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Some Libertarian Ideas about Human Social Life

Abstract: The central thesis of my article is that people live a life worthy of a human being only as self-ruling members of some autarchic (or self-governing) communities. On the one hand, nobody is born as a self-ruling individual, and on the other hand, everybody can become such a person by observing progressively the non-aggression principle and, ipso facto, by behaving as a moral being. A self-ruling person has no interest in controlling her neighbors, but in mastering his own impulses, needs, wishes, desires, behaviors, etc. Inasmuch as he is an imperfect being who lives in an imperfect world, he needs to share certain interests, beliefs, values, customs and other characteristics with other people, i.e. to be involved in some communities. Depending on the following four criteria – the regulatory principle, the essential resources, the specific feedback and the fundamental values –, the countless and manifold human communities can be grouped in three categories: (1) affinity communities, (2) economic communities, and (3) civic communities. In other words, every community or human behavior has an affinity, an economic, and a civic dimension. If a civic community is merely a state shaped society, it can be called a political community. All communities are intrinsically variable. Throughout time, they ceaselessly change their composition, values, interpersonal processes and relations, territory, etc. Interestingly enough, the variability is unanimously recognized and accepted in affinity and communities economic, but is denied or abusively interpreted in the case of state shaped societies. If we confuse two types of order − cosmos and taxis – and two types of rule – nomos and thesis –, as well as we exaggerate the importance of certain type of community we bring some social maladies, namely the traditionalism, the commercialism and the civism, (with the worst form of it – the politicality). Whatever the communities they are involved in, all persons relate (implicitly or explicitly) to the libertarian non-aggression principle, living their life in strict accordance with the logical implications of the position they adopt. People who respect the non-aggression axiom necessarily manifest self-control, consideration for the life and property of the others, commitment to offer value for value, love of freedom and a high level of individual responsibility. By contrast, people who violate this axiom – the villains and the statists – invariably strive to control their neighbors, behave as parasites or predators, prefer forced exchanges, reject the personal responsibility (at most accepting the idea of social responsibility), and apply double moral standards. The first category of people generates a libertarian civic discourse as a spontaneous

order, and the second creates a political/ statist civic discourse as a result of the human design and will to power. As a spontaneous order, the libertarian civic discourse implies free involvement, peaceful coordination, free expression, free reproduction of ideas and the power of one. Every communication performance in the frame of the libertarian civic discourse is important and has relevant results. All participants to the libertarian civic discourse are automatically members of some self-governing communities (at least members of the general libertarian community). The most important thing for these communities is to be connected to a communicational infrastructure which would make possible free involvement, free expression and the free reproduction of ideas. Inasmuch as today democracy means the tyranny of majority and participatory democracy the tyranny of majority plus the power of vested (and illegitimate) interests, only the emergence of self-governing communities by libertarian discourse offers us a little hope. It's high time to fall in love (again) with liberty and to embrace the non-aggression principle. We don't have to create a perfect world, but we can strive to develop our human nature.

1.   Preamble

The problem of living together peacefully in accordance with the non-aggression principle (that is as free self-ruling persons in self-governing communities) will be discussed in the field of social philosophy, on the theoretical grounding ensured by some remarkable exponents of the Austrian School – Ludwig von Mises (1962; 1998), Albert Jay Nock (1936; 1950), Frank Chodorov (1959), Robert LeFevre (1966; 1976), Murray Rothbard (2006; 2009), Hans-Hermann Hoppe (1995; 2001), Jesús Huerta de Soto (2009) etc. − and by means of the praxeologic method (von Mises 1998; Rothbard 1976; Hoppe 2001). Our approach is based on the following methodological assumptions: (1) because "[t]he same external events produce in different men and in the same men at different times different reactions" (Mises 1962, 37), and, therefore, it is impossible to know how external events affect peoples' thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, values, etc., it is appropriate to accept the methodological dualism between the physical and social realities; (2) methodological individualism is the best means to provide (valid) knowledge in social sciences, so that scientific propositions in social sciences should refer to actions, dispositions and decisions of individuals; (3) there is just one logical structure of the human mind, and, therefore, we should not ascribe different forms of logic to different groups (based on race, class, gender, or time period); (4) we are capable of acquiring a

priori knowledge about facts and necessary relations *from within* via non-inductive means, so that factual data don't prove, but illustrate the truth.

