

Libertarianism as a Political Philosophy

*Dr. Vinay Girotra

Assistant Professor, Doaba College, Jalandhar

Abstract

Libertarianism adheres to the philosophy of laissez-faire, advocating for minimal state interference. It posits that the state should focus solely on tasks such as internal security, defense, and the establishment of laws. Other responsibilities, including education, healthcare, and social services, are deemed more appropriately managed by social, economic, or religious institutions. The extent and nature of power vested in the state versus other institutions have been subjects of varying opinions among thinkers, and this paper delves into the diverse perspectives on this matter.

Keywords: *New Right, Education, Health, Free Market, Entitlement, Natural Rights*

Article Publication

 Published Online: 30-Sep-2023

*Author's Correspondence

 Dr. Vinay Girotra

 Assistant Professor, Doaba College,
Jalandhar

 girotravinay@gmail.com

 [10.31305/rrjm2023.v03.n03.005](https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjm2023.v03.n03.005)

© 2022 The Authors. Published by Revista Review Index Journal of Multidisciplinary. This is an open access article under the CC

BY-NC-ND license 
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Scan and access Online



There is a political ideology known as libertarianism that has been at the core of the so-called "New Right" movement, which was influential during the administrations of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. It maintains that the role of the state in society ought to be severely restricted, primarily consisting of the administration of courts of law, the protection of law enforcement, and the defence of the nation. All other responsibilities that are typically carried out by modern governments, such as education, social insurance, welfare, and so on, should be taken over by religious organisations, charitable organisations, and other private institutions that operate in a free market.

The 1960s saw the rise of the libertarian movement in both the United States of America and England. After the publication of the book "Anarchy, State, and Utopia" in 1974, which was written by the Harvard philosopher Robert Nozick, it got a significant amount of attention from the academic community. Many libertarians give a variety of reasons for adopting this ideology, including the advantages of market competition, the inherent mechanisms that point state bureaucracies in the direction of incompetence and inefficiency, the poor track record of governmental attempts to deal with specific issues such as poverty and pollution, and so on. Nozick was of the opinion that the most compelling

argument in favour of a libertarian society is the fact that such an argument is a direct consequence of a profound regard for the rights of the person. When Nozick (1974:27)

Numerous academics have contributed to the development of the libertarian philosophy. Some of the more notable of these individuals are F.A. Hayek, Karl Popper, Talmon, Milton Friedman, I. Berlin, and Robert Nozick. It believes that in order to defend liberty, a society must have strong private property rights, a free market, and little government. This is because it considers liberty to be the most important value. 'Freedom' is the definition of libertarianism that some authors use. Libertarians, in its most fundamental form, advocate for freedom in all aspects of life, including the right to do whatever one pleases with one's own body, provided that one does not infringe on the property or personal freedom of other people. (from Cohen, 1995:34) They are of the opinion that the voluntary collaboration between individuals which occurs in a free market is always superior than the compulsion that is exerted by the state. Neither the promotion of cultures nor the support of agriculture is the mandates of the state. It has just one responsibility to fulfil, and that is to safeguard the rights of personal individuals.

Schools/Branches of Libertarianism

Libertarianism, like many other philosophical movements, is diverse and includes a number of schools and sub-groups under its umbrella. Libertarianism may be broken down into two primary categories, and each of these categories has its own set of responses to the questions.

Anarcho-Capitalists: One group, the anarchists, often referred to as "anarcho-capitalists," advocates for the complete abolition of the state and the privatisation of even the most fundamental services. At first glance, this objective could get the impression of being excessive or absurd; nonetheless, it is founded on an argument that is conceptually plausible. As an illustration, it is not difficult to conceive of the possibility of substituting private security organisations for provincial, state, or municipal police forces, despite the fact that these forces are typically characterised by inefficiency, corruption, and abuses of power, and they frequently operate with impunity. The only way that these would generate profits is if they actually safeguard civilians and make an effort to combat actual criminals. These are the same kinds of arguments that anarcho-capitalists make to justify their support for privatising the military and the judicial system, which would leave the state with no authority to administer.

They are known as "Miniarchists," and they are members of the second branch of government. They believe that the government has the authority to engage in activities such as the protection of individuals, the enforcement of contracts and national defence, foreign relations, justice, the preservation of private property, and the protection of individual rights. It is recommended that all remaining functions be privatised.

