

LIBERTARIANISM: *A POCKET GUIDE*



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”No”

-*My father,
when asked for a quote.*

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1 | Introduction

A small booklet, introducing the ideas and concepts of libertarianism in a clear and concise way, is something that the present author would have found extremely useful when he first came in contact with the ideology. Unfortunately, such a booklet, at least to the author's knowledge, did not exist.

The present essay is an attempt to bridge this gap.

The structure of the text is as follows: In the first chapter we will try to define, in a simple way, the fundamental concepts, and in the following chapters, we will arrive at the framework of ideas that constitute the structure known as libertarianism, using logical arguments.

The author recognises the introductory level of argumentation presented in this text. The goal is not to delve into further expansion or specialisation, but rather, to arouse the reader's interest. More specifically, a possible desired result would be that the reader pondered upon and began the process of refuting the arguments presented in this text, so that afterwards, they may try to contradict those new arguments, cultivating their critical thinking in the process.

To conclude, the main purpose of this booklet is to introduce the ideology, and anyone interested to learn more about it should in no way rest on their laurels after reading this text. For this purpose, suggested bibliography is presented in the end of this book.

2 | The Rights of Man

Since the early days of the Libertarian movement around the 18th century, with works by distinguished scholars, such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, John Locke, and Fredric Bastiat¹, and even before that, during the era of the Stoics and the Epicureans in Ancient Greece, there existed a differentiation between laws created by man, for the improvement of the quality of life inside an organised society, and the natural rights, liberties in essence, thought as constant and global throughout human history. Natural rights form the foundations of libertarianism and upon them rests the Principle of No Violence, or Non Aggression Principle as it is more commonly known, which was formed organically and proved to be the catalyst for organising the first civilised societies.

Natural Rights

Views on natural rights are multiple and more often than not vary greatly, often leading to disagreement. According to the most commonly accepted view, each person has three fundamental rights: The right to self, the right to freedom, and the right to property. The aforementioned rights are both sufficient and necessary for a dignified life, personal choices notwithstanding, and forfeiture of any of those three practically leads to the deprivation of all.

The reader might dispute the right to property, since, at first glance, it seems unrelated to the other two. However, it is valid to argue that the culmination of property is merely an extension of an individual's abilities, which by definition compose an essential part of oneself.

Having secured those three liberties, each person has the opportunity to live their life to the best of their abilities, pursue happiness and satisfaction by carving their own path² and make the most of their property.

Non Aggression Principle

The Natural Rights gave birth to the Non Aggression Principle³. In essence, it constitutes a moral obligation, under which all forms of violence or coercion in a civil society are not tolerated since, in regards to the fundamental liberties of each person, there exists no differentiating factor or hierarchical order, because, as mentioned above, these particular liberties are global and must be respected by everyone. Nevertheless, use of violence is justified in situations where the liberties of the individual are at stake, e.g. in selfdefence or in selfpreservation issues.

1. Ref. Chapter 5

2. In contrast to the one imposed on them by an oppressor.

3. From now on, we will refer to it as NAP.

The imprint the NAP has left in the general conscience is observable ever since the first human societies and is considered the determining factor towards their formation and growth, despite the individuals not being conscious of the principle's systemic application. Essentially, it allowed the peaceful coexistence between members of each community, promoting the values of cooperation and solidarity. Without these values, the essential organisation required to further evolve communities and form complex structures, such as cities or states, would be impossible.

This does not mean that the NAP has become redundant in the modern age. Buried deep into the unconscious, it composes the inner mechanism that drives most persons to avoid pursuing violent means to accomplish their goals, even at their personal expense, and to criticise those that do not act in a similar fashion.

Let us not forget, the standard of a civilised society is set not only according to the strictness of the law, but also upon the degree that individuals respect the liberties of their peers.

Personal Liberty

Every man is thus able to act in the way that they perceives as optimal to cover their needs and wants during their life on Earth. At first glance, this concept of liberty, may lead to egotism and social isolation but this argument can be logically countered.