2. Affinity, economic, and civic communities

Inasmuch as all humans are imperfect beings who live in an imperfect world, they need to share certain interests, beliefs, values, customs, preferences and other characteristics with other people, *id est* to be involved in some communities. Either in the real world, or in cyberspace, people use race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, region, occupation, worldview, interests, hobbies, fantasies, etc. to affiliate, work and live together with their fellow men.

Depending on the following four criteria – (1) the regulatory principle, (2) the essential resources, (3) the systemic means, (4) specific feedback, and (5) the ultimate goal(s) –, the countless and manifold human communities can be grouped in three categories: affinity communities, economic communities, and civic communities. In other words, every community or human behavior has an affinity, an economic, and a civic dimension.

	Affinity communities	*Economic communities*	*Civic communities*
Regulatory principle	Tradition	Market	Governance
Essential resources	Social norms	Economic laws, entrepreneurial ideas	Opinions
Means	Positive vs. negative emotions	Factors of productions	Private laws
Feedback	Involvement vs. ostracism	Price signals, profit vs. loss	Integration vs. isolation
Fundamental goals	Affiliation, belonging, solidarity	Efficient allocation of scarce resources, wealth creation	Justice

1. Types of human communities

An affinity community is governed by the regulatory mechanism of tradition, its systemic resources are social norms (as evolutionary strategies), its code of conduct is enforced by inducing positive emotions (joy, pride, liking, admiration, sympathy, gratitude, etc.) or by inflicting negative emotions (guilt, shame, sadness, worry, contempt, hatred, indignation, etc.), feedback takes the shape of involvement (integration) or ostracism (isolation), and the ultimate goals of its members are affiliation, belonging, and solidarity.

Pridefulness	is triggered by one's own	positive assessment	of one's character	
Liking			of someone else's character	
Pride			of one's behavior	
Gratitude			of someone else's behavior	toward oneself
Admiration				toward a third party
Shame		negativeass essment	of one's character	
Contempt			of someone else's	induced by the thought that another is inferior
Hatred			character	induced by the thought that another is evil
Guilt			of one's behavior	
Anger			of someone else's	toward oneself
Cartesian indignation			behavior	toward a third party

2. Jon Elster's list of social emotions (Elster 2007, 98-99)

All affinity communities have some institutions and organizations. As an established system or custom every institution responds to certain social needs, but it is not deliberately made by men and it has no specific goal. It is a spontaneous order or cosmos, namely an order which emerges as result of the *voluntary* activities of *self-interested* individuals who don't intentionally try to create it by planning. Being an emergent order, each institution is characterized by the following traits (Easterly 2011): (1) nobody designed it; nobody needs to direct it; nobody can completely know it; everybody can understand its essential aspects: regulative principles, systemic resources, feedback, etc.; (2) very simple behaviors can result in complex phenomena; (3) it is not automatically good (in all aspects, for everyone and in any circumstances); (4) every action can have unintended consequences; (5) partial equilibrium analysis works within the context of spontaneous order. The best known institutions in affinity communities are marriage, charity, school, spiritual assistance, orphanage, insurance (against fire, famine, flood, or burglary), and distractions. In contrast to institutions, organizations are produced by man deliberately putting the elements in their place or assigning them distinctive tasks (Hayek 1968, 11). In a constructed order, or taxis, the knowledge and purposes of the organiser will

determine the resulting order. For example, the Fârte family, the Save the Children NGO, the Assumption Parish of Iasi (Romania), the football club of my neighborhood instantiate the institutions of marriage, charity, spiritual assistance and distraction. It is worthy of notice that institutions change over time under the influence of organizations' actions. Both my family and the family of my grandparents instantiate the institution of marriage, but they differ widely. Affinity communities are favorable environments for learning self-rule, inhibiting aggressive tendencies and voluntary coordinating efforts in collective projects.

