General rights are rights that every individual has an interest in. Those rights have often been referred to as natural rights or human rights because individuals possess them on the basis of some common natural feature of human existence (e.g., on the basis of the ultimate separability of each person and each person’s life). The right of self-ownership and the right not to have one’s life taken are examples of general rights. In contrast, specific rights to particular actions or possessions are based on the specific actions performed by other individuals—individuals who, through their particular actions, have incurred special rights—correlative obligations. For example, I may possess a right against another that he deliver a copy of this encyclopedia to me, and I may possess that right on the basis of his having contracted to deliver this tome. This right is specific—confined on me alone and not on another. Rights to particular actions or possessions are based on the actions of others. It is the most obvious type of right by which one person may confer a special right on another. A person also might, for instance, have conferred a right on me to be provided with a copy of the encyclopedia by way of the other person having destroyed my previously purchased copy.

Libertarian theorists hold that all general rights are negative rights. For all persons, the initial baseline rights and obligations are negative. We are, so to speak, each born free—morally free to do with our lives as we see fit, subject to the negative constraint that we leave others equally free to do as they see fit. That is to say that all individuals are born to full self-ownership, to self-sovereignty; no individual is born to servitude to others. Although each person is born to a negative obligation to leave others in the peaceful enjoyment of their persons and their own property, that baseline obligation is not oppressive. For fulfilling that general negative obligation leaves one entirely free to dispose of oneself and one’s own property as one sees fit. Moreover, for each person, all others being subject to that negative constraint is essential to his own moral freedom, to his own right to do as he sees fit. Rights to a particular property (aside from property in one’s own body) are obviously not general rights; no one is born to any particular rights to extrapersonal objects. Still, property rights—like general rights—are negative rights. In the absence of special complications, one’s property rights only impose on others the duty not to trespass and to leave one free to do as one sees fit with one’s own and one’s own property. Moreover, for each person, the duty to respect one’s property rights is essential to one’s own freedom to do as he sees fit with his person and property. Negative rights are nonoppressive.

In contrast, the individual theories of individual rights, all positive rights are special rights. An individual can acquire positive rights against another—rights to another serving me in one way or another—only if that right is conferred on me by the other person. All of a person’s positive obligations must arise from actions performed by that person, such as entering into an agreement to provide another with a copy of the encyclopedia. That is the sense in which, on the basis of a libertarian theory of rights, there are no unchosen positive obligations. All positive obligations are choses, most characteristically through the agreements into which individuals voluntarily enter. The world of interpersonal relations is indeed thick with a great variety of positive rights and obligations, but those special rights and obligations are the products of particular decisions made by the individuals who are bound by those obligations. They are not obligations to which individuals are born, nor are they obligations that are imposed by others’ needs, desires, or decrees.

Libertarian theories reject assertions of positive rights that cannot be traced to the specific obligation-incurring actions of others. Although the most obvious type of such action by which one person may confer a special right on another. A person also might, for instance, have conferred a right on me to be provided with a copy of the encyclopedia by way of the other person having destroyed my previously purchased copy.

The industrial revolution, a term under dispute but hard to avoid, refers to the economic transformation that began in northwestern Europe in the 18th century, accelerated in the 19th century, and spread to most of the industrialized world—in the midst of social, political and cultural transformations that led to industrialization. The economic growth and social changes that accompanied the industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries were profound and far-reaching. The industrial revolution was a period of rapid technological advancement, which led to significant changes in the way goods were produced and distributed. These changes had a profound impact on society, as new industries emerged and old ones declined. The industrial revolution also led to significant changes in the way people lived and worked, as new technologies made it possible to produce goods more quickly and efficiently. The industrial revolution was a time of great change and progress, but it also brought challenges and hardships for those who were left behind.

See also Freedom; Kant, Immanuel; Neetz, Robert; Positive Liberty; Private Property; Rand, Ayn; Rights of; Rothbard, Murray
The classical and Marxian idea that capital begets capital, and the Bolshevik seizure. It has in recent years been revived even among some economists, in the form of so-called new growth theory, an attempt to present what the development economist William Easterly calls capital fund- 
manipulation in a cross-cultural form. See you for 
capital fundamentalism in all the stage theories from Smith 

to Marx to Walt Rostow. “Accumulation, accumulation,” wrote Marx, “is that the law and the prophets.” The eco-

comic historians have an ax to grind.

One trouble is that savings, investment, state power to 

expropriate, and the other physical-capital accumula-
tions that are supposed to explain modern economic 
growth have existed on a large scale since the Sumerians.

Yet modern economic growth—that wholly unprece-
dented factor in the high teens—is a phenomenon of 

the past generation. Something happened in the 18th 

century that prepared for a temporary but shocking “great 
divergence” of the European economies from those of 

the rest of the world.

Changes in aggregate rates of saving, in other words, 
drove nothing of consequence. No unusual Weberian ethi 

of high thriftiness or Marxian anti-ethic of forceful 
expropriation started economic growth. East Anglian Puritans 

learned from their Dutch neighbors and co-religionists how 

to be thrifty in order to godly, to work hard in order, 

as John Winthrop put it, “to entertain each other in brotherly 

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Further Readings
- Hudson, Patricia. The Industrial Revolution. Sevenoaks, Kent, UK: Edward Arnold, 2000

Intellectual Property

Private property is the cornerstone of the market system. A well-functioning free-market economy requires that property rights be clearly defined and protected so that people can engage in trade. Most libertarians agree that such rights should be extended to physical property, but they differ over property rights in ideas (i.e., intellectual property). Most, specifically, they differ about whether patents and copyrights are legitimate.

Many market-oriented economists believe that intellec-
tual property rights must be protected. In principle, they argue, people would have little or no incentive to invent and develop goods that they will ultimately bring to market. Consider prescription drugs, for instance. Such drugs have benefited millions of people, improving or extending their lives. Patent protection enables drug companies to recoup their development costs because for a specific period of time they have the sole right to manufacture and distribute the products they have invented. After that period elapses, these drugs may be sold in generic form. The copyright system works in a similar way and for similar reasons. Novelists, for example, have the exclusive right to profit from the stories they write as long as those works are under copyright. To libertarian supporters of patent and copyright, the key is to develop an optimal intellectual property regime, one that promotes both innovation and consumer welfare, not to abolish the system altogether.

But to other libertarians, abolition is indeed the proper goal. Intellectual property laws, they argue, cannot be ethi-
cally justified. Consider the position taken by libertarian philosopher Roderick Long. He writes:

Ethically, property rights of any kind have to be justified as extensions of the right of individuals to control their own lives. Thus any argument that conflict with this moral basis—like the “right” to own slaves—are invalida-
ted. In my judgment, intellectual property rights also fail this test. To own the copyright on a book is to prevent people from making peaceful use of the information they possess. If you have acquired the information legiti-
mately (say, by buying a book) then on what grounds can you be prevented from using it, reproducing it, trading it? Is this not a violation of the freedom of speech and press? It may be objected that the person who originated the information deserves ownership rights over it. But information is not a concrete thing an individual can control; it