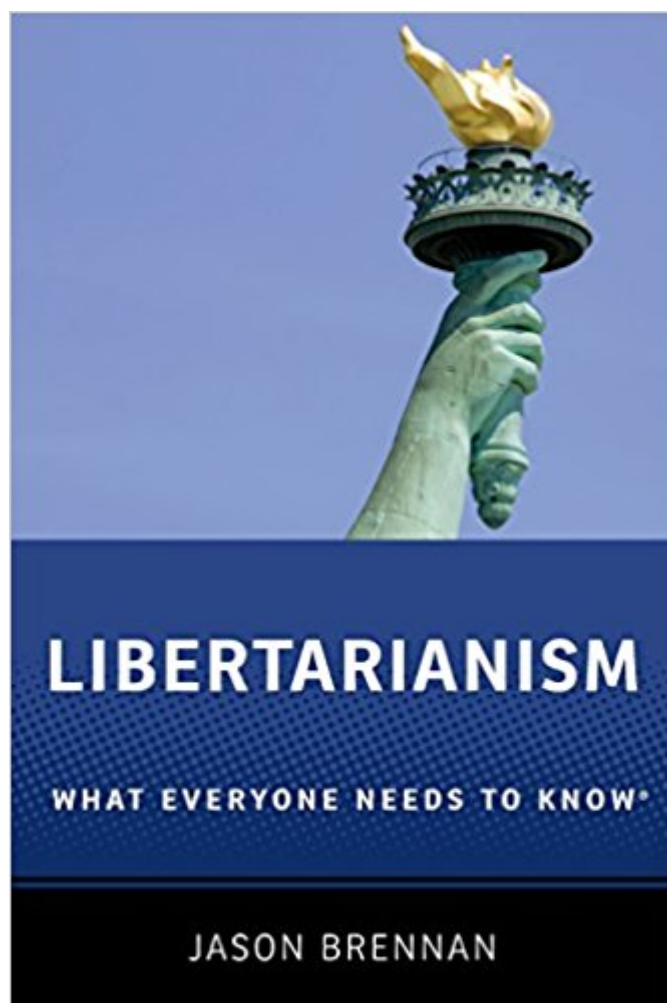


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Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs To Know



Synopsis

Historically, Americans have seen libertarians as far outside the mainstream, but with the rise of the Tea Party movement, libertarian principles have risen to the forefront of Republican politics. But libertarianism is more than the philosophy of individual freedom and unfettered markets that Republicans have embraced. Indeed, as Jason Brennan points out, libertarianism is a quite different--and far richer--system of thought than most of us suspect. In this timely new entry in Oxford's acclaimed series *What Everyone Needs to Know*®, Brennan offers a nuanced portrait of libertarianism, proceeding through a series of questions to illuminate the essential elements of libertarianism and the problems the philosophy addresses, including such topics as the Value of Liberty, Human Nature and Ethics, Economic Liberty, Civil Rights, Social Justice and the Poor, Government and Democracy, and Contemporary Politics. Brennan asks the most fundamental and challenging questions: What do Libertarians think liberty is? Do libertarians think everyone should be selfish? Are libertarians just out to protect the interests of big business? What do libertarians think we should do about racial injustice? What would libertarians do about pollution? Are Tea Party activists true libertarians? As he sheds light on libertarian beliefs, Brennan overturns numerous misconceptions. Libertarianism is not about simple-minded paranoia about government, he writes. Rather, it celebrates the ideal of peaceful cooperation among free and equal people. Libertarians believe that the rich always capture political power; they want to minimize the power available to them in order to protect the weak. Brennan argues that libertarians are, in fact, animated by benevolence and a deep concern for the poor. Clear, concise, and incisively written, this volume explains a vitally important philosophy in American history--and a potent force in contemporary politics. *What Everyone Needs to Know*® is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press.

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Customer Reviews

I'll start with full disclosure. I am a libertarian. I have little patience for the statism coming from the Rs and Ds. I have run for office as a Libertarian a couple of times. So I was predisposed to like Jason Brennan's *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*. But, subjectivity aside, I think Brennan provides a terrific, accessible guide to modern libertarian political thought. The structure of Brennan's book, a series of questions grouped by topic, make it a very useful reference. It's worth reading straight through, but each short chapter can also stand alone, particularly the latter chapters addressing specific contemporary issues. Covering libertarian foundations, political theory, economics, and modern problems, Brennan lays out the basics of libertarianism. Starting with the basics, Brennan gives the core of what libertarianism is about: individual liberty, mutual consent, cooperation, tolerance, mutual respect, volunteerism, equality, responsibility, and radical freedom. Answering the criticism that libertarians are too reliant on market solutions without acknowledging market failure, he points out that government also fail, and that while market failures eventually self-correct, government failure becomes entrenched. Although markets and governments both fail, we should favor free markets and not government intervention, as governments stifle freedom and exercise their monopoly on coercive power. Whether the issue is civil rights, poverty, the environment, crime, or international trade, government intervention, Brennan argues, is always the wrong choice. He lays out the arguments in deceptively simple terms, but in such a way that demands further study and response.

This book could serve as an excellent introduction to libertarian ideas and the libertarian approach to government, society, and politics. It is ideal for people who are undecided about their political leanings, those interested in learning more about libertarianism from a libertarian, and those who are already comfortable with libertarian ideas but want something more structured. It could be used as a sort of guide or reference for basic answers to most of the major questions that arise in conversations about libertarianism (or any political philosophy). Both libertarians and non- or antilibertarians could benefit from reading it. As noted by other reviewers, the Q&A format and straightforward, conversational tone make the book very accessible. However, I did have some problems with the book. One is related to something the other three-star reviewer pointed out, which

is that the author does not represent the full spectrum of views held by libertarians on some views. That reviewer noted the author's omission of libertarians who are opposed to abortion; my issue has to do with public education. The question asked is this: "What would libertarians do about failing public schools?" The answer, while good enough as far as it went, failed to mention the solution that a growing number of people are going for: home- or unschooling. The homeschooling movement has gained much more widespread acceptance in recent years simply because it has shown to work so well for many families. I don't think there is a major institution of higher education now in this country that doesn't accept homeschoolers. In fact, a growing demographic group of homeschoolers is that of public school teachers who are homeschooling their own children.

In *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Jason Brennan offers a clear, straightforward, and readable introduction to the libertarian political perspective, carefully acknowledging along the way the range of differing opinions held by libertarians on key issues (with an exception, see below). The book is written in an easily referenceable question-and-answer format, and is divided by topic. The chapters and even individual questions can be consulted in any order, independently of the rest of the book. To this end, in the course of answering a particular question, Brennan helpfully cites other places in the book that give a more in-depth look at something perhaps only briefly mentioned. The author can be commended as well for often introducing anti-libertarian perspectives or objections without providing any direct libertarian rebuttal. In this way, the book serves to familiarize the reader with both the libertarian viewpoint on various political, social, and economic topics as well as common rejoinders or alternative takes from non- or anti-libertarians. Brennan deftly wields thought experiments and examples to illustrate how otherwise abstract ideas can be practically applied. On the negative side, I would like to have seen footnotes with explicit references included throughout the book. For example, Brennan cites many studies, statistics, and ideas directly, and although he sometimes gives the reader enough information to go off of in their own search, the sheer number of such instances leaves this reader desiring the inclusion of footnotes to assist in locating these. However, Brennan provides an excellent selection of texts and articles for further reading at the end of the book, divided into specific subcategories.

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