

## **Andrew Galambos — the Unknown Libertarian**

**By Harry Browne**

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Andrew J. Galambos died on April 10, 1997.

He was an influential libertarian, but I refer to him as "the unknown libertarian" because he never wrote a book or appeared on national radio or TV. His renown will be limited mostly to those who came in personal contact with him.

But he had a profound effect on thousands of individuals who took his courses — who in turn affected others. Undoubtedly the ripples from the stones he dropped eventually touched some of today's leading libertarians.

He was a fascinating mixture of contrasts. He combined a brilliant mind with an ungracious personality. He was an astrophysicist who taught social science. He preached the importance of respect for intellectual property, but freely lifted the ideas of others without giving them credit. He was dishonest, but he inspired others to be more honest. He disdained the word "libertarian" while turning thousands of people into libertarians. He was an insensitive teacher, and yet he apparently changed the lives of most of the people he taught. And he pushed out of his own life practically everyone who was important to him.

One of those people was Alvin Lowi — a long-time friend and business associate of Galambos, who had taught some of his courses. This memoir is based both on my brief relationship with Galambos and on Alvin Lowi's more extensive recollections.

### **A Life**

Andrew Galambos was born in Hungary in 1924. His parents moved to New York City soon afterward, and Andrew grew up there. After serving in the military in World War II, he attended Carlton College in Minnesota and earned a master's degree — probably in astronomy or astrophysics.

In 1952, he moved to Los Angeles to work for North American Aviation in the new field of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs). His purpose wasn't to make the world safe for democracy, but to make money for himself. In 1958 he was an astrophysicist at Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation, which later became TRW Space Technology Laboratories.

In 1957 the Soviets had launched Sputnik. Most of the engineers at Ramo-Wooldridge were unfamiliar with the concept of artificial earth satellites. Galambos became a respected mentor by explaining ballistics and astronautics to them in a series of noon-time lectures.

Andrew was well-versed also in astronomy, philosophy, the history of science, the scientific method, economics, investments, and insurance. And he was a master at coining precise definitions for words whose meanings we sometimes take for granted.

Although his life's work turned out to be the promotion of a free society, his primary interest was astronautics — not the social sciences. He wanted to create a commercial transportation service to the moon, and he believed this would be possible only after the government got out of the way. So the first job on his agenda was to create a free society.

Around 1960, Galambos left the aerospace industry and taught briefly at Whittier College.

In 1961 he went to New York to meet Ayn Rand, Ludwig von Mises, Leonard Read, Murray Rothbard, and Henry Hazlitt. Galambos had a very strong personality, and he and Rand rubbed each other the wrong way — perhaps because they were so much alike. He spoke disparagingly of her thereafter. Mises wasn't willing to discuss Andrew's economic ideas — possibly because Galambos' background was in the physical, not the social, sciences. Rothbard treated him cordially — as he did almost everyone — and thereafter Galambos was more respectful of Rothbard's work than that of the others.

That same year, he established the Free Enterprise Institute (FEI) in Los Angeles — where he offered courses to the paying public on the construction of a free society. Thousands of students passed through his courses over the next two decades. He was one of the most successful "freedom entrepreneurs" ever — making very good money preaching the gospel of liberty and capitalism. Some of his later courses cost \$500 or more (the equivalent of \$2,000 today) and each were attended by several hundred people. He had very little overhead, advertising was mostly word-of-mouth, and he didn't spend money to make his students comfortable in the classes.

In addition, he made money selling mutual funds — advocating his own investment strategy of cost-averaging and holding for the long term. He had no reservations about selling mutual funds to his students; he thought that earning investment profits would make them stronger advocates of capitalism.

Sometime during the 1980s Galambos became afflicted with Alzheimer's Disease, and in 1990 he was institutionalized. Because he had been financially successful and had taken good care of his money, he didn't have to rely on welfare or charity. In 1996 Suzanne Galambos, his wife of over four decades, died. And, finally, on April 10, 1997, he died.

The news undoubtedly saddened thousands of people whose lives had been improved by his teaching.

### **Social Lion & Teacher**

According to Alvin Lowi, in Galambos' early days in Los Angeles he was gracious, thoughtful, and hospitable. But after his courses made him important to people, he apparently no longer felt the need to be gracious. By the time I met him in late 1963, his personality had changed.

