



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on June 15, 2011

Philosopher and Champion of Liberty Dr. John Hospers Dead at 93

The name John Hospers may not evoke too many memories among most people, although those in the movement for greater freedom and constitutionalism are well aware of the manifold contributions this man made to the liberty movement in American politics. He died June 12 at the age of 93, after a lengthy battle with various illnesses.



Dr. Hospers (left) was born on June 9, 1918 in the historically rich town of Pella, Iowa, and after studying at Pella's Central College, earned advanced degrees from the University of Iowa and Columbia University, including a doctoral degree in philosophy. He conducted research in the fields of aesthetics, ethics, and other areas of philosophical inquiry, and he taught philosophy at Brooklyn College in New York and at California State University, Los Angeles, where for many years, he was chairman of the philosophy department. His doctoral dissertation, "Meaning and Truth in the Arts," became his first published book, which remained in print for 40 years, and his second book, *Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, went through four editions and is still in print. This was followed by his book on ethics, *Human Conduct*, still in wide use, along with a considerable assortment of articles on aesthetics and epistemology (the study of knowledge) in various journals and anthologies.

In Dr. Hospers' earlier years, many in the nation as well as his own family saw government as an interference with freedom and prosperity. He remembered his grandmother voting regularly for the Democratic candidate while his great-grandmother (who lived to be more than 100) voted for the Republican candidate. One of his earliest political memories was of two of his uncles remarking on the Roosevelt landslide of 1936, "This will be the end of freedom in America."

While he taught at Brooklyn College, Hospers became involved in the then-nascent libertarian movement; then in 1960 he became acquainted with Ayn Rand, and began to meet with her at regular intervals to discuss various aspects of philosophy and world affairs. Hospers commented that Rand's



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magnum opus, *Atlas Shrugged*, first opened his eyes to libertarian political thought, and he fondly recalled his first meeting with its author:

Aesthetically we were very much on the same wavelength, and my detailed praises, with the reasons for them, clearly pleased her enormously. I described to her the deepening sense of mystery as one gets into the book; and how well she revealed some details while withholding others. I described her way of dropping a hint in an early page, then picking up on it some hundreds of pages later. All this was obviously well known to her, the author, but she kept urging me to keep on. Above all, I admired the dramatic speeches, each spoken in the context of rising action and at the place where it wielded the maximum dramatic potency.

She told me to read Henry Hazlitt's *Economics in One Lesson* — which I did, within a few days — and she introduced me to Ludwig Von Mises, giving me copies of *Socialism and Bureaucracy* — uninsurable.

Rand and Hospers, however, would eventually separate over philosophical differences. According to Rand's biographer Barbara Branden, the two disagreed over issues of epistemology, and Rand broke with Hospers after he criticized her Harvard talk on "Art as Sense of Life" before the American Society of Aesthetics.

In 1968 Hospers became chairman of the philosophy department at CSU-Los Angeles, and in 1972 he was asked to run as the first presidential candidate of the Libertarian Party, with Theodora "Tonie" Nathan as his running mate. While they received little more than 8,000 votes, their run served to establish the Libertarian Party, which would become the largest third party in the United States. Around the same time, he published his political credo, *Libertarianism — A Political Philosophy for Tomorrow*, and became editor of several publications — including *Liberty* magazine, *The Monist*, and *The Personalist* — which have long served the liberty movement and have been pivotal in the spread of free market, pro-freedom concepts.

Hospers' love of country and freedom is evident in the many issues he addressed in his voluminous writings; in several cases, however, his expressed opinions put him at odds with the bulk of the mainstream libertarian movement. Concerned with the tragic consequences of unrestrained illegal immigration from Mexico as well as Central America and elsewhere in recent years, he published in 1998 a principled, insightful, and utterly damning critique of the pro-open borders mentality espoused by many in the libertarian movement. In "Libertarian Arguments Against Open Borders," he refuted the view that humans have the unmitigated right to enter other nations at will:

The main obstacle that confronts the "open borders" policy is that many people enter the United States in order to collect the free benefits that it has to offer. When the new immigrants become a majority of the American population, will there be more, or less, devotion than there is now to the ideals of individual rights and limited government? Will the bureaucracy that is so corrupt in Mexico be any less so when it has migrated north of the border? Will there be less of a tendency than now to "live off the government"? Will the new immigrants help to stem the tide of taxes and regulations that now bid fair to bring the American republic to its knees? Shall the future of America rest on so slender a reed as this?

Also placing himself at odds with most libertarians, Hospers, near the end of his life, wrote extensively against the construction of a mosque at Ground Zero in New York City. He labeled it an affront against the culture and basic beliefs of Americans as a people, and warned that "it could provide the nails in the



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coffin of America, because it will inspire further attacks.” He also eloquently stated that “[W]e, as free people, must first take our country back from the treachery of a purposefully planned diabolical national debt and an increasingly power-mad dictatorship metastasizing from Washington like a political cancer.”

Hospers wrote passionately on the inherent dangers of *democracy* (rule by majority), defending the virtues of American *republicanism* (rule by law) and warning that democracy is alien to the principles of our Founders:

Democracy is simply government by the majority of a collective (or the majority of the representatives the voters have voted for). Their decisions may not accord with the needs or wishes of you as a individual at all. To the extent that they exert coercive power over your life, you are being governed by others.

Hospers eventually left the Libertarian Party, and became instrumental in forming the Republican Liberty Caucus, serving as a member of the organization’s advisory board until his death — three days after his 93rd birthday. In 2002, an hour-long video about Hospers’ life, work, and philosophy was released by the Liberty Fund of Indianapolis as part of its Classics of Liberty series.

Professor John Hospers will be remembered for his many philosophical and political contributions to the freedom movement, as well as for his undying devotion to the principles of constitutional government, the free market, and republicanism. America has lost one of her devoted sons — a true intellectual, patriot, and champion of liberty.



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