

Libertarianism: A Pocket Guide

Vasilis Valatsos

Students For Liberty Greece

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1 | The Rights of Man

Since the start of the Libertarian movement in the 18th century, and even before that, during the Stoics and the Epicureans of Ancient Greece, there exists a fundamental philosophical difference between man-made laws, that were created for the improvement of the quality of life of people inside a society, and natural, or god given laws. These laws, or natural rights as they are presented in this chapter, are considered constant throughout human history and global in effect. They form the foundations of libertarianism and were called upon extensively by persons such as John Locke, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and Frédéric Bastiat. Based on the natural rights, the non aggression principle was organically formed amongst the first early societies and it was the defining factor that enabled them to form the first civil societies.

Natural Rights

Every person has three fundamental rights. He has the right to protect himself, his freedom and his property. Those three are prerequisites to a good life, and the lack of one of those three aspects means the lack of all three.

The reasoning behind the last statement is simple. Property is merely a projection of an individual's abilities, and those abilities are an essential part of oneself.

Based on those three freedoms, any person is free to live his life to the best of his abilities, pursue happiness as he sees fit and decides upon, act upon his property, and also move and trade freely.

Non Aggression Principle

The Natural Rights, paired with an aspect of mutual respect, as well as the understanding that there is nothing defining a certain individual as "more equal" than the rest, gave birth to the Non Aggression Principle¹. In essence, the NAP is an ethical stance, where the use of force or coercion is deemed unethical and immoral in a civil society, except in situations such as self defence or matters of self-survival.

As the NAP was originally formed in the conscience of the early human societies, it can also be seen as the driving force between the formation and the continuous growth of the aforementioned societies. It is what allowed trade between individuals, and set the foundations for cooperation, to the point that the first hunter-gatherer communities could form, evolve to agricultural communities and then in turn to the first cities and states.

This does not mean that the role of the NAP has become redundant in more civilised and complex societies such as the one that would allow me to print such a book. Always existing in the back of the head of individuals, the NAP is the reason why most people choose to follow non violent means to achieve their goals, even to their personal expense.

If you have yet to convince yourself on the importance of the NAP, you only have to consider that the standard for how civilised a society is, is not the strictness of it's laws, but rather, how respectful are individuals to the civil rights of their peers.

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

Individuality

Every man is thus able to act in the way that he perceives as the best way to cover his needs and wants in any given moment. At first glance, this concept, called individuality, could be thought as a way to egotism or isolation but it is easy to see that this is not the case.

Even if we ignore the primal need for socialisation and human contact, and considered the most egotistical and self-absorbed individual we could think of, the fact that he cares about the betterment of his quality of life would force him to socialise and join the community of people. This is true, due to the scarcity of goods, as he would have to trade with other individuals and in order to trade, he would have to provide services to other people as well.

Only when individuals are free to trade voluntarily and also make mistakes and learn from them² can they truly work together to lay down the first foundations of society based on personal liberty, where each individual enjoys his *natural* rights, whilst respecting the rights of others, and where the only commitments are those given verbally or through voluntary contracts.

The above are, admittedly, only a small fraction of the huge argumentation on Natural Rights, the NAP and personal liberty, but the writer considers them sufficient as an introduction for how a civilised society³ could function.

2. When you're not allowed to make any mistakes, you aren't truly free.

3. One based on personal freedom and voluntary interactions.

2 | The State and The Market

The concept of "State Intervention" goes back to the very beginning of libertarian thought, and the intensity of "acceptable State Intervention" still is a heavily debated topic, with opinions ranging from no-state(anarcho-capitalism, agorism) to minimal state (minarchism) and further, to "a small amount of state"(the rest). In this piece the author does not wish to take a side, but merely to introduce the concept of state intervention, as well as the concept of minimal state, before introducing one of the, if not the, most important concept of libertarianism, that of the free market.

State Intervention

In simple terms, the State is composed of people¹, each with their own abilities, wants, needs, but also, flaws and impulses, from which nor they, nor any human, can ever hope to escape. Based on the aforementioned natural rights, it would be inconceivable that there would be a small group of special individuals that should be given power over the actions of the rest of society.