Libertarians, on the other hand, acknowledge that local authorities have the ability to intervene in other areas and provide a variety of social and economic arrangements in the setting of a federal state that is highly decentralised. This is because unsatisfied citizens are able to quickly relocate to other jurisdictions. Miniarchists consider the authority to levy taxes, even for the purpose of securing funds for a variety of activities, to be an essential component that is not included.

Main features of Libertarianism

When it comes to social analysis, libertarianism considers the individual to be the fundamental unit. Individuals are responsible for their acts and the decisions they make within their lives. Specifically, it places an emphasis on the dignity of the individual, which includes both rights and responsibilities. Individuals have the right to be safe in their life, liberty, and property since they are moral agents. This right cannot be taken away from them. The government and society do not bestow these rights upon individuals; rather, they are innate to the human condition and cannot be taken away from them. (Brennan, editors for 2018:3) Those who would take away rights should be the ones to bear the responsibility of providing an explanation for their actions, as it is intuitively right that persons enjoy the security of such rights.

In order for individuals to thrive and have a chance at survival, there must be a significant amount of order in society. One of the most important insights that libertarian social analysis offers is that order in society emerges naturally, as a result of the actions of thousands of individuals who coordinate their actions with those of others in order to accomplish their goals. There has been no clear direction in the development of the most significant institutions of human society, such as language, law, money, and markets. All of these institutions have developed spontaneously. Another example of spontaneous order is the civil society. Although the associations that make up the civil society are founded for a specific purpose, the civil society itself is not an organisation and does not have a goal of its own. It is necessary for individuals to participate in economic activity in order for them to exist and thrive. When it comes to property, having the right to trade property through mutual agreements is an essential component. As stated in the year 2011, Bader and Meadowcroft The economic system of free persons is known as free markets, and it is essential for the creation of wealth to have free markets.

People who subscribe to the libertarian ideology think that if the government intervenes less in the economic decisions that people make, then they will be freer and more prosperous.

Regarding this matter, the well-known entitlement thesis was presented by Robert Nozick. 'If we believe that everyone is entitled to the assets that they already possess (their holdings), then a just distribution is simply whatever distribution comes from people's just transactions, according to what he says. All distributions that result from the free movement of resources from a just situation are, in and of themselves, just. In spite of the fact that the taxes are used to compensate for the additional expense of someone's unfair natural handicap, it is still immoral for the government to impose taxes on these exchanges against the will of any individual. The only legal purpose for taxing is to generate cash for the purpose of sustaining the background institutions that are necessary to defend the system of free exchange, such as the court system and the police force. R. Nozick's work from 2001

These three guiding concepts form the foundation of this entitlement theory: The first principle is the principle of transfer, which states that anything that has been acquired in a just manner can be freely transferred. The second principle is the principle of just initial acquisition, which describes how people come to own things initially and how they can be transferred in accordance with the first principle. The third principle is the principle of rectification of injustice, which describes how to deal with acquisitions that have been acquired or transferred in an unjust manner. Twenty-four (Hunt, L., 2015) For illustration purposes, if I am the owner of a piece of land, the principle of transfer states that I am free to participate in any transfer that I choose. In the event that the first two principles are violated, the principle of correction of wrong will tell me what to do. The principle of acquisition will explain how the plot was initially acquired, and it will also explain how it came to be possessed. Taking everything into consideration, if the current holdings of individuals are obtained in a just manner, then the formula for just distribution is as follows: from each as they choose, to each as they are chosen. (Hunt, L., 2015 paragraph 26)

States are formed by individuals in order to safeguard their rights. On the other hand, the government is a perilous institution. As a general rule, libertarians have a strong aversion to centralised power. They aim to divide and limit power, and this means, in particular, that they want to limit the government in general by means of a written constitution that enumerates and limits the authority that the people grant to the government.

One of the most fundamental political implications of libertarianism is the use of limited government. The role of the state ought to be restricted to the narrow duty of providing protection against coercion, theft, fraud, and the enforcement of contracts, among other things. The right of a person to not be forced to perform specific actions is violated by any will that is more extensive, and as a result, such a will would be unreasonable. Nozick's work from 1974 The belief held by libertarians is that in a society that is truly just, there exists a natural balance of interests among people who are peaceful and productive. As a result of the market, many of us are forced to adjust our plans because the individual plans of one person, which may include things like acquiring a job, starting a business, or purchasing a property, among other things, may be in conflict with the plans of other people. The operation of the free market, on the other hand, is beneficial to all of us, because it eliminates the need for conflicts to arise between farmers and merchants, manufacturers and importers.