Someone had handed me a small pamphlet Andrew had written — one of the very few publications that came out of his work. It contained some novel thoughts that I considered worth quoting in a syndicated newspaper column I was writing at the time. As was my custom, I sent him a copy of the column. He was very pleased to be quoted and he wrote back, rather than calling, even though we were both in Los Angeles. Further communications led me to take his course, which I'd heard about from others.

In a phone conversation the day before the first lecture, he said he was looking forward to meeting me — as he was impressed by some of my articles that I'd sent him. But when I finally met him in person and said, "How do you do? I'm Harry Browne," he looked at me as though to say, "So?" I extended my hand, which he responded to only after a long pause, and he eventually replied, "How do you do?" No smile, no sign that we'd had any communication before. But then, during his lecture, he solicited my opinion a couple of times — referring to me as a fellow toiler in the fields of liberty. This was my first exposure to his many contradictions and his strange conception of the social graces.

By any normal standards, he was a very poor lecturer. Although the course, "Capitalism — the Key to Survival," was billed as a series of sixteen 2-hour lectures, each one ran well over two hours. And as the course went on, the lectures were longer and longer — with the last few running over four hours apiece. He used no script and very few notes — and sometimes rambled so far from his main thread that you didn't know whether he'd ever find his way back (he always did). There was a single break in the middle of each lecture — during which Andrew would get a soft drink. After the break, he'd continue sipping his drink — and he'd suck on the ice while talking.

The chairs were uncomfortable and the lecturer was insensitive, but the course was fascinating. As Andrew covered the gamut from science to society, you learned about the special contributions to technology of various scientists, about the scientific method, about Andrew's desire to apply the discipline of the physical sciences to the social sciences, and much more.

(A few years later, I realized that the inability to conduct controlled, repeatable experiments made it impossible to transfer the methods of the physical sciences to the social sciences — including economics and investments. Still later, I came across Ludwig von Mises' *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, in which he explains this point better than I could.)

There were so many ideas discussed in a Galambos lecture that it was hard to sleep afterward. People who took the courses began looking at the world in new ways; in many cases they changed their businesses, their marriages, and their lives.

### **The Galambos Philosophy**

In his early days as a teacher, Andrew wasn't an anarchist. In 1960 he had gone to the Republican convention in Chicago to encourage Barry Goldwater to compete for the GOP nomination against Richard Nixon. And his first courses promoted limited, constitutional government. However, his own consistency, together with input from his students, caused him eventually to advocate a society without any political government.

He had reached that point before I took my first course from him in the winter of 1963-64. His free society relied on private, competing protection and judicial agencies. National defense was to be provided by insurance companies that reimbursed you if they failed to protect your property. His method of getting from here to there involved building private alternatives to government until those alternatives dominated society — at which point most people would see no reason to continue to rely on government for anything.

He strongly opposed voting or any other form of political action. He believed voting was an agreement to abide by whatever the politicians decided. He transformed the familiar slogan into, "If you vote, don't complain."

Morality was a key element in his philosophy. Unlike Ayn Rand, who attempted to prove that there was a single morality that must be obeyed (what I call an absolute morality), Galambos felt that acting morally was optional, but that there was a single morality that would increase the happiness of anyone who lived by it (what I call a universal morality). In practice, the moralities were similar — revolving around non-coercion toward others.

Although he felt his greatest contribution was in the integration of many ideas and details into a single grand theory of freedom, I was less impressed by the overall design than I was by the precise way he defined and organized many of the details.

### **Property**

Everything in the Galambos philosophy revolved around property.

He described societal freedom as that condition in which everyone has 100% control of his own property and 0% control over anyone else's property. This was a particularly succinct way of describing freedom. And with everything privately owned, many traditional questions about freedom would be automatically resolved.

Can I shout fire in a crowded theatre? That depends on who owns the theatre and what his policy is.

Should Nazis be allowed to demonstrate in Skokie? That depends on the street owner's policy.

However, a weakness in Andrew's thinking, in my view, was that he assumed that questions of property borders and definitions of property itself could be easily resolved. In Andrew's mind, they already were resolved — and eventually they probably will be to the satisfaction of others. But the technology for doing so was very primitive in the Galambos courses.

A cornerstone of Andrew's philosophy was the concept of intellectual property. In the words of the late Charles Estes, Galambos:

defined "primordial property" as a person's own life and "primary property" as his ideas. All other property he derived from these two fundamental kinds.