An economic community is governed by the regulatory mechanism of market, its systemic resources are economic laws and entrepreneurial ideas, its means are the factors of production, feedback is provided by price signals, and the ultimate goals are the efficient allocation of scarce resources and wealth creation. The best known economic institutions are firm, bank, stock exchange, accreditation agency, arbitration agency, credit insurance agency, etc.

Unfortunately, economic institutions are not connected only with economic organizations (as Microsoft, ING Bank, Deutsche Börse, The Court of International Commercial Arbitration, etc.), but also with political organizations. Money market, credit market, regulatory mechanisms, commercial arbitration, etc. are largely controlled by political agencies. This fact explained many failures in the economic sphere. So-called market failure is, in fact, a distortion caused by political organizations. The market is a very fair regulatory mechanism, as all people are free to obtain the goods they want and to enjoy them exclusively. The market establishes no artificial barrier (such as origin, intelligence, education, profession, or high moral values) between the consumer and the desired product. And yet the market discourages those who are unproductive and ineffective in consuming scarce products, coveted more by those both productive and efficient. The quantity and quality of private goods transacted on the market, and the exclusivity of those goods makes the effort of acquiring them take place in a climate marked by envy, rivalry and competition.

The civic communities are regulated by governance principle, the systemic resources are opinions about what is right and wrong (Hayek 1968, 24), their means are private laws (as rules of just conduct) that serve individual interests, feedback takes the shape of civic rewards or civic punishments, and the ultimate goal is justice. Emergent institutions in civic communities satisfy three important needs: (1) to formulate rules of just conduct, (2) to create a casuistry, and (3) to enforce the code of just conduct.

Unfortunately, civic institutions are oppressed by an "organization which attempts to maintain a monopoly of the use of force and violence in a given territorial area" (Rothbard 2009, 1) and "may engage in continual, institutionalized property rights violations and the exploitation – in the form of expropriation, taxation and regulation – of private property owners" (Hoppe 1995, 94). This organization is the state. The state transforms civic communities into political communities so that the regulatory principle is the state, the

systemic resource is organized force, the means to action are positive laws, feedback is provided by political rewards or punishments, and the ultimate goal is partisan welfare.

	Civic community	Political community
Regulatory principle	Governance	State
Essential resources	Opinions	Organized force
Means	Private laws	Positive laws
Feedback	Integration vs. isolation	Political rewards vs. political punishments
Fundamental goals	Justice	Partisan welfare

3. A comparaison between civic community and political community

The state perverts not only civic communities, but also affinity and economic communities. Thus, when the state intervenes in the affinity communities, it dissocializes, alters the maturing process of individuals and hampers the learning of virtues. More exactly, the "generous" social assistance services have reduced the economical and mutual aid functions of the family, parish and local community. The decay of domestic economy and taking care of the elders by the state made children undesirable, as can be seen by the proliferation of contraceptive practices (and accepting the most inhumane form of contraception, abortion, as something natural). Consequently, the institution of marriage became superfluous, because in the absence of children, adults no longer need a home and a special form of solidarity. Without fertile conjugal relations, the partners are no longer bound to mutual fidelity and have no sufficient motivation to build an exclusive lifelong partnership. The state's paternalism discourages young people to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, as can be seen in prolonged schooling (often continuing after 30 years of age). If the state did not make private life problems public (education, working place, family, income source, health etc.), people would take their lives into their own hands sooner and would not wait for certain "political commissioners" to take care of their personal problems (Fârte 2010, 116-117). As abusive agent in economical communities, the state agency turns into a poverty factor, because it (a) reduces the financial capital accessible to entrepreneurs (by increasing public debt), (b) turns the workforce from directly productive activities (by increasing corruption), (c) generally restricts market resources (by taxation), (d) penalizes the frugality, prudence and future planning of some people (through inflation), (e) disorients entrepreneurs (through preferential credit, tax exemptions, bonuses, overtaxing, excises etc.), (f)

hampers the equilibrium of supply and demand (by restricting so-called excessive profits), (g) hinders the optimal occupation of the workforce (by guarantying minimum wages and taxing work), (h) makes certain goods or services scarce and inaccessible (through monopoly policies and administered prices), (i) disorients consumers (through stimulating programs like "The Clunker", "The First Home" etc.), by making them buy goods they do not need or that exceed their level of productivity at unfair prices, (j) exacerbates the consumers' expectancies (by proclaiming a so-called welfare right), so that many people take on a much too high life standard, to the detriment of the future generations etc. (Fârte 2010, 116).