When societies reach the point of creating their own laws, they give that exact power to a very small group of individuals, the lawmakers, hoping that they do not abuse such absolute power for their own benefit. Those lawmakers then have to give the monopoly of violence² to another group of individuals, hoping again, that they do not abuse it for their own benefit.

Even considering the most virtuous of lawmakers and the most virtuous of state-people, where they only try to threaten what they deem as unjust, the order of natural law has been upset. The society is no longer based on personal liberty, but upon the liberties that are approved and granted by a political entity, even if those who comprise said entity work for the "betterment" of the society.³

It is now clear that even in this ideal situation, The State could and would intervene above and beyond the natural rights, in order to achieve the so called "utopia", for which natural rights could even be seen as "unjust" and "damaging". What would happen were we not to consider the ideal conditions of virtuous lawmakers and state-persons is left to the reader for consideration.

1. The State is composed of bureaucrats, lawmakers etc., not *the* people.

2. Otherwise what power would The State really have?

3. Obviously the term betterment is put on quotes because of the subjective nature of the word in this (and honestly any other) context.

Minimal State

The path to the minimal state passes through the study of utopian systems. If we study utopia logically, and with an open mind, we can clearly see it is not a single idea or concept, but closely resembles a cluster of smaller systems.

Since we agree that individuals have individual needs, wants, abilities, upbringings, spiritual concerns, etc., we arrive somewhat trivially, to the conclusion that there probably is not a single societal structure or set of rules that would make everyone feel satisfied or happy.

Since there is no concrete way for a person to reach to the so called "utopia", and since there isn't a single "utopia" to hope to get to, it is only logical to assume that on the road to utopia, different societies and societal norms will arise. Some societies might build large urban settings, others might go for a more agricultural aesthetic, while others might focus on the absence of physical goods and focus solely on the spiritual.

Almost surely, some of those might appeal to a larger percentage of the world population, and they might appeal for different periods of time, since appeal and demand are purely subjective, whilst people would be able to pick and choose what suits them based on those subjective criteria.

In essence, this supersociety of pseudo-utopian societies is the Minimal State. It is a system where people are free to pick and choose the lifestyle that suits them at any given time, where all ideas can grow and all people can thrive, where the only obligations you did not voluntarily choose to commit to are those imposed by the natural rights of others and the NAP.

The Free Market

The Free Market, also known as the Holy Grail of Libertarianism⁴, is considered the highest point of personal freedom within a civil society. The Free Market, even though is called a "market", does not mean a literal market, but is a structure that encompasses the whole concept of voluntary exchange, be it ideas, items or services, in a fully decentralised and intervention-free environment, under the NAP, as always.

The concept of a free market does not carry the concept of a "preferred way of transaction". Monetary exchanges, cryptocurrency, barter, donations, everything is accepted, and the only prerequisite for an exchange is that both sides, that of the consumer and that of the seller, are exchanging on a voluntary basis.

As one might imagine, voluntarism plays a big role in such a concept⁵, since volunteers, along with groups of individuals or organisations, would form the basis of activism⁶.

The concept of a Free Market is such a strong and powerful one, that the next chapter is solely focused on ideas and substructures that without a truly free market, are doomed to become instruments of abuse in the hands of individuals.

4. Or the Devil Incarnate, depending on the reader.

5. One might note that it already plays a big role in today's society as well. One would be right. The difference is that in a free market society, voluntarism would also get some much deserved praise.

6. Again, as the previous footnote.

3 | Liberty and Competition

Only in a Free Market society can self-interest be used for the benefit of the whole. In the free market, people earn for themselves, by looking out for others' needs and wants, and trying to offer that for perceived value. In complex societies and economies, this leads to the creation of new technology, new services and even to the creation of infrastructure, such as roads.

Civil Liberty

Civil Liberty might be the hardest to define in this text, as the name of the concept is almost a perfect explanation of what it is. Nonetheless, we will try to expand on the concept¹.