Thus Galambos referred to physical property as "secondary property." Because primary property was antecedent to secondary property, he felt that respecting the ideas of other people was more important even than respecting their physical property.

Although academics have long honored the concept of proper intellectual credit for ideas, the Galambos view of primary property went far beyond anything previously promulgated on either the political left or right. He considered it immoral to use someone's ideas without gaining permission and providing compensation. This meant, in effect, that the inventor of the wheel was due a royalty on every automobile sold.

While this would seem to lead to chaos and the stifling of technological progress, Andrew believed it wouldn't be difficult to work out the mechanics of handling such payments — and he already had developed a number of techniques.

Unlike with patent laws, Andrew's system recognized independent development of ideas — so that it would be unlikely that an eccentric inventor of, say, the computer could arbitrarily halt development of all computers.

### **His Vulnerability**

Andrew was very possessive of his own primary property. He continually promised to write a book setting forth his philosophy, so that ownership of his ideas would be well-documented. But he never did so. It may be that he felt intuitively that his grand plan was impressive when delivered orally, but might not hold up when examined in print; or that he wasn't by nature a writer and the task intimidated him; or that he was simply a procrastinator.

Whatever the reason, the lack of a written document to confirm his authorship apparently made him feel vulnerable — afraid that anyone could soak up his ideas, walk off with them, repackage them, and claim them as one's own inventions.

He required every student entering one of his courses to sign a contract agreeing not to divulge any of the course ideas without permission from Galambos — and not even to *use* the ideas, in business or elsewhere, without permission. In effect, the course tuition bought you the right to become aware of the ideas, but not to use them or even to talk about them to outsiders.

This led to the humorous situation in which a graduate would rave about the course and insist that you take it — but when you asked him for examples of what was good, he would say, "Sorry, I can't tell you."

Needless to say, some people did talk about the ideas. And many more graduates used the ideas profitably. This bothered Andrew, but he claimed to be bothered most by individuals who seemed to be using his ideas in other courses, lectures, or writings.

He spoke frequently of one individual or another who had stolen his ideas. And if it were pointed out that the person was preaching ideas that were the opposite of Andrew's, Galambos would say

the person had stolen Andrew's ideas but had gotten them all wrong. One of his favorite epithets toward an enemy was that the person had "flunked the course."

Alvin Lowi pointed out to me that Andrew, despite his protestations, may not have been concerned about intellectual thievery. Instead, he may have been jealous of the success others were achieving — success in presenting and marketing the ideas of freedom, and success in applying the ideas to their business and personal lives.

Whatever his secret concerns may have been, his possessiveness, criticism, arrogance, and thoughtlessness served to alienate and eventually chase away every important person in his life. The one exception was his wife, Suzanne, who suffered frequent verbal abuse from him in public but never deserted him.

### **My Experience**

My own experience with him was typical in several ways.

Taking his first course inspired me to bring back to life an earlier idea I had for a course on free-market economics. I discussed the idea with Alvin Lowi, who encouraged me to go ahead with it. Andrew also supported the venture and allowed me to mail to his customer list. The first presentation of the 8-session, 2-hour-per-lecture course was well received by my customers, and Andrew suggested that his Institute sponsor the course thereafter. I agreed to the arrangement.

Another presentation of the course began, and the trouble started. Andrew said he had heard from some of my students that I was presenting his ideas but not giving him credit. I explained that there was very little in the course that hadn't been a part of my repertoire for some time — and that I did, in fact, give credit to him for any ideas I had gleaned from him.

He maintained that he was unconvinced. He frequently phoned me — saying he had heard further tales of my using his ideas without credit. He would berate me in conversations that lasted an hour or two or three. Looking back, it's hard to imagine what could have been said that made those conversations so lengthy — or why I put up with the situation as long as I did. But, then, I was only 31 at the time.

I sent him transcripts of my lectures, along with a box full of articles I'd published prior to meeting him, so he could see that my world didn't begin with him. I marked the appropriate passages in my articles so he could skim through them quickly. But he claimed he didn't have the time to look at them. So instead of taking an hour to go through the material, he spent many hours on the phone literally yelling at me.

