

2008

# John H. Hallowell: The Criteria of Integral Liberalism: Study Guide

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## Recommended Citation

Samson, Steven Alan, "John H. Hallowell: The Criteria of Integral Liberalism: Study Guide" (2008). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 225.

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# JOHN H. HALLOWELL: THE CRITERIA OF INTEGRAL LIBERALISM: STUDY GUIDE, 2008

## Steven Alan Samson

Classical liberalism reflects its origins in a Christian civilization but subtly differs from Christianity in its voluntarist conception of the nature and destiny of man. In the absence of a strong ontological and epistemological sense of God's creation and superintendence of the world, liberal values become either mere assertions with little rational basis (which has led to a widespread rejection of natural law) or sentimental holdovers from a faith that has lost its claim over the whole of life. As the Apostle Paul noted, the alternative is the Epicurean motto: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor. 15:32).

### Integral Liberalism: Precepts or Criteria

- Absolute value of human personality [Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. relativized it]
- Spiritual equality of all individuals [Hobbes was less high-minded: the ability to murder one another is a "great equalizer"]
- Autonomy of individual will [cf. Rushdoony's "Man Over Law," which leads to "Man Apart from Law"]
- Essential rationality and goodness of man
- Inalienable rights [but not concomitant duties]
- Contractual relationship between the state and individual [contradicts "inalienable rights"]
- Law is the product of human will but also the embodiment of reason
- Government has primarily negative functions ["positive liberty" comes later]
- Individual freedom in all spheres of life
- Transcendental order of truth accessible to man's natural reason and capable of evoking a moral response [a holdover of the natural law view]

Individual conscience, rather than God's sovereignty, has become the keystone of liberal doctrine. In fact, God is edged out of the picture. The individual conscience takes the place of God, who is moved from the public realm of obedience or worshipful submission to the private realm of belief. Liberalism thus represents an evolution from a voluntarist conception of an absolute but arbitrary God to a view of man after the same image. Note what Hallowell says below about making either the state sovereign or the individual sovereign. As Protagoras put it: Man is the measure [and the measurer] of all things.

The idea of inalienable rights and the idea of popular sovereignty are logically incompatible. But Rousseau came up with a solution to the dilemma: his "general will" idea can be used to reinterpret "inalienable" rights so that they are compatible with a state of being "forced to be free." That is, you enjoy the inescapable right to be compelled to act in your own best interest, which is also the collective interest. Rousseau's "general will" may be regarded as an absolute and unlimited sovereignty

that anticipates the totalitarianism of more recent times. This general will is “popular” because the people submit to what is in their best interest as determined by the “people’s republic” (or its “vanguard”).

In the liberal worldview, the subjective claims of individuals undercut the organic aspect of human community. Russell Kirk’s canons of conservatism represent an effort to bring the respective goods of individuals and communities into harmony by restoring the transcendental dimension that liberalism has forsaken. What Rousseau offered is a this-worldly replacement. Liberalism depends on acts of the will (e.g., consent) to make its vision of “natural reason” practically binding. But there is nothing to prevent another act of the will from loosing what was previously bound. Amid the free-for-all of electoral politics and the cupidity of temporary majorities (what Rousseau called “the will of all”), there is also nothing to prevent one faction from boldly claiming to represent the will of the people and imposing its own will on the rest (“one man, one vote, one time”). Hence the regime of “political correctness” and “repressive tolerance” envisioned by Herbert Marcuse. The hazards of such a fluid conception of consent may be discerned in Pope Benedict’s discussion of the problem of voluntarism in the Regensburg Lecture. Democracy has become a mere charade that barely conceals a deadly duel of ideologies that rends the modern world. With every election and every judicial decision, the very foundations of liberty and self-government are placed in jeopardy.

The state has consequently been transformed from “a natural necessity arising out of men’s needs and social nature with a *purpose* transcending the subjective wills of individuals” to “an artificial instrumentality based on the claims of individuals. . . . The state exists, not, as Aristotle believed, to make men good [an unfortunate choice of words], to enable them to live the ‘good life’ but to satisfy their *claims* and to reflect their *will*. This conception did not appear dangerous in any way to the early liberal for it was inconceivable to him that the will of men could be anything other than good or their claims anything other than legitimate” (114). This last point, of course, is an incredible assertion. If it were even remotely accurate, it would indicate how far the culture that produced classical liberalism had forsaken its foundations in Biblical Christianity.

**The Problem with Liberalism:** As Hallowell summarizes the problem: “The conception of the state as an instrumentality of the will of men contains in itself no limitation upon the way in which that will shall be employed. Without the conception of a final end or purpose for which the state exists the will of men can rapidly degenerate, as it did in fact degenerate, into an irresponsible one” (114). Society loses its moorings by straying from a jurisprudence based on divine law and natural law.

“. . . With the disintegration of conscience [self-willed rather than divinely-attuned] and the denial of the existence of eternal truth and justice the liberal is driven by his own logic to either of two conclusions: to make the sovereign absolute (tyranny) or to make the individual absolute (anarchy)” (114-15). R. J. Rushdoony draws a similar conclusion in his discussion of the relationship of man and law in *The Politics of Guilt and Pity*.

SOURCE: John H. Hallowell, Main Currents in Modern Political Thought. New York:

Henry Holt, 1950, pp. 110-15.

**Questions:** How does positivism deepen the problem? Where does it lead? [cf. Wilhelm Roepke, "Robbing Peter to Pay Paul."]

### **Review**

voluntarism                      Rousseau's general will      purpose of the state  
liberal disintegration leads to two conclusions