

Liberty vs responsibility

[Experience](#), [Responsibility](#)



Liberty v/sResponsibilityLiberty is the most valued and sought after outcome of any political society. It is a mark of a productive and prosperous society where people enjoy a set of fundamental rights for e. g. :- right to free speech, fair trial, etc. On the other hand social responsibility towards others and oneself unites the community and increases social well-being. Various political philosophers have come up with different ways to prioritize one over the other and some have believed to strike a balance between the two.

This leads to an interesting political debate that at what point we draw a line etween liberty and responsibility, where in we have maximum liberty and minimum responsibility. In this paper I assert the libertarian political thought which resolves this debate by striking a fine balance between liberty and responsibility. To support my argument, I apply the ideas of John Locke who was a 17th century classical liberal philosopher (for first reason) and much of libertarian political thought is inspired from his works. For second reason I apply the ideas of libertarian philosopher Friedrich Hayek.

Towards the end I discuss the principles of libertarianism which clearly address this conflict. The first reason is the primary reason why people have desire to loot or plunder and that reason is scarcity. Scarcity is also the main reason why we have to follow a set of rules and act responsibly. If there were no scarcity, then there would be a surplus of goods and resources for everyone and any person's wishes and desires would be fulfilled no matter how unlimited they were and his/her actions would have no consequence on anybody else. But we do live in a world where there is scarcity and that cannot be avoided.

So, we have to interact and exchange goods with one another and that involves a set of rules for social conduct. In this context, John Locke believed in the rightful accumulation of property (scarce good) by mixing labor with natural resources (Nozick 175). He didn't believe in accumulation of property via coercion, fraud or theft. As far as the extent of accumulation is concerned he believed that too much property should not be consumed that very little is left for others because that would hinder someone else's right to accumulation of private property.

Nozick had given this a term " Lockean Proviso" (Nozick 175). Applying the Lockean proviso to the conflict between liberty and responsibility, in the presence of scarcity, there has to be a certain set of responsibilities that people need to fulfill (mentioned above, Locke called them " natural laws" (Korab)) mainly including the one where they don't over-consume resources so that less is left for others and at the same time enjoy the liberties granted by the social contract. It's important to note that the responsibilities are optimum that if there are more or less responsibilities there will be less to no liberty.

The second reason is that responsibility is important for liberty to exist is that it encourages good decision making by making people accountable for their actions. Friedrich Hayek in his book " Constitution of Liberty' said that a free society depends more than any other on people being held responsible for their actions (" American Spectator") Applying his idea, in life one is awarded for achieving a set of goals by the proper use of resources he/she

was provided with, then that person should also not be helped and made to suffer the consequences of making a bad decision.

In the long term, this suffering will help him make better decisions.

Additionally, if the person doesn't suffer the consequences, he/she will develop a propensity for excessive risk taking which wouldn't be good for the society. Another implication of not taking responsibility is that someone else ends up taking responsibility for it and then that person has a right to curb the latter's freedom. For e. g. :- if the government decides to bailout a firm which didn't make right decisions, then the government will force the company to take some hard decisions which might go against the interests of the people in that company.

So, learning to take responsibility from bad choices increases self-ownership and thereby upholds one's liberty. It also improves one-self which is always beneficial towards society. Libertarianism has two main principles: the non-aggression principle and the preservation of individual rights and private property ("Libertarianism"). According to Libertarianism these are the only two responsibilities the person owes to other people in the community.

He/she ought not to show aggression and encroach upon any other person's rights in the community.

Any responsibility more than that comes at the cost of liberty. Based on the reasons that I gave, Libertarianism strikes a fine balance between liberty and responsibility by not placing laws that achieve a specific outcome unlike a Leviathan government. At the same time the laws that it places are minimal and only lead to a further expansion of liberty among all. One doesn't want

too many laws because that leads to a powerful government where there is no liberty and one also can't manage not having any laws because scarcity and greed will lead to a state of war of "one against all".

Libertarianism gives a solution that is somewhere between those two extremes. To conclude, libertarianism believes in the importance of individual liberty which can be found in the fundamental rights that people enjoy and duties/responsibilities which people are obligated to follow. It's important for fundamental duties to exist because without which liberty won't exist. However, responsibility wouldn't have any meaning in the absence of liberty and that it derives its existence from the presence of the latter.