



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## **A Methodology for Hope**

**by Jacob G. Hornberger**

A major adverse consequence of the 9/11 attacks has been a feeling of resignation that has come over some advocates of liberty. The feeling is that, given 9/11 and the “war on terrorism,” the omnipotent state is here to stay for the indefinite future. As difficult as it was to restore libertarian principles to our country in the pre-9/11 period, it is now thought that the chances of accomplishing such a goal are virtually non-existent, at least in the short term. Therefore, feeling that the restoration of libertarianism is now virtually impossible, these advocates of liberty seem to have resigned themselves to devoting their lives to reforming and improving federal programs and policies rather than fighting for their eradication.

There is no question that the paradigms of socialism, interventionism, and empire are extremely well entrenched in our land. There’s hardly any part of our lives and property that is not subject to federal control. The 9/11 attacks, the war on Iraq, and the perpetual “war on terrorism” made things worse because they made people feel that that overwhelming federal power over our lives has become permanent.

At the same time, however, there appears to be tremendous “dis — ease” in our nation. There seems to be a growing sense among a segment in society that something is simply not right in America. It is those people who provide a hope for reaching a critical mass that would cause a major paradigm shift toward libertarianism and the restoration of freedom in America.

That is why it is so vitally important that libertarians resist the temptation to surrender to the status quo and instead continue sharing their insights with others about the moral nature of libertarian ideas and on the practical benefits that would flow from the adoption of the libertarian philosophy.

If truth and ideas didn’t matter — that is, if they weren’t powerful — totalitarian governments would not devote so much time and energy to suppressing them. The reason they do attempt to suppress them is that they know how powerful such forces are, especially when they enter the minds of people who are feeling “disease” and who are seeking something better for society and for their individual lives. It is that seeking-segment of a society that terrifies political

rulers because government officials know that, no matter how powerful the government is, a major shift in thinking among the citizenry can bring about enormous political change, sometimes very rapidly.

Ideas move people to action, especially ideas that are grounded in moral principles. This is how people throughout history have risen above their ordinary daily affairs to achieve such monumental things as the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, habeas corpus, and due process of law. Achievements such as those don't just happen. They are the result of people's efforts to speak the truth and share ideas on freedom with others, who then think and reflect upon such truths and ideas and who are then motivated to share them with yet others.

Sharing truth and ideas is much like planting seeds. Some are going to fall on fertile ground and others not. But one must not be overconcerned about that. What matters is the conviction that truth and ideas do matter and that their transmission can move an entire society to action. Once that conviction enters a person's mind, then the quest becomes not so much trying to convert people to libertarianism or measuring the success of one's efforts to spread ideas on freedom but simply: How can I best inject ideas on freedom into the marketplace of ideas, knowing that, if a person does embrace the idea, it might well change the course of his life and cause him to do the same with others?

Once a feeling of resignation and inevitability of omnipotent government takes over a person's mind, he often succumbs to the temptation to spend his time spreading ideas on how to reform and improve federal programs, often under the rubric of advancing a "free-market reform," rather than advancing genuine libertarian ideas.

The tragedy in this is obviously that by spreading ideas that call for reform, rather than for replacing the current paradigm with a libertarian paradigm, the status quo is reinforced because people aren't made aware that there is a true alternative.

### **Spreading ideas: the Internet**

Moreover, as bad as things are politically, we can count our blessings with respect to the opportunities we still have to disseminate libertarian ideas here in the United States. While the federal authorities are becoming increasingly oppressive, Americans still have more than ample opportunity to speak the truth and share ideas on freedom with others, especially thanks to our ancestors' wisdom and foresight in expressly prohibiting the Congress from depriving people of freedom of speech in the First Amendment.

Moreover, we are the fortunate beneficiaries of what is undoubtedly the most efficient and effective vehicle for spreading truth and ideas in history — the Internet. It is impossible to overstate the power of the Internet in this respect. In order to spread ideas in the pre-Internet

days, one needed to publish books or newsletters, or purchase time on radio or television, or send op-eds or letters to newspapers, or deliver speeches to relatively small groups of people. While those can be very effective means of disseminating ideas, they can also be relatively difficult and expensive.

Today, thanks to the Internet, virtually anyone can share his thoughts and ideas with potentially unlimited numbers of people, and at a lower cost than before.

Thus, while political circumstances have placed us in a position of seeming to be saddled with an all-powerful government for the indefinite future, at the same time life has presented us with an enormously powerful vehicle for the dissemination of libertarian ideas to others.

So should we resign ourselves to “reform” when we’ve been blessed with such a grand opportunity to share the libertarian vision with others? Perish the thought! We should instead redouble our efforts to prevail. Which means, again, speaking the truth to others and sharing ideas on freedom, not only orally and in writing but also through the click of the “forward” button on one’s email software.

### **The “life of the lie”**

Why is truth so powerful, especially as a means to restore libertarianism to American society? Because it is able to pierce through the lies and deceptions that cloud a person’s mind, thereby oftentimes causing the person to shift his world-view.