Andrew was willing to acknowledge that I (or anyone else) could have been exposed to similar ideas prior to meeting him. But he maintained that his packaging of the ideas was so revolutionary that one's understanding of freedom was severely limited before taking his course. Thus, no matter what you knew before your exposure to him, you were indebted almost totally to him for your understanding of freedom. Therefore you should credit him even for ideas about freedom you developed yourself or heard earlier from someone else.

Because I believed he was an important person and we were doing important things, I tolerated all this for about six months. And then I informed him — in the spring of 1965 — that I would no longer give my course under his auspices. He told me I couldn't unilaterally terminate the relationship — although we had no agreement that prevented me from doing so. In effect, he claimed I had to continue working with him until he no longer wanted me to. But I simply refused to put up with him anymore.

After this close, very intense relationship lasting about a year, I never saw him again. We spoke only one more time — briefly on the phone in 1973.

When I became somewhat well-known through my books, people would sometimes ask Andrew what he thought of my ideas. Andrew would shout that I had stolen all my ideas from him — even though I can't imagine that he ever took the time to read any of my books or even knew what they covered.

But, as Lowi pointed out, the issue of how people were using his ideas may have been a red herring. He may have been more upset by the fact that I had published my ideas, and that I was making a great deal of money with them, while he was bogged down in weekly lectures and the trivia of running his course business. Again, the only reason he was even involved in the social sciences was to create a society in which he would be free to be an astronomical entrepreneur.

But that dream was fading because — although he was financially successful — he wasn't getting very far in creating the free society in which he could start his lunar airline.

Although I had been closer to him than most people, my experience wasn't unique. He thought of numerous former students as his enemies — and the more successful they were, the more he condemned them publicly.

### **Dishonesty**

As possessive as he was of his own intellectual property, he was very careless with the ideas of others. He often argued against someone's suggestion, only to incorporate it as part of his own "original" thinking a few months or years later.

Although he lavished praise on some thinkers who were long since dead — Thomas Paine, Isaac Newton, and so on — he rarely gave credit to any living person. When he did, it usually was only in general terms, rather than for any identifiable contribution to his philosophy. And on some of the rare occasions when he gave specific credit to a living person, it was backhanded.

For example, Alvin Lowi was Andrew's closest associate and a great intellectual stimulus to him. But in all of Andrew's lectures I attended, I heard him give credit to Alvin only once. On that occasion he discussed the way a thorny social problem would be handled in a free society; he identified a key factor and said, "Once you get past that point it is, as Alvin Lowi has said, as easy as falling off a log."

After the lecture I tore into Andrew. "Why in the world would you embarrass Alvin by implying the he was taking credit for such an expression? You know he would never claim to have coined it."

Andrew answered, "But Alvin's contribution was in applying it to this situation."

"That isn't the way the audience understood it."

"That's the way they *should* understand it," he said.

While appearing to be generous in dispensing credit, in truth Andrew — as far as I know — never acknowledged the many original ideas Alvin did provide.

Also, although he stood foursquare against force and fraud, he engaged in fraudulent practices himself. One example was the aforementioned contract students were required to sign before entering a course — acknowledging that Galambos was the owner of the ideas, that they were buying exposure to them only, and that the ideas were not to be repeated or used without Galambos' permission. The contract was so full of gobbledygook that no one really understood what he was signing, and some people refused to sign such a vague agreement.

Thinking I was doing him a favor, I wrote a far clearer version of the contract and presented it to him. The event was much like your cat bringing a dead bird into your house and proudly laying it at your feet. Galambos was not pleased. He said, "Don't you understand? If people know what the contract says, they won't sign it."

"But how can you ask people to sign something they don't understand?"

"Because after they take the course, they'll understand it and agree with it."

Of course, not everyone who took the course came to believe that he should get Andrew's permission before using any of the ideas.

He also had his own definitions for words, which he didn't explain until you took his course. This allowed him to state his beliefs in public without shocking anyone. For example, he defined "government" as a private company with whom you contract for protection (contrasted with "the State," which he defined as a coercive agency), and he would go before liberal groups to say he was in favor of world government. He also called himself a "liberal" — knowing that modern liberals would mistakenly consider him to be a political ally.

### **Influence on Me**

Andrew Galambos was the stereotypical genius — impossible to deal with, but the source of great innovation. Much like the composer Richard Wagner, he aggravated, inconvenienced, and exploited many people while enriching their lives.

