because the fundamentals of Objectivism (or any other philosophy for that matter) precede any political agenda. The fundamentals of a philosophy are not comprised of concretes, and the concretes of any political agenda should not exist without the foundation of a philosophy. The Libertarian political agenda does not have a philosophy at its base (Objectivism or otherwise), nor do all of the concretes within their agenda coincide with the philosophy of Objectivism. More on this to come later.**

Your Friend in Reason,  
Aristotle

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*Q: "How is being a Libertarian any different than being an anarchist?"*

**A: Fundamentally, they are no different. When, as with the Libertarians, one believes that government is a "necessary evil" one has laid the foundation for why government should be dissolved altogether. Regardless of its alleged necessity, if one believes it to be evil, then there are only two choices: any government will do, or no government at all. Those who believe that government is evil now have a sanction to run willy-nilly and will make every attempt to prove that no government in particular or any government at all is in fact necessary.**

**Your Friend in Reason,  
Aristotle**

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*Q: Dear Aristotle,*

*How come there can't be more "cool" Objectivists like your buddies? Know any good tips for chasing creepy libertarians away from public campus club meetings?*

**A: My friends thank you for the compliment. As to why there cannot be more Objectivists like us, I can only say that I am sure that there are. Keep looking and they are sure to turn up.**

**I wish I knew of a way to discourage Libertarians from showing up to public gatherings, but I do not. The best idea that I can give you is to establish a campus club that has exclusive membership and if you have to participate in any public club meetings, then stick to your guns by trying to convince them of the right ideas through reason. If they are unable or unwilling to listen, then walk away. You have better things to do with your time than to waste it with the likes of them. For instance, you can go out and look for other "cool" Objectivists like my friends.**

**Your friend in reason,  
Aristotle**

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*Q: According to the principles of Objectivism, when is it justified to hold a referendum? I ask this because we have recently had one here in Scotland to establish a new parliament. The question boils down to: when does democracy become mob rule?*

**A: First of all, I must say that I do not know enough about the political situation in your country to speak specifically in regard to it. However, I can say that in principle it is not proper to put to a vote any issue in which the outcome would result in the violation of the rights of any one or more individuals. This is why it is necessary to establish a system of government based on principles where the elections involve nothing more than determining the best way to safe guard those principles. The establishing of a new parliament may fall into this latter category, but I must again plead ignorance of the particulars regarding your referendum.**

**Your friend in reason,  
Aristotle**

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*Q: "I understand at least somewhat why Objectivists are against libertarianism, that is, that Objectivists want a republic, but libertarians want a democracy, though both seem to hold similar views on most topics. But what exactly does this mean in practice? Would an Objectivist government not allow a non-objectivist to run for election (I can understand why, but I don't know how do this)? What other differences would there be between the two governments? Thank you very much for the enlightenment!"*

**A: You have many mistaken premises that need correcting. There is no such thing as an Objectivist government. Objectivism is a philosophy, not a political movement. Politics is a branch of philosophy, and as such, with the right ideas one can properly define the nature, roles, and responsibilities of a proper government, but politics is not a rallying point for advancing philosophy.**

**There is such a thing as an Objectivist view of government, but there is no such thing as a government by and for only Objectivists. And the Objectivist view of a proper government does not promote the exclusion of those with differing ideas by preventing them from participating. By definition, that would be a dictatorship by a philosophical elite, and Objectivism is against dictatorships of any kind.**

**If one day Objectivism were to take hold as the dominant philosophy, then a non-Objectivist running for election would gain or lose public office, not by law, but by popular vote. Society would judge each candidate based on the degree to which he is rational and capable of performing the duties of public office. You claim to understand why it would be proper to not allow a non-Objectivist to run for government, I am interested in knowing how you arrived at that conclusion. Currently, we have a very flawed system of government. Would you advocate that as Objectivists we refrain from participating because our current government is "non-Objectivist?"**

**Now as for the difference between Libertarians and Objectivists, I will start by saying that your assessment is both wrong and superficial. First of all, there is not necessarily a dichotomy between having a republic and a democracy. The incompatibility lies with attempting to join a republic with an unlimited democracy. In a republic, it is still proper to vote on certain, but not all issues. It is proper to vote on who should be elected, how best to run a military, how to spend legitimate revenue, etc. It is not proper to vote on welfare programs, a woman's right to her own body, or how best to regulate industry. A republic must be founded on properly defined principles based on a proper understanding of Man's rights.**

**Secondly, Libertarians will also claim they want a republic. This claim is contradicted by the fact that they are not primarily for liberty, rather they are primarily anti-government. The difference between Libertarians and Objectivists is not political, but philosophical. Libertarians do not have an intellectual basis on which to found any of their ideas (nor do their ideas always coincide with those of Objectivists), and they advocate the abolition of certain government institutions that are necessary for the protection of liberty. Because this is a complex subject, I will not cover all of it here. I will, however, refer you to the various literature on the subject which can be found in Second Renaissance books and ask**

**that you keep an eye out for an essay that my friend Eric hopes to finish in the near future. When he does, it will be posted on our website.**

**Your Friend in Reason,  
Aristotle**