



# Henry George & Benjamin R. Tucker: A Dialogue



**By Jack Schwartzman**

**F**rom your resting places in Eternity, I have summoned you, gentlemen, to ask you to clarify for me your thoughts about society, government, State, socialism, anarchism, individualism, and liberty. There are few human beings in history whom I have admired as much as you two. You, Henry George, achieved international fame with your *Progress and Poverty*, a book which attacked monopoly of land and other State-fostered iniquities, championed individual Liberty, and envisioned a future where poverty and most of the functions of the State would be eliminated. You, Benjamin Tucker, received international acclaim (though to a lesser degree than Henry George) for your anarchistic Liberty, a magazine which attacked four State-fostered monopolies, championed individual Liberty, and envisioned a future where poverty *and* the State would be eliminated. Two great individualistic prophets! There should have been nothing but harmony between you. Yet, I am saddened to note that bitter hostility existed instead, especially on your part, Mr. Tucker.

For more than ten years, not only did you attack Henry George ideologically, but personally as well. In 1896, one year before his death, you published a savage denunciation, *Henry George, Traitor*, in which you castigated him for his alleged silence in the Haymarket case. I am stunned by such hatred. Were not both of you

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renowned as proponents of Liberty? Did not your magazine, *Liberty*, Mr. Tucker, carry as its slogan Proudhon's celebrated maxim: "Liberty, the mother, not the daughter of order"? And you, Mr. George, did not your beautifully poetic "Ode to Liberty" add greatly to your stature? Why, then, since both of you shared the same faith in and love for Liberty, were you such enemies?

I would appreciate your answers to this and to other questions in dialogue form. I shall act as a very unobtrusive moderator. Please reply in your original words — those that once appeared in print. (Where paraphrases of the original words will have to be used, please enclose them in parentheses.)

Shall we begin, gentlemen? Since we have already mentioned Liberty, let us commence our discussion with that concept. What *is* Liberty? What *purpose* does it serve?

Tucker: The purpose of Liberty . . . is the abolition of authority (which is another name for the State).<sup>1</sup> . . . As a choice of blessings, Liberty is the greater; as a choice of evils, Liberty is the smaller. Then Liberty always, say the anarchists.<sup>2</sup>

George: Liberty! It is a word to be conjured with, not to vex the ear in empty boastings. For Liberty means Justice, and Justice is the natural law — the law of health and symmetry and strength, of fraternity and co-operation . . . Liberty is to virtue what light is to color; to wealth what sunshine is to grain; to knowledge what eyes are to sight. She is the genius of invention, the brawn of national strength, the spirit of national independence.<sup>3</sup>

Tucker: Mr. George has no conception of Liberty as a universal social law . . . It has never dawned upon his mind that disorder is the inevitable fruit of every plant which has authority for its roots (and Mr. George, through the Single Tax, believes in authority).<sup>4</sup> I have . . . derided many of the arguments by which Mr. George has attempted to justify . . . his ridiculous pretense that he is a champion of Liberty.<sup>5</sup> The man who believes in aggression and government as the basis of society (as Mr. George does, through his would-be meddling Single Tax snoopers), . . . has not learned his lesson that "Liberty is the mother of order." This lesson, then, . . . is the essential condition of the development of anarchism.<sup>6</sup>

George: (This is nonsense. Anarchism, or anarchy, used synonymously by Mr. Tucker, is a branch of socialism — as Mr. Tucker admits — and socialism is the true aggressor and the real enemy of Liberty.) We have passed out of the socialism of the tribal State, and

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cannot enter it again except by a retrogression that would involve anarchy and perhaps barbarism.<sup>7</sup>

(It is incredible how Mr. Tucker speaks of the "mother of order," a "lesson" to be learned, and a "universal social law." It is *my* "remedy," not his, that is based on all these precepts.) Liberty is the source, the mother, the necessary condition . . . Either we must wholly accept her or she will not stay . . . This is the universal law. This is the lesson of the centuries. Unless its foundation be laid in justice the social structure cannot stand.<sup>8</sup>

Moderator: Gentlemen, I believe that this cross-fire concerning Liberty has produced more heat than light. Let us speak of something more specific, the relationship between the individual and the collective. Possibly, then, we may be able to differentiate the issues a bit more. Both of you have been named and famed as great individualists. What is the relation between the individual and the State, between the individual and society, and between society and the State?

