

REFLECTIONS ON TEN YEARS OF *LIBERTARIAN PAPERS*

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ALL GOOD THINGS must come to an end, and after ten years, the end has come for *Libertarian Papers*.

Libertarian Papers was an experiment in publishing, and one I believe was ultimately successful. Those who contributed—as editors, reviewers, or authors—can be justly proud of their achievements, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate them for their service to the journal. Through their efforts *Libertarian Papers* became a respectable outlet for a wide range of scholarship on many topics and from many disciplines, and it is with a spirit of gratitude that I will use this editorial to reflect on some of their (and the journal's) accomplishments.

Journals are judged by the material they publish, so I will begin by mentioning some of the high points of our history. No journal can succeed without attracting outstanding authors, and we are proud to have published works by leading libertarian thinkers as well as promising young researchers. Contributors have included scholars from Columbia University, the London School of Economics, Bocconi University, the University of Manchester, University College Dublin, and Boston University. Among the older generation of researchers, we were fortunate to work with many distinguished scholars, including some who have since passed away, especially the late Tibor Machan, who was quite active with the journal and frequently submitted his work. We have also been eager to support outstanding younger

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academics at the start of their careers; for instance, authors who published with us as graduate students have gone on to work at universities as diverse as King's College London, the University of Southampton, Texas Tech, and Oklahoma State.

On the administrative and business side of the journal, only a few years after its launch *Libertarian Papers* was already listed in a wide range of databases and journal indexes, in some cases receiving high rankings. Our acceptance rate dropped dramatically over the life of the journal, while at the same time we consistently received a larger number of high-quality submissions. These outcomes are difficult to achieve in the best of circumstances, but especially for a journal starting essentially from scratch. *Libertarian Papers* was ahead of most academic publishers in other respects as well, including our use of social media, experimentation with podcasting articles, reduction of publication times, and above all, with our commitment to making all content available free of charge.

Yet it is our hope that the most important contributions made by the journal are to our understanding of liberty in its varied forms and throughout many areas of human inquiry. Although we leave it posterity to judge the value of individual articles, we are confident that on the whole they have enriched our knowledge, and that some will be read for many years to come. This is why we were devoted from the beginning to making the journal available to as wide an audience as possible, and also why we will continue to make the print and online editions available in the future.

Editors face a paradox: on the one hand, it has never been easier to start an academic journal. On the other hand, the proliferation of new journals means it is harder than ever to craft a distinct publication with a genuinely valuable mission—one that succeeds in publishing high-quality research while also finding an audience for it. However, this was a challenge *Libertarian Papers* met and overcame. Understanding this only requires looking at the numerous other journals in the libertarian, classical liberal, and free-market orbit that were founded at about the same time as *Libertarian Papers*, or during its run. I believe it is fair to say that, by all conventional metrics, *Libertarian Papers* outpaced these competitors and was more successful at increasing its audience while also refining the quality of its published research. Nevertheless, despite its achievements, we are bringing the journal to a close. There are a number of reasons for this decision.

First, the original mission of the journal has now been completed. *Libertarian Papers* was intended as a more versatile replacement for the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, which ceased publication in 2009. Now that the *Journal of*

Libertarian Studies is returning to print, however, the original gap filled by *Libertarian Papers* has ceased to exist, and we can safely say its watch is ended.

A second reason is that *Libertarian Papers* no longer fills the technological gap in publishing it once did. Although academic publishing is still a cartelized, out-of-touch industry in many respects, it has changed dramatically since the journal was founded, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse. For example, journals in many disciplines have drastically shortened review and publication times, and a few prestigious outlets are even distributing content free of charge. Online repositories are also thriving, providing additional ways to access research that would otherwise be unavailable. Together, these developments reduce the need for a journal like *Libertarian Papers*.

Third, specialized outlets like *Libertarian Papers* are not as necessary as they once were because for many years there have been an increasing number of alternatives. For example, publishing in mainstream philosophy, politics, and economics journals is common, and there is thus less need for a central libertarian journal, even a wide-ranging, multidisciplinary one like *Libertarian Papers*. Moving away from specialized outlets is also practical: if libertarians are concerned with a search for truth, it is reasonable that if they find it they should want to spread it far and wide. Yet publishing within the libertarian community can actually be a barrier to this goal, as it risks preaching to a particularly uncritical choir. Of course, it can be useful to have outlets for research on topics of interest only to libertarians. However, there is a real danger that these outlets will become insular, self-absorbed, and disengaged from the wider world of scholarship. This is an especially important issue for early-career scholars trying to build their research profiles. While I do not think it applies to *Libertarian Papers*, the passing of time makes mission drift almost inevitable, and is one more reason why the moment is right to bring the journal to a close. After helping to encourage a decade's worth of young scholars, there is now a chance for them to find or create their own places in the literature.

I would like to conclude on a personal note. Editing *Libertarian Papers* has been an extraordinary experience, equal parts educational and humbling, and one I will look back on fondly. In particular, I will always be grateful to Stephan Kinsella for placing his trust in me by appointing me Editor, and for his tireless support of the journal ever since. At the time I became Editor I was inexperienced and Stephan must have had little reason to think I would survive in the role. As a way of repaying his kindness I have always tried in my turn to encourage the work of young scholars in similar positions to my own. One way in which I attempted this was by maintaining an ecumenical editorial policy that strove to place the quality of research above

considerations of loyalty to individuals or schools of thought. It is my firm opinion that this is the only viable way to encourage outstanding research, which is usually frustrated by a dogged devotion to orthodoxy. And while I cannot speak for the other Editors, my experience was that this policy was both correct and successful.

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