Even if we ignored the primal need for socialisation, and considered the most egotistical and selfabsorbed individual we could think of, that person would have, due to the scarcity of available goods, to trade with other individuals to improve their life, and it would be necessary to become a part of a community, in order to achieve this purpose.

Only when individuals are free to trade voluntarily⁴ can they truly work together to form a society based on personal liberty, where each individual enjoys their natural rights, whilst respecting the rights of others, with the only obligations being those taken upon through voluntary contracts.

The above comprise an admittedly small fraction of the vast argumentation on Natural Rights, the NAP and personal liberty, but the writer considers them sufficient as a framework for how a civilised society could function.

4. And also make mistakes and learn from them; besides, true liberty is unattainable without the ability to make mistakes.

3 | The State and The Market

The notion of State Intervention constitutes a critical chapter in libertarian thought, with the discussion on State limitation being a heavily debated topic, even to this day. Opinions range from anarchocapitalism and agorism, that advocate for the total rejection of State institutions, to minarchism, that focuses on the idea of Minimal State¹, and even to other, more moderate schools of thought that call upon the need of a more robust State infrastructure. The presentation of the following opinions, does not conceal any personal preference of the author, but serves as an inclination to properly understand what is arguably the greatest ideological achievement of Libertarianism, the Free Market.

State Intervention

On its basis, the State is comprised of lawmakers, politicians, and other bureaucrats, each with their own skills, wants, and needs, but also, their flaws and impulses. Therefore, with respect to the natural rights, it would seem inconceivable that a small group of "specialists" would be granted authority over the actions and behaviours of others.

Each time a society begins the process of drafting a law, that exact same authority is passed to a very small group of individuals, the lawmakers, alongside with the hope that they will not abuse this newfound power to grant privileges to their advantage. But even they themselves are then forced to pass the monopoly of violence, that is, the only legitimate use of force, that's recognised solely to the State as a functional tool², to a secondary group of people, namely those that constitute the political authority, again with the hope of proper conduct.

Even if we imagine the most virtuous and selfless lawmakers and politicians, equipped with the sole purpose of protecting society from what they consider to be dangerous or pathogenic, the order of natural law has been upset nonetheless. Society is no longer based upon natural rights, but upon the artificial liberties that accompany this newly founded political construct, whether or not its aim is to eventually improve the quality of life³.

Hence, the State, in its attempt to fulfil the vague promise of a utopia, against which natural rights could be considered to be even detrimental, would proceed to infringe those rights. What would the result be, were the lawmakers and politicians not the ideal beings we created, is left to the reader as an exercise.

1. *Nightwatchman State*

2. *How could the State hold people under its authority otherwise?*

3. *Obviously, what constitutes an improvement is purely subjective.*

Minimal State

In order for us to approach the idea of the Minimal State, firstly it is necessary to study the nature and functions of utopian systems. What will be made clear, is that utopia does not comprise of a unitary idea or concept, but rather, a vast cluster of ideas.

If we accept that every individual acts based on their own needs, desires, and motives, as was previously mentioned, we come to the conclusion that it is practically impossible that a single, unanimously agreed upon, model or set of rules, may exist.

Given that there exists no certain road towards utopia, it is only reasonable that the route will split up into many, complex, branching paths. Some societies might create large urban settings, others might embrace an agricultural way of life, while others might reject material commodities and focus on spiritual affairs.

Due to the peculiar nature of decision making, an individual might choose different lifestyles during their lifetime, influenced by the respective societal norms. Certain societal structures will, therefore, appeal to a greater audience than others. For this process to exhibit results however, it is necessary that society does not adopt a paternalistic stance⁴ towards the individual, but rather, to create the proper conditions that would promote the independent growth of oneself.

In essence, the only theoretical mechanism that could allow the existence of such conditions, is the Minimal State, a system wherein the people are free to make and profess their choices at any given time, with the only limitations being the personal liberties of others, as expressed through the theory of natural rights and the NAP.