Long-time readers of *Freedom Daily* know that one of my favorite quotations is from Johann von Goethe: “None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.” The reason I like it so much is that I don’t think any words better express the plight of the American people of our time.

There is little question that most Americans honestly believe they are free. Every day, from the first grade on up, they are told they are free. Government officials repeat it ad infinitum, ad nauseam. Parents teach it to their children.

Yet consider some of the political-economic programs and policies under which Americans live: income taxation, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, public schooling, economic regulations, drug laws, welfare, immigration controls, trade restrictions, gun control, and denial of due process and jury trials for suspected terrorists, to mention just a few.

Every single one of those programs and policies is found in Cuba, North Korea, and China, all of which are communist-socialist countries. Ask yourself: Are people in those societies free? Why not? Don’t they live under the same political and economic programs and policies as Americans?

The problem, of course, is that Americans have been taught, mostly in the 12 years they served in public schools, that freedom consists primarily of the right to participate in the political process, the right to religious freedom, and the right of free expression. If people have all those

rights, the common perception is that that means they're free. That is in fact how Americans would distinguish the Cubans, North Koreans, and Chinese from themselves despite the fact that they share the same economic programs and policies.

Yet how many Americans know that their American ancestors, say in 1889, lived without any of those economic programs or policies? I'm willing to bet that most people have never given much thought to that. Or, even worse, they've bought in to the government line that all these programs are simply a means by which "free enterprise" was saved and extended into American life.

### **Economic liberty vs. socialism**

It's all a "life of the lie." Americans rejected income taxation for more than 100 years of our nation's history. The same holds true for other aspects of socialism, including the crown jewel of socialism — Social Security — as well as public schooling, welfare, Medicare, Medicaid, subsidies, and government grants. The same holds true for the drug war, economic regulations, and travel restrictions. And for gun control. And immigration controls. And abridgements of due process of law, jury trials, right to counsel, and civil liberties.

That's what distinguished an American, in say 1889, from people throughout history. That's what those Americans called freedom. That's what made America different. For the only time in history, people had so severely limited government power that they were free to engage in economic enterprise freely — that is, without governmental monitoring or control, engage in mutually beneficial transactions with others anywhere in the world, keep everything they earned, and decide what to do with it.

Why did early Americans choose libertarianism? Because of moral principles. They believed that it was wrong for a person to take what didn't belong to him, even when it was done through the political process. They believed that freedom entailed the right to make peaceful choices and that morality meant nothing when government forced people to make the "right choice." They believed freedom meant the right to live one's life any way he chooses so long as his conduct is peaceful.

That was why they rejected the socialism and interventionism that was taking the world by storm in the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century.

### **Republic versus empire**

Their philosophy with respect to foreign policy, especially foreign wars, was a simple one. While they recognized that people all over the world had always suffered under tyrannical and oppressive regimes, they would not permit the federal government to wage foreign wars to save or liberate foreigners.

Instead, their philosophy was that by establishing a model free society here (without income taxation, Social Security, et cetera), they would be doing more for the world than by having an all-powerful government going abroad “in search of monsters to destroy.”

Moreover, by refusing to enact barriers to immigration, they sent the world a powerful message, one that is encapsulated on the Statue of Liberty: If you are able to escape the tyranny or oppression under which you suffer, there will always be at least one country to which you can go.

Compare that foreign policy to the one under which we now live: An all-powerful federal government that levies exorbitant taxes on the citizenry to fund massive military interventions abroad that kill countless innocent people in the alleged attempt to save or liberate them, while at the same time harassing immigrants and issuing travel advisories warning Americans of the increased risks of traveling abroad — actions that tend to alienate the American people from others around the world. And of course we now have the ever-present retaliatory terrorist strikes that such interventions produce, along with the “temporary” suspension of civil liberties that inevitably follows.

The fact is that nearly everything the federal government has touched is an absolute mess — the drug war, Social Security, Medicare, government spending, the dollar, Iraq, immigration, trade, foreign policy, and much more. It is almost a confirmation that God has created a consistent universe: Abandon moral principles, including those in your political system, and reap the adverse consequences.

Truth and libertarian ideas enable people to break through the lies and deceptions and recognize that there is a reason for the crises in which our nation is mired and that there is a real solution to them. They enable people to see that the many woes that afflict our nation are rooted in the morally bankrupt paradigms of socialism, interventionism, and empire that have held our nation in their grip for decades and that the only real solution to such woes is libertarianism.

Now, it's true that when an American discovers the truth about his plight, he might well say, “Well, okay, they lied to me. It's not free enterprise I live under. It is socialism, interventionism, and empire. But I like it and I'll stick with it.”

But others might well conclude, “They've lied to me, and now I see why our nation is so mired in crises. Libertarianism holds the key to our nation's future. I'm going to help spread it far and wide in the hope of restoring liberty to our land.”

In order to make a conscious choice between paradigms, people need to be made aware that there is an alternative paradigm — that it is one based on the founding principles of our nation, one that is grounded in moral principles, and one that will significantly improve people's lives. That is why libertarians should resist the temptation to reform the status quo and instead continue advancing libertarian ideas. That is where the hope for the future lies.

*Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.*

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