The first thing one must mention about civil liberty², is that it has nothing in common to the notion of social justice.

While the purpose of social justice is to redistribute, intervene, distinct and favour certain social groups, and to correct perceived mistakes, as a concept it is highly against true justice and freedom. The reasoning is simple. In order for this notion of justice to exist, it is detrimental to it's efficiency to belittle the rights of individuals or social groups, in order to overpraise the group that is perceived as vulnerable³.

Civil Liberty, as genuine justice, that arises solely from the Natural Rights and the respect of those through the NAP, does not discriminate between social groups, but cares for each person on an individual level. A person is judged and valued as an individual of their own qualities and merits, not as a member of a subcategory, or as a person to be treated differently solely on their social status. It is therefore a meritocratic concept, where individuality, innovation and creativity are rewarded, where isolation, counterproductivity and unfair practices are discouraged, and where issues such as race, sexuality, gender etc completely lose meaning.

In a sense then, Civil Liberty is the structure that makes the concept

1. Not through what it is, but through what it is not.

2. Since it's "the current year" apparently.

3. Examples of social justice are all the systems in which a certain social group is favoured over another, such as but not limited to: The USA in the current decade, Stalinist Russia, South Africa, etc.

of social groups irrelevant, since it doesn't care for them,

Economic Liberty

It is Economic Liberty, that which combined with the notion of Civil Liberty, allows any and all social groups (which as we said, are made redundant as discrete groups by true civil liberty) to have their natural rights guaranteed.

Since every person is free to associate with whomever he chooses, the concept of beneficial trade is born, trade from which both sides walk away having gained something of greater importance than what they had to give up, in their own subjective view. In the absence of economic intervention from a third party (The State), and in the presence of self-servitude, reaching a goal that leaves both parties satisfied is insured.

Two simple arguments that guarantee freedom in a system with absolute civil and economic liberty, are those of productivity and public opinion. In such a system, where there is no outside pressure from third parties (The State), on hiring quotas, or policy making, meritocracy would be the preferred hiring system, as that would ensure the highest productivity in comparison to their competitors, whilst non-discriminating allows individuals to associate with a wider range of people, ensuring higher profits. At the same time, discriminatory policy making, would not only suffer on productivity or customer range, but also would suffer as the public would discriminate against it⁴, harming the discriminators further.

In a free market society, the freedom of association is guaranteed for both sides of a deal, as there is not a third party (The State) enforcing interventionist laws. Therefore, a seller may deny service

4. *Boycotting*

the same way that a buyer chooses not to acquire service from a seller. The reasons, be they moral, religious, personal, are non of our business.

Competition

One can say that the existence and persistence of the concept of cooperation, comes from an understanding that people have more to gain by working together than from each one acting independently.

Since through civil and economic liberty each person is allowed to work for his interest, it is only natural that competition will occur, as due to this freedom he can choose what he believes is better fit for his needs. So the people that want to cooperate with him have to compete with each other, to prove to him that they are best suited to be chosen.

Competition therefore, is nothing more than the manifestation of the economic and civil liberties of a person in relation to the freedom to associate with individuals or organisations for the betterment of his existence.

Monopolies, symptom and problems of State Intervention, are practically impossible in a civil society. One of the many reasons for this, is that in order for the monopoly of a certain good to take hold, there must be a higher legal entity (The State), that guarantees and feeds the monopoly by depressing competition.

4 | Suggested Bibliography

I mention a small collection of suggested bibliography on the foundation of Classical Libertarianism.

Bastiat, Frederic. *The Law*. 1850.

Chydenius, Anders. *The National Gain*. 1765.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 1740.

Mills, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. 1859.

Mises, Ludwig von. *The Free Market and It's Enemies*. 2004.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. 1974.

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Rothbard, Murray. *The Anatomy of the State*. 1974.

Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. 1776.

*The book by Tom G. Palmer is a collections of essays that cover an immensely broad field of topics, many of which are not even presented in this book, for the convenience of keeping everything simple and introductory. They are highly recommended and through them, one can find readings much more complex and fulfilling than the current booklet.