

speechwriting for a tobacco company might be morally dubious, and neglecting to tell his international readers that Pauline Hanson was acquitted of electoral fraud. But his occasional lapses highlight his studied objectivity elsewhere. ‘The true speechwriter never writes for the political opposition,’ he writes.

Naturally enough, Glover considers the profession of speech writing. He portrays an exciting, unique and rare vocation—one bound to entice any budding Graham Freudenberg or Peggy Noonan. He is generally sceptical about politicians who write their own speeches—the ones who ‘usually end up having nervous breakdowns.’ He singles out Rudd for not trusting the talents of his speech writers.

Glover’s book is also a plea for better speech making. Is it a plea in vain?

‘To be ignorant of what occurred before you is to forever remain a child,’ wrote Cicero. Glover seems to agree; for professional speechwriters, history and literature provide the best academic training. But what if the audiences are child-like? Modern curricula have ensured younger generations are bereft of the key names and events from history that their parents and grandparents could easily recall. This lack of common knowledge among citizens poses a growing problem for speech writing.

The public’s knowledge of grammar has collapsed too. But perhaps that has been a help. After all, Glover notes that Neil Armstrong ‘fluffed’ his immortal *antithesis*—employment of contrasting ideas for dramatic

effect—during his 1969 moon landing. He ‘left out the crucial indefinite article’ ‘a.’

**Reviewed by Adam Creighton**

*Libertarianism Today*

by Jacob Huebert

Praeger Press, 2010

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Although libertarianism has long been on the fringe of respectable political discourse, it has seemingly only attracted appreciable public attention since the arrival of the global financial crisis and the Obama presidency. Indeed, the rise of ostensibly libertarian media personalities such as Glenn Beck and movements like the Tea Party in the United States in recent years has done much to repopularise the philosophy’s rhetoric of individual freedom and restrained government.

Yet many established libertarians like historian Jeff Riggenbach have repudiated this ‘new generation,’ characterising its often conservative and war-friendly undertones as ‘nothing remotely libertarian.’ It is from this context that Jacob Huebert’s *Libertarianism Today* attempts to provide a clear account of true libertarianism in the tradition of thinkers like Leonard Read and Murray Rothbard. To accomplish this, the book

is effectively divided into two parts: the first briefly develops the theory behind libertarianism, while the second explores modern libertarian perspectives on topics as diverse as economics, warfare, drug prohibition, and intellectual property.

Huebert begins his task by detailing the basic ‘non-aggression principle’ of libertarianism: the notion that individuals ought to be allowed to do anything they wish so long as they do not harm others through force or fraud. Not missing a beat, the author seizes the opportunity to take a dig at both conservatism and

left-liberalism, duly characterising the ideologies as predicated on the excessive use of state force. Appropriately, the reader is reminded of the modern conservative’s proclivity for war, spying, corporate welfare and social management, and the

left-liberal’s fondness for coercive wealth equalisation and restrictive economic controls.

While libertarianism is distinguished from orthodox politics on the issue of force, the author is also quick to draw battle-lines within the philosophy itself. Noted are the differences between the apparently ‘Establishment-friendly’ brand of libertarianism associated with both the Cato Institute and the Chicago school of economics and the ‘more principled’ and radical libertarianism associated with the Ludwig von Mises Institute. In particular, the schools’ bitter debate on the issue of monetary policy is detailed,



with the Chicagoans' tendency to see a role for government in controlling the money supply and short-term interest rates contrasted unfavorably with the more consistent belief of the 'Austrians' at the Mises Institute that both be left to the market.

Though branding 'Establishment-friendly' libertarians as less principled leaves few questions about where the author's loyalties lie, Huebert properly limits his reproach, and instead explores the methodological differences that lead the Chicagoans to allow for a larger role for government than the Austrians. This evenhanded approach to explaining views the author disagrees with is indeed both typical of the book and one of its major strengths.

In any case, the unashamedly unbending libertarianism of the author ultimately lends itself to a more forthright and absorbing account of specific libertarian policy positions. Huebert does not equivocate when, for example, he seeks to explain the causes of the recent financial crisis. Indeed, after repudiating *Slate.com* editor-in-chief Jacob Weisberg's claims that the crash was caused by the apparent political ascendancy of libertarianism, he succinctly details the Austrian theory of the business cycle to instead present the culpability of different levels of government. Specifically, Huebert explains the US Federal Reserve's role in creating the illusory and unsustainable economic 'boom' through its manipulation of the money supply, and blames the concomitant distortion of the capital production structure for the unemployment

rife since the bust. Noted also are the eerily accurate predictions of the crash made by Austrians using the theory, including those of Robert Blumen, Mark Thornton, and most famously, Peter Schiff. These are illuminatingly contrasted with the timid efforts of some libertarians at the Cato Institute to defend the economy and the Fed's performance in both the lead-up to and the aftermath of the crash.