Tucker: (As far as I am concerned), I do not admit anything except the existence of the individual, as a condition of his sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> (Anarchism is synonymous with individualism, and both "isms" recognize the right of every non-aggressive individual to the full control of his person and property.)<sup>10</sup> (Anarchism is) the doctrine that all the affairs of men should be managed by individuals or voluntary associations and that the State should be abolished.<sup>11</sup>

(Society is) not a person or a thing but a relation, and a relation can have no rights. (Society consists of individuals, and only individuals possess rights.)<sup>12</sup>

(As far as the State is concerned), the individual is not related to the State as the tiger's paw is related to the tiger. Kill the tiger, and the tiger's paw no longer performs its office; kill the State, and the individual still lives and satisfies his wants. As for society, the anarchists would not kill it if they could, and could not if they would. (They only wish to abolish the State.)<sup>13</sup>

(As for the Marxists, who claim that society and the State are one, my answer is that they are one in the sense) that the lamb and Hon are one after the lion has eaten the lamb.<sup>14</sup>

George: (Considering the individuals as atoms, each individual's best potential is realized in society.)<sup>15</sup> Society is an organism, not a machine. It can live only by the individual life of its parts.<sup>16</sup>

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(When my "remedy" is finally adopted, the community would collect the rent, and) society . . . would approach the ideal of Jeffersonian democracy . . . the abolition of government.<sup>17</sup> An immense and complicated network of governmental machinery would thus be dispensed with.<sup>18</sup>

Tucker: That there is an entity known as the community which is the rightful owner of all land anarchists deny. I . . . maintain that the community is a non-entity, that it has no existence, and is simply a combination of individuals having no prerogative beyond those of the individuals themselves.<sup>19</sup> (The Single Tax, George's "remedy," is nothing more than a State socialistic measure, just another crushing tax.)<sup>20</sup> A . . . pertinent analogy would be a comparison of the George scheme for the confiscation of rent with a system of individual banking of which the State should confiscate the profits.<sup>21</sup>

George: (It is strange that the anarchists, who believe in "society," have the temerity to speak up against "community" and to attack the Single Tax. They admit that they are socialists. Is there anything more Statist than socialism?) Socialism takes no account of natural laws, neither seeking them nor striving to be governed by them . . . . The proposal which socialism makes is that the collectivity or State shall assume the management of all means of production . . . ; do away with all competition, and convert mankind into two classes, the directors . . . and the workers . . . . Modern socialism is . . . without religion, and its tendency is atheistic. It has no system of individual rights whereby it can define the extent to which the individual is entitled to Liberty, or to which the State may go in restraining it.<sup>22</sup>

Tucker: (There are two kinds of socialists: State socialists and individual anarchists. The socialism referred to by Henry George is *State* socialism. It is nothing less than the State itself — at its worst. The anarchists of the *Liberty* magazine are socialists only in the economic sense; in the political sense, they are arch-individualists. They oppose all State intervention, the kind mentioned above by Henry George, and the kind that he himself urges through his Single Tax. In fact, the Single Taxers are the State inquisitors of the future.)<sup>23</sup>

Moderator: Once again, gentlemen, I must step in. Each side is accusing the other of being Statist; each side is calling itself individualistic. Since, once again, much heat is generated by this

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debate, it will be necessary for me (forgive the presumptuousness) to summarize and conclude this dialogue.

Elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> I have compared your economic solutions: your Single Tax, Mr. George, with your "occupancy and use" formula, Mr. Tucker. It is not important, for the purposes of this dialogue, to discuss those economic views here. Therefore, I shall summarize the political issues only — those that we discussed here.

I find *both* of you, gentlemen, to be brilliant, fiery, sincere, intense, and strongly individualistic. I find *both* of you to be staunchly anti-Statist. The fact that each of you accuses the other of being in favor of the State only points out the dangers inherent in each of your panaceas.

There is, in each political movement, no matter how individualistic it professes to be, a tendency to "centralize" its direction by leaving it in the hands of a few "leaders" — who may then lead the individualistic "followers" straight into the Hell of Statism. Therefore, you are each right in pointing out the individualistic "virtues" of your own theory and the dangers in that of your "opponent."

There are no "victors" in this dialogue/debate, nor is there any inconsistency on my part to root for both sides. All that is left for me to say is: May your philosophies retain for Eternity their sparkle and their freshness! May your words be heard always! May the number of your adherents increase constantly! And, best of all:

May there be Liberty forever!

### Footnotes

1. James J. Martin, *Men Against the State* (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Publisher, 1970), p. 213.
2. Benjamin R. Tucker, *Individual Liberty* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1926), p. 85.
3. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1979), pp. 546-7.
4. Tucker, *Individual Liberty*, pp. 195-6.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
7. George, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 320-1.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 546-8.
9. Tucker, *Individual Liberty*, p. 32.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
12. Martin, *Men Against the State*, p. 209.

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13. Tucker, *Individual Liberty*, pp. 50-1.
14. Atindranath Bose, *A History of Anarchism* (Calcutta: The World Press Private Ltd., 1967), pp. 382-3, 387.
15. George, *Progress and Poverty*, p. 487.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 321.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 456.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 454.
19. Martin, *Men Against the State*, p. 220.
20. Tucker, *Individual Liberty*, p. 189.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
22. Henry George, *Science of Political Economy* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1981), p. 198.
23. Tucker, *Individual Liberty*, pp. 1-19.
24. Jack Schwartzman, "Ingalls, Hanson, and Tucker: Nineteenth-Century American Anarchists," in Robert V. Andelson (ed.), *Critics of Henry George* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 234-53.