



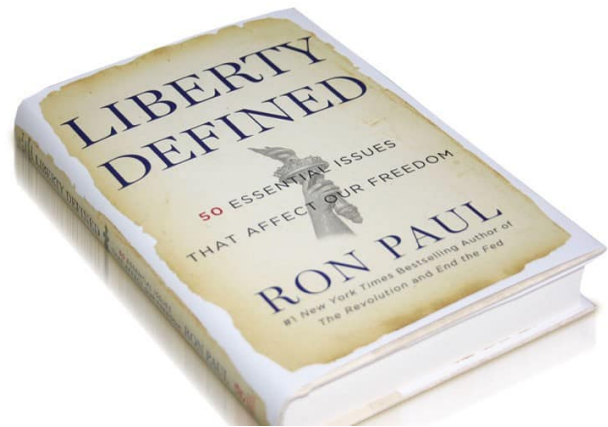
Written by [Becky Akers](#) on May 9, 2011

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Taking the Road Less Traveled

Liberty Defined, by Ron Paul, New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2011, 352 pages, hardcover.

When was the last time you opened a book by a contemporary politician — or more accurately, his ghostwriter — to see Lysander Spooner mentioned, much less discussed, and intelligently so? If you crave so exceedingly rare and rarified a pleasure, treat yourself to Rep. Ron Paul's (R-Texas) newest effort, *Liberty Defined*.



Were Dr. Paul a typical American ruler, he would be far more familiar with lobbyists and menus at four-star restaurants than with anarcho-capitalists from the 19th century. And if by some bizarre happenstance, he had actually heard of Spooner, he would vilify and denounce him for his vigorous hostility against government. But of course, Dr. Paul is as unusual as freedom is.

That accounts for his “cult-like following,” the smear with which statist dismiss those Americans who yearn for the “individual liberty, constitutional government, sound money, free markets, and ... noninterventionist foreign policy” that Dr. Paul has always championed. It accounts as well for the fact that, though I am an anarcho-capitalist who would never buy (in any sense of the word) a politician's prattle, let alone recommend it, I happily break that rule for Dr. Paul and *Liberty Defined*.

Maybe you've studied political philosophy extensively; *Liberty Defined*, though as “accessible” and “easy to digest” as its publisher promises, will still thrill you. Here is a Congressman of 12 terms who spouts such condemnations of government as, “Do our leaders in Washington believe in liberty? They sometimes say they do. I don't think they are telling the truth.” A page later, he briefly reviews the wars and genocide of the 20th century to warn that “the threat of government today, all over the world, may well present a greater danger than anything that occurred” then. All this, and we haven't even left the Introduction!

One of the good doctor's greatest services to liberty is his evangelizing. His principled, consistent, and breathtakingly courageous stance for freedom over the decades, his integrity, his courtesy and gentlemanliness, under even the rudest, most ignorant attacks, have converted legions from their faith in Leviathan.

Unfortunately, their enthusiasm often exceeds their knowledge of freedom's philosophy. One reader of [campaignforliberty.com](#), the website Dr. Paul founded, comments that “Ron Paul is an amazing person and he's really got me into the ideas of libertarianism/free markets,” but then lauds “public/socialized healthcare” in Canada and by extension ObamaCare. Another defends government's regulation of smoking on aircraft because he is “old enough to have experienced many flights without any smoking restrictions at all and they were not pleasant.”

It's these folks and those who have yet to consider freedom's blessings who most need *Liberty Defined*. Dr. Paul alternately teaches and preaches with his trademark tact, then applies freedom's tenets to 50



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issues — everything from Abortion and Austrian Economics, through CIA, Discrimination, Education, Gun Control, and Monetary Policy, to Security, Surveillance, and Unions.

The Content

Each subject forms a chapter averaging seven pages, all of which are remarkably free of jargon (perhaps we're benefiting from Dr. Paul's earning a degree in medicine rather than law); "the idea of this book," Dr. Paul tells us, "is not to provide a blueprint for the future or an all-encompassing defense of a libertarian program. What I offer here are thoughts on a series of controversial topics that tend to confuse people, and these are interpreted in light of my own experience and my thinking." He adds with characteristic humility, "I present not final answers but rather guideposts for thinking seriously about these topics. I certainly do not expect every reader to agree with my beliefs." But let's hope for liberty's sake that most do.

For example, Mr. ObamaCare would benefit immensely from Dr. Paul's essay on "Medical Care," even if he reads no further than its opening paragraph: "The prevailing attitude of the American people is that everyone has a right to medical care. This is an intellectual error... The supposed right to medical care can only be guaranteed at others' expense. The transfer can only be arranged by force. This creates oppressive bureaucracies, encourages overutilization of resources, and leads to technological stagnation and inevitably to rationing and deprivation."

Hold your cheers until you read Dr. Paul's next sentence, because you'll want to make them even louder: "It's true that everyone has a right to *pursue* medical care without being hindered by government policies. But that is not the system we have today."

Our hero then helps readers toward "a proper understanding of what insurance is and is not." Politicians have so abused the word that most Americans no longer distinguish between its true meaning — a financial instrument that "measures risk" — and the impostor of "government social welfare schemes" that said government relentlessly pushes instead.

Or flip back a few chapters for an exposé on that alias of despotism we call "democracy." Lauded by dictators criminal or merely notorious, worshipped by much of the American public, democracy is America's sacred cow. Yet Dr. Paul fearlessly slaughters it. "Pure democracy, in which the law itself is up for grabs based on legislative maneuvering, is the enemy of individual rights, and it victimizes the minority," he explains. Nor should citizens "be able to vote to take away the rights of others. And yet this is what the slogan democracy has come to mean domestically. It does not mean that the people prevail over the government; it means that the government prevails over the people by claiming the blessing of mass opinion."

This chapter gobsmacks us with one brilliant, iconoclastic demerit against democracy after another:

The real danger of democracy is the ability of the majority to arbitrarily redefine individual rights.... It would have been better if we had stayed a loose-knit confederation and not allowed the failed principles of democracy and slavery to infect the Constitution.... How can we 'spread our goodness' around the world through occupation and violence when here at home we have squandered our liberties and wealth?

But perhaps my favorite point in this chapter occurs just three sentences into it: "If the government is small and unintrusive, the form of government doesn't matter that much." Could the saintly Paul argue



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more persuasively for dismantling the welfare-warfare state? Could he more succinctly suggest a reason for scaling back Leviathan to the minuscule proportions the Founders prescribed?

If We Fail to Succeed

Americans throughout our history have probably felt they stood at a crossroads, with the fate of the country and of liberty hanging in the balance. But the intersection we now face of totalitarianism and freedom, and our decision as to which of those wildly diverging roads we'll travel, seem especially imperative. Dr. Paul explicitly acknowledges that "We ... live in an age where the current system is being challenged for philosophic and practical reasons. Its failure is becoming more evident every day. There have been plenty of agitators and reformers for decades ... offer[ing] the practical alternative of freedom. Fortunately, their voices are growing louder and there's reason to be hopeful that our times will prompt a sea change in Americans' understanding of what the role of government ought to be."

Let us pray that after reading *Liberty Defined*, multitudes choose the road less traveled, for that will make all the difference.



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