The author's radical brand of libertarianism also allows for a provocative chapter on drug policy. In perhaps the most eye-opening part of the book, Huebert makes a once again unambiguous case for the complete legalisation of all drugs. The author suggests many libertarians are particularly hostile to the war on drugs not only because they believe people should be at liberty to consume the substances they desire, but also because of certain important factors concerning drug prohibition. Precisely, the war on drugs has often been based on farcically dishonest government propaganda, and more significantly, has resulted in the deaths of many through gangsterism not seen since the American prohibition of alcohol.

To emphasise this case, Huebert explores America's history prior to drug prohibition. He points out that before World War I, when a '9-year-old girl could walk into a drug store and buy heroin,' only around 0.5% of the population was addicted to drugs. Moreover, most of those people were able to continue as high-functioning members of society, thanks largely to their ability to deal with their addiction out in the open,

and to feed it both inexpensively and responsibly. Similarly, 'there was virtually none of the violence, death and crime,' nor the decimation of entire inner-city neighborhoods that is today part and parcel of the drug trade. Though this unqualified call for the immediate legalisation of all drugs soft and hard will irk some less rigid libertarians, it undoubtedly reflects the perspectives of the growing number of younger libertarians who consistently rather than arbitrarily apply the non-aggression principle to policy issues.

If the book falls down anywhere, it is in overplaying the role of the Austrians in the development of modern libertarianism. Although the Austrians have no doubt played one of the largest roles, with the movement almost defined by the works of Murray Rothbard and his intellectual disciples, the reader would be forgiven for thinking few non-Austrian libertarians have contributed anything much at all. For example, Ayn Rand's considerable influence on the development of Rothbard's natural rights libertarianism, as evidenced by correspondence between the two, fails to be noted by the author. The novelist and philosopher is instead relegated to a few pages early on where her works are characterised as one-time 'gateway drugs' to libertarianism that today barely perform that role. Likewise, while thinkers such as Milton Friedman and to a lesser extent Robert Nozick are given some page time, their rather significant contributions to the evolution of the philosophy still come across

trivialised. Yet this is a only a minor quibble in a book that otherwise packs a great deal of complexity and information into limited space.

Indeed, although the author could not possibly provide a complete introduction to an ideology as unorthodox and contested as libertarianism in such a short volume, Huebert's attempt is the most engaging and incisive currently available. Further, its unabashedly radical nature is a welcome surprise for a book that could just as easily have been meandering and equivocal in its case for libertarianism. With an abundance of suggestions for further reading throughout, it should appeal to all readers from the most well-informed libertarian to those new to the radical theory.

**Reviewed by Alex Willemys**

*Government Size and Implications for Economic Growth*

**By Andreas Bergh and Magnus Henrekson**

American Enterprise Institute  
Washington D.C., 2010  
US\$20, 85 pages  
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**W**hat, if anything, does bigger government mean for economic growth? This is an old question that has acquired new relevance since the global financial crisis led the state to assume an expanded role in many developed economies. While some of that expansion will be unwound in

recovery, some of it is here to stay, driven by a backlash against capitalism and free markets. This prospect, if nothing else, makes *Government Size and Implications for Economic Growth* timely and worth reading. Even before the crisis, however, government spending and taxation were claiming large shares of the economies of developed countries.

To ordinary people the size of government is an abstract concept. Public opinion is swayed more by anecdotes about waste and mismanagement in government than by analysis of total taxation or government spending as shares of gross domestic product (GDP), which have little meaning to the non-expert. Libertarians are also concerned about waste and mismanagement, but to them government spending and taxation as shares of GDP are a neat way of quantifying the extent of government intrusion in economic life. Libertarians are always in need of new ways to extend the popular reach of their arguments against big government. If they can cite evidence of a direct link from larger government to slower economic growth, they will have a powerful message that is readily understandable to ordinary people—that bigger government makes us all poorer (than we otherwise would be). That's where books such as this one come in.

*Government Size and Implications for Economic Growth* is a reflection of contemporary American economic and

political debate, but it is not a Tea Party tirade against government; it is a serious little book from two well-credentialed researchers—Swedes, in fact, who would know a thing or two about super-sized government from direct experience in their home country. The book is nonetheless quick and easy for an economically literate but non-academic audience to digest, with the exception of Chapter 2 titled 'What Existing Studies Show.' Most readers will find this chapter eye-glazing in its technical detail. But this trawl through the relevant empirical economic research is necessary

to back up the authors' key conclusion that in rich countries, an increase of 10 percentage points in tax revenue as a share of GDP leads to annual economic growth being between one half and one percentage point lower. For those in want of the reassurance of rigour, Chapter 2 provides

it, investigating but dismissing possible upsets to the above conclusion such as reverse causality, omitted variables, and sensitivity of the results to the selection of countries and time periods.

Readers familiar with the topic will find two novel points of emphasis. One is an explanation for how Scandinavian countries have managed to combine a relatively good economic performance with their attachment to big government—the biggest, in fact, among the world's market economies. On the face of it, the Scandinavian experience is