Generally speaking, all exaggerations in the field of affinity, economic and civic communities are harmful. As imbalance of affinity communities, traditionalism causes hypertrophy of social norms, too strong social ties, chauvinism, economic inefficiency, and justice corruption. As exaggeration of the economic dimension, commercialism correlates with inappropriate monetary valuation, unsuitable impersonal relationships, excessive optimization, and plutocracy. The state intervention in social life causes justice corruption, paternalism, dissocialization, misallocation of resources, and poverty. Each mentioned element can be illustrated with various examples.

Throughout time, affinity, economic and civic communities ceaselessly change their composition, values, interpersonal processes and relations, territory, etc. Interestingly enough, the variability is unanimously recognized and accepted in economic and affinity communities, but is denied or abusively interpreted in the case of state shaped societies. Nobody is surprised when a joint venture is ended, a rental contract is canceled, a married couple divorces, a religious denomination suffers a schism, a charity changes its target audience etc. without violent conflicts. It seems to be axiomatic that no one needs to use violence in order to associate with or dissociate from someone. Obviously, this does not mean that there is no resentment or non-aggressive manifestation of discontent: avoidance, defamation, discrimination, boycott etc. However, in the case of political communities, state agencies invoke the argument of legitimacy to maintain or extend – by force or by threats of using force − a certain territory. Thus, variability is accepted only in the sense of augmentation, in no case in that of diminution. But neither language, religion, nor the past justifies incorporating individuals or groups in a political community despite their will. Besides, history confirms the contingency of all political communities. A state agency does not control a certain territory thanks to the legitimacy of its borders, but by its political force.

By choosing freely to integrate peacefully in certain communities or to leave others, each person looks for his own path to happiness, appreciating subjectively the benefits derived from taking decisions. The only legitimate thing in this context is precisely everyone's freedom to live together with other people in those communities he considers adequate to his aspirations.

3. The non-aggression principle as discriminatory tool
between free and servile people

Whatever the civic, economic or affinity communities they are involved in, all individuals relate (implicitly or explicitly) to the libertarian non-aggression principle, living their life in strict accordance with the logical implications of the position they adopt. The non-aggression axiom asserts that aggression is inherently unjust (and unjustifiable), that is to say, the initiation of physical force against (innocent) persons or their property, the threat of such, or fraud upon persons or their property is unjustified under any circumstances.

Every human being who declares that he observes the non-aggression principle undertakes implicitly to respect the following conditions: (1) to know the boundaries that delimit both the persons with whom he interacts and their properties; (2) to claim ownership of his person and his properties; (3) to ask his fellows to claim ownership of their persons and properties; (4) to practice self-control by tempering his affects, drives, passions, thoughts, etc.; (5) to pursue only reasonable goals, that is, goals that do not require violence as means; (6) to obtain goods from their fellows only by voluntary transactions (in accordance with the principle value for value); (7) to assume the status of producer and to use efficiently his knowledge, faculties, capabilities, resources, etc.; (8) to develop an acute sense of responsibility and to assume obligations in relation to the consequences of his actions; (9) to build a unitary personality, that is not to act in the mass (collective, committee, commission, organization, etc.) in a manner inferior to the way he acts on his own responsibility (Read 1962, 50). Obviously we can continue this list of conditions by means of deduction mechanism.