We do not become involved in group disputes until a government begins to pay out rewards on the basis of political pressure. At that point, we are compelled to organise and compete with other groups in order to obtain a portion of the political power.

From the beginning, libertarians have been fighting against the age-old problem of war. They had the understanding that war was a source of death and damage on a massive scale, that it caused disruptions in family and economic life, and that it placed greater power in the hands of the ruling class. This may have been the reason why the ruling class did not always share the general sentiment's desire for peace. Free men and women have, of course, frequently been had to defend their own civilizations against dangers from other countries; yet, throughout the course of history, war has typically been the adversary of peaceful and industrious people on all sides of the wars.

Critical Evaluation

We are born with natural rights, which include the rights to life, liberty, and property, according to the argument of certain libertarians. These natural rights must be protected. The question that arises, however, is why these rights are not the rights of others! The explanation that libertarians give is that they are necessary in order to give people the freedom to direct their own lives. On the other hand, this does not provide a solution to the question of why these rights are essential. Hammerton contends that there is no basis for the belief that the rights are inherent, pre-existing rights that are independent of the laws that govern a community. *The Hammerton Journal*, 2003:15

Additionally, the concept of freedom that libertarians propose, which is "absence of coercion," is not accepted by critics. If we accept this definition of freedom, then the degree to which a person is able to act without being forced to do (or not do) something against their will is the level to which they are able to exercise their freedom. When living in a society that adheres to the libertarian philosophy, it is impossible to legitimately do anything with another person's property if they do not want you to. As a result, the quantity of property you possess is the only thing that guarantees your freedom. It is a corollary of this that an individual who does not possess any property does not have any freedom guaranteed to them, and that the more property you possess, the larger your freedom that is guaranteed to you. *The Hammerton Journal*, 2003:16 To put it another way, according to the definition provided by libertarians themselves, a distribution of property should be understood as a distribution of freedom.

The 'absence of tile initiation of force' is another definition of liberty that is held by libertarians. To reiterate, this term does not provide much assistance. It is possible to use force in order to safeguard properly rights, yet it is also possible to violate property rights without using force for the sake of protecting them. Furthermore, the absence of compulsion is not the highest value; other values take precedence over it. To give one example, if all other factors remain the same, it is not unethical to obtain justice through the use of force. Furthermore, in situations where the alternative to coercion is not innovation, the use of compulsion to achieve innovation is likewise an acceptable option.

In addition, some who are opposed to libertarianism argue that the redistribution of wealth is not inherently unethical. The argument put up by libertarians is that it is inherently unethical to take the property that is rightfully owned by the wealthy and distribute it to those who are less fortunate. Taking Nozick as an example, he believes that the most essential right is the right to have control over oneself, sometimes known as the right to self-ownership. Therefore, "what one owns and what is owned are one and the same and the whole person," is the meaning of this phrase. To put it another way, if I own myself, then I am also the owner of my talents and the things that come from my talents. As a result, the demand for redistribution taxation, which would shift wealth from the wealthy to the less fortunate, is a violation of self-ownership.

References

- [1] Bader, R. and Meadowcroft, 2011, *Cambridge Companion to Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] Brennan, J., van der Vossen, B., and Schmidtz, D. (eds.), 2018, *The Routledge Handbook of Libertarianism*, New York: Routledge.

-
- [3] Cohen, G.A., 1995, *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Hammerton J., 2003 A Critique of Libertarianism, online available <http://www.tardis.ed.ac.uk/james/politics/libcrit.txt>
- [5] Hunt, L., 2015, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia: An Advanced Guide*, Oxford: John Wiley and Sons.
- [6] Nozick, R., 1974, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books
- [7] Nozick, R., 2001, *Invariances: The Structure of the Objective World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Author's Biography:

Dr. Vinay Girotra was awarded with Junior Research Fellowship by University Grant Commission, New Delhi in 2004. He completed his PhD. In Political Science from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar in 2009. He is working as Assistant Professor and Head in PG Department of Political Science, Doaba College Jalandhar.

How Cite this article?

Girotra, V. (2023). Libertarianism as a Political Philosophy. *Revista Review Index Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 3(3), 23–27. <https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm2023.v03.n03.005>