The Free Market

The Free Market is considered by some to be the pinnacle of personal liberty within a civil society. In this case, the word "market", does not mean the literal market, but rather alludes to the broader concept of voluntary exchange, be it ideas, items or services, in a non-interventionist, fully decentralised environment, that embraces the NAP without any reservations.

Besides, the concept of a free market does not axiomatically carry a preferred method of transaction. Monetary exchanges, cryptocurrencies, barter, donations, everything is appropriate, with the only prerequisite being that an exchange is conducted on a voluntary premise for all the parties involved.

The next chapter is solely focused on mental structures that, without a genuinely free market, are in danger of becoming instruments of misconduct, at the hands of appropriators.

4. Meaning, a stance where society functions as a paternal figure, aiming to force "moral" behaviour.

4 | Liberty and Competition

Only in a Free Market society can self-interest be beneficial for the rest of the community. In the free market, people determine the value of goods in collaboration with each other, and earn profit by finding and covering others' needs and wants, be they new products, new services and even infrastructure, such as the construction of roads.

Civil Liberty

Civil Liberty is possibly the hardest concept to define in this text. To understand it, our first priority should be to discern it from that of Social Justice, with which not only are they not synonymous, but more often than not, they antagonise each other.

While the purpose of social justice is to distinct, intervene, and redistribute in favour of certain social groups, it often derails from its trajectory towards true justice, because it sidelines the rights of individuals or even social groups so that it may support or protect the group, which it deems as vulnerable.¹

On the other hand, Civil Liberty, an idea that emerges solely from the Natural Rights rejects the notion of social groups, and instead, focuses on the individual. This means that a person is judged and valued not by their properties they acquire as an element of a social group, but rather, by their own qualities and merits.

It is, therefore, a meritocratic and just system, where initiative, creativity and self-expression are rewarded, in contrast to isolation, anti-social behaviour and unfair practices.

Economic Liberty

When every person is able to freely associate with others, they enjoy the benefits of beneficial trade, that is, the trade that the parties will advance to if and only if, in their own subjective view, will make profit. In the spirit of self-servitude, and in the absence of economic intervention from a third party, reaching a goal that leaves both parties satisfied is almost certainly ensured.

Thus, Economic Liberty, when combined with Civil Liberty, ultimately allows any and all individuals, now free from the yoke of social groups, to have their natural rights guaranteed.

1. *Examples of systems with a prevalent focus on social justice are systems such as but not limited to: the Identity Politics movement of the 21st century, Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, the Apartheid.*

Under absolute Civil and Economic Liberty, production and public opinion are the main mechanisms of an economic system. As there are no interventionist organisations to direct business policy, meritocracy would quickly prevail over other models, since only the most capable employees can maximise production over the competition, while the denouncement of the barriers imposed by social groups would allow individuals to trade with a greater percentage of the population. Conversely, potential social discrimination would lead to a decrease in overall profit, because those that would choose to trade with a person or organisation that would openly display such antisocial behaviour, would be significantly less in number.

It follows, therefore, that Economic Liberty is guaranteed for any and all members of a free market society, who are able to either accept a transaction or deny one, if they so choose, on the premise of it being illegitimate.

Competition

On the basis that, through Civil and Economic Liberty, each person is able to pursue their interests, and also that, to achieve this purpose, they consider mutual cooperation as more advantageous than separate isolated actions, it is only natural that competition will arise between persons, whilst searching for an ideal partner.

Hence, competition, in unison with the freedom of association between persons and organisations, constitutes the manifestation of the economic and civil liberties in the actual world, with the ultimate goal being the improvement of the living standards.

Last but not least, monopolies, a symptom and pathogen given birth by State Intervention, are practically impossible to appear in a Free Market society, since, in order for a monopoly of a certain good to establish itself, a higher institution must exist so that it can protect and empower it, by discouraging any potential competitor.

5 | Suggested Bibliography

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