It is easy to see, the traits of the people who prefer to acquire the goods they desire by means of coercion are obviously contrary to the libertarians' attributes: (1) being addicted to aggression, they don't care about the boundaries of properties and don't limit their desires; (2) instead of practicing self-control, they strive to control the others; (3) by choosing the status of predator instead of producer, they systematically engage in infringing on the life, liberty and property of their neighbors; (4) not being engaged in voluntary goods exchange, they have no consideration for the value for value principle; (5) because they do not need freedom to fructify their faculties and resources, they interact with other people based on the master-slave relationship; (6) in the absence of freedom, they behave irresponsibly, at most accepting the idea of social responsibility; (7) in most interaction situations within a community, they apply double moral standards. Essentially, the non-aggression principle is trespassed by two categories of individuals: the *villains* (thieves, bullies, criminals, procurers, rapists, etc.) and the *statists* (politicians, lobbyists, voters, sinecurists, etc.). The former frankly admit the violent and immoral nature of their means, whereas the latter insist on the so-called legitimate nature of the coercive actions they perform. It is worthy of asking the question if villains' aggressions are less

harmful than statists' aggression. In all my life, thieves stole from me goods worth less than $200. The state takes from me more than $200 each month.

Examining the consequences of observing *versus* violating the non-aggression principle, we may say that true libertarians have a natural right to live together in various (real or virtual) communities as they see fit, as long as the rules of action they follow necessarily generate benefits and do not prejudice the others. On the other hand, those who disregard the non-aggression axiom affect the welfare of other people whatever the communities they are part of, the goals they pursue and the justifications they bring to support their actions.

4. Deliberative democracy is not an alternative to libertarian self-organization

Agreeing with Winston Churchill's famous dictum „Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time", the overwhelming majority of public voices within the Euro-Atlantic area claim that democracy – with its supposed basic components: the sovereignty of the people, the separation of powers, the human rights protection, the equality before the law, the limitation of government power to interfere in the lives of people or communities, the majority rule in decision making, the protection of minority rights, the open debates on public projects, etc. – is the only acceptable form of political ruling and organization of a society. Some political pundits exhort the societies to refine the democratic political regime by adopting so-called deliberative or participatory democracy, in order to stimulate or to facilitate the everyone's involvement in political discussions, debates and actions.

Sad to say, inasmuch as all political agencies are doomed to fail (because their main tool – aggression – is intrinsically evil), the states that are organized as participatory democracies failed too. Let's analyze, for example, some traits of participatory democracy that were presented by Iris Marion Young (2003) and John Gastil (2008): (1) inclusion, (2) political equality, (3) reasonableness or enlightened understanding, (4) publicity, and (5) participation opportunities.

A system would satisfy the criterion of *inclusion* if all adults who exist within its boundaries are welcomed into its political process (Gastil 2008, 5), i.e. if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making (Young, 23). But for many persons (including me) it's neither useful, nor desirable to be involved in political decision-making process. Why should I vote, if my single vote is superfluous? My vote would be relevant only in case of a tie, and it's highly improbable to have such a situation in political elections. Moreover, inclusion in town hall meetings, citizens' panels, citizens' forums, and so forth generates inequality and overload. Some citizens have plenty of resources (money, time, communication competences, etc.) while others have just a vote. Therefore, their influences differ considerably. Every person who participates in a beach cleanup – even a marginal one – has a useful contribution.

By contrast, a marginal debater adds no value but burdens the sphere of public discussions.

Political equality is illusory, because – by definition – two entities are equal if and only if they are interchangeable (in a given context), and it is impossible to find interchangeable entities (votes, citizens, influences, etc.) in political sphere. The slogan "One man, one vote" suggests that votes have the same importance. It is ironic that the votes of so-called disadvantaged people are sometimes "more equal" that the votes of other people because they form a majority. In addition, some citizens participate in political process only in the form of voting while others are involved in lobbying, fundraising, canvassing, etc.

Reasonableness is possible only if voters request and politicians offer public goods, namely goods that could not be offered to somebody without being offered – in the same conditions – to everybody. Unfortunately, many times voters request and politicians offer scarce goods: minimum wage, affordable houses, subsidies, preferential interest rate, tax exemptions, compensations for damages, etc. When people share scarce goods by political means, or when the solution of somebody's problem is a problem for other people (Higgs 2009), it is difficult to appear reasonable.

