



The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism

By George H. Smith

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Liberal individualism, or "classical liberalism" as it is often called, refers to a political philosophy in which liberty plays the central role. This book demonstrates a conceptual unity within the manifestations of classical liberalism by tracing the history of several interrelated and reinforcing themes. Concepts such as order, justice, rights, and freedom have imparted unity to this diverse political ideology by integrating context and meaning. However, they have also sparked conflict, as classical liberals split on a number of issues, such as legitimate exceptions to the "presumption of liberty," the meaning of "the public good," natural rights versus utilitarianism, the role of the state in education, and the rights of resistance and revolution. This book explores these conflicts and their implications for contemporary liberal and libertarian thought.

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Review

"George Smith's lectures on classical liberalism had a profound effect on my thinking. Now, at long last, others may profit from his prodigious learning in this absolutely 'must read' book for anyone interested in modern libertarianism and its historical roots. Clear, accessible, balanced, and powerfully reasoned."

--Randy E. Barnett, author of *The Structure of Liberty: Justice and the Rule of Law*

"This is a lucid, concise, but at the same time a deep overview of the origins and structure of classical liberal thought. With a fluid and engaging style, Smith corrects many of our modern misconceptions about how early liberals understood themselves and the terms on which they debated. Anyone interested in liberal thought, whether in its 'classical', modern 'high liberal', or libertarian forms, will find this a valuable resource. Even critics of classical liberalism will find, thanks to Smith, that classical liberal thought contains a great deal of forgotten wisdom."

--Jason Brennan, author of *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*

"George H. Smith is an independent scholar who for many decades has lectured and written about the history of classical liberal and libertarian ideas. *The System of Liberty* is his first extended take on this history to be published by a high-level academic press—a tribute both to Smith's dogged scholarship and to the rise in the respectability of the libertarian tradition he explains and espouses...the information and analysis are always interesting." -Brian Doherty, *Reason Magazine*

About the Author

George H. Smith is a freelance writer and writes a weekly article for the Cato Institute titled 'Excursions into the History of Libertarian Thought'. He is the author of *Atheism: The Case against God* (1974), *Atheism, Ayn Rand, and Other Heresies* (1991) and *Why Atheism?* (2000). Since 1971, he has written more than one hundred articles and book reviews that have appeared in a wide range of publications, including *The New York Times*, *The Arizona Daily Star*, *Newsday*, *Reason Magazine*, *Free Inquiry*, *The Humanist*, and *Inquiry Magazine*, among many others.

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