That certainly was true in my case. Although I paid a high price then, my life is far better for having met Andrew Galambos. Although much of what I consider valuable wouldn't be what he'd want credit for, I did learn much from him. For one thing, my writing became more precise, better organized, and — learning negatively from him — more considerate of the reader.

And probably no one influenced the course of my personal life and career as much as he did. His ideas prodded me to make several major changes.

Most of all, he inspired and encouraged me to give courses — which led to my writing eleven books — which led to everything else worthwhile that has happened to me over the past 35 years.

### **Benefits to Others**

Despite his personality and his business practices, he had a way of changing almost all his students' lives. And I never heard of a Galambos graduate regressing to his former ways.

Ironically, one thing many people seemed to glean from his courses was the value of honesty — even though I don't recall him preaching it and he certainly didn't practice it himself. Doing business with a Galambos graduate was usually straightforward, profitable, and pleasurable.

The chicken-&-egg question is whether Andrew somehow attracted smart people to his courses or listening to him made them smarter. Either way, his clientele consisted of first-rate people who knew how to use what they learned. He appealed to people who wanted to solve problems. They wanted to know how to make a better world, but they also sought the means of improving their own lives in a realistic way — not with a magic cure-all.

Andrew provided the conceptual tools by which individuals could organize and refine their own ideas — their own observations about how the world works. In effect, they didn't adopt Andrew's philosophy so much as they made better use of their own.

They didn't accept Andrew's ideas because they were Andrew's; they accepted what made sense to them. Because many of them were emotionally stronger than Andrew, they were able to survive the criticism and pettiness Andrew inflicted; if Galambos was abusive, they knew enough to ignore what wasn't true and drink in from Galambos all that would help them. And they were secure enough in their own lives to be able to acknowledge their intellectual debts to him, even if he accused them of intellectual piracy.

Andrew Galambos made the world more intelligible to them, and they made the most of their newfound understanding. In the process, his graduates proved that a proper understanding of the free market can be used to effect a happier, more productive, much more prosperous life.

### **The Galambos Legacy**

One of Andrew's greatest failings appeared to be his inability to recognize that there are no final answers for a free society. If a totally free society will exist in, say, the year 2020, we have no way of knowing today how property will be protected, how the nation will be defended, how

drivers will be charged for using roads, or how any of the thousands of other technical issues will be handled.

If someday there is a profit to be made from providing neighborhood protection or national defense, hundreds of ideas will come gushing forth — as some of the best minds in the world see an opportunity to get rich and to be intellectually challenged by devising the best possible systems.

It is presumptuous of us to think we can somehow foresee all these ideas and know now how these matters will be handled. All we can do is to cite *potential* ways to take care of them — to reassure people that matters can be handled without resorting to the coercion, inefficiency, and monopoly of political methods.

Andrew Galambos devised or promoted potential ways to deal with some of the thorniest issues of a free society. In this, he provided a great service. But he was wrong to think that his ways were *the* ways — and that this is *how it will be*. He set himself up as the final authority on these questions. In effect, he was playing God, and he was no better at it than anyone else who tries to fill that role.

But those who have criticized his ideas can be just as mistaken. If there was some part of his grand design that was defective, if he presumed too much — so what? No matter how Andrew perceived his role, he wasn't setting the rules for a free society; he was helping us see how responsive and effective the free market can be when confronted with any sort of human need.

That was a large part of his great genius, and it opened the minds of a multitude of individuals who were exposed to his courses.

In the same way, there are thousands of other unknown libertarians around America — and around the world — who are helping people move a step further in their understanding of the limitless benefits of liberty. Whatever we think of the details of their ideas, we are indebted to them for opening the minds of so many people.

Andrew Galambos was one of the most important of these teachers. He transformed conservatives, liberals, and moderates into libertarians at a time when liberty was the most radical idea imaginable — when the welfare state was at the very peak of its popularity in the mid-1960s. With massive confidence, he encouraged thousands of people to live better lives and to become better salesmen of liberty.

As Alvin Lowi put it:

Galambos' legacy is a work in process embodied in a few individuals enriched with new vistas of a rational world including a humanity worthy of survival. Those individuals have proceeded to celebrate that legacy with a strengthened courage of conviction to live their lives more fully and unashamedly for themselves, at no expense to anyone else, in the unshakable belief that in doing so, the world would be the better for it. In this outcome, Galambos could have taken ample satisfaction.