Under *publicity* condition, people "must try to explain their particular background experiences, interests, or proposals in ways that others can understand, and they must express reasons for their claims in ways that others recognize could be accepted, even if in fact they disagree with the claims and reasons" (Young 2002, 25). Nobody can deny the reasonableness of this condition, but a "must-proposition" doesn't generate automatically the fact that it refers to.

Finally, for John Gastil, to have equal and adequate *opportunities to participate* means to put issues on the agenda, to express views on those issues, and to vote on those issues, directly or indirectly (Gastil 2008, 6). Could an agency create equal and adequate opportunities for each member of a political society? Categorically no, because all real opportunities are intrinsically subjective, and a public agency can't know them. A good opportunity for me could have no relevance for other people.

5. Toward self-governing communities by libertarian communication performances[1]

Persons who observe the non-aggression principle contribute to the emergence of libertarian civic discourse whatever they do and communicate. Libertarian civic discourse is not a deliberate goal or a constructed order, but a byproduct of some individual (communicative) actions, id est a spontaneous

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[1] A detailed version of this section appeared in the article "Democratic Public Discourse in the Coming Autarchic Communities." (Fârte 2010, 401-406).

order. For libertarians, it is totally absurd to assume the goal of building a libertarian civic discourse or, alas, a libertarian society. Libertarians accept (with deep sadness) the idea that some people choose not to be free.

Like any other discourse, libertarian civic discourse is a cluster of noticeable communication performances. It differs in comparison to other types of discourse by the assumed fundamental values – justice and self-realization as human being –, by the assumed axioms – "Man is a thinking and acting being" and "Aggression is inherently unjust, unjustifiable, and, therefore, unacceptable" –, and by the means of collective action: free involvement, critical thinking, free expression, free exchange of information, peaceful coordination, free reproduction of ideas, civility, and the power of one.

Communicative performances that generate libertarian civic discourse could be associated with several discursive roles: creator, commentator, promoter, developer, educator, instructor, casuist, apologist, facilitator, etc. Fulfilling some of these roles to achieve their *individual* goals, libertarian people contribute *ipso facto* to the development of libertarian civic discourse.

Unsurprisingly, the enemies of all spontaneous orders – the political agencies – seek to control the media of communication as they try to regulate the markets. In societies considered to be democratic, censorship is less obvious because many discover that one can criticize and even slander anybody without being harmed. Few notice, however, that the political agency is ruthless to those who express points of view that can undermine its power.

Fortunately, however fierce the censorship some political agencies exercise, public discourse – as an ensemble of messages used to create a space of openness, transparency, evaluation and emergence of natural rules – is a haven of freedom and voluntary cooperation, if not for the masses, then for the supporters of the non-aggression principle. In the last resort, ideas are indestructible and can be infinitely reproduced in peoples' minds from one generation to the next. The new communication technologies – especially the Internet – give public discourse a truly democratic quality. Messages placed in the new media can reproduce virally and reach billions of computers and minds, so that no political agency in the world can control them.

All participants to the libertarian civic discourse are automatically members of some self-governing communities (at least members of the general libertarian community). These collectivities should not be looked upon as closed and isolated small communities of freaks. Moreover, it is neither necessary, nor always desirable for the members of a libertarian community to live in the same territory. (Geographical concentration makes self-governing communities vulnerable to agencies who initiate aggression.) The most important thing for them is to be connected to a communicational infrastructure which would make possible free involvement, free expression, dynamic coordination, and the free reproduction of ideas. Inasmuch as today democracy means the tyranny of majority and participatory democracy the tyranny of majority plus the power of

vested (and illegitimate) interests, only the emergence of self-governing communities by libertarian discourse offers us a little hope.

Throughout the history of humankind, there has always been a remnant of humanity for which self-control, non-aggression, work, mutuality, freedom, responsibility and integrity were values indispensable to a life worthy of a human being. Aware of their own fallibility, the persons did not strive to create a perfect world, but to discern and respect principles and rules capable of diminishing injustice in the world. Self-governing communities do not try to change the world and do not seek to replace the power of political agencies by their own authority. They offer support and encouragement to those who refuse to aggress and govern their fellow men, preferring to control themselves.

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