

Libertarianism (and classical liberalism, of which it is a subset) presupposes a specific, but implicit, conception of liberty. Imagine two lists of property-rights: one list is all those that are libertarian and the other is all those that are not. What determines into which list a property-right is assigned? If libertarianism is really about liberty, then the determining factor can only be whether the property-right fits what liberty is (in a sense more abstract than property). Therefore, it greatly clarifies matters to have an explicit theory of this presupposed conception.

‘Liberty’ in its most general sense means ‘absence of constraint’ (in complete contrast is ‘presence of assistance’). But the issue here is interpersonal liberty: the absence of some kind of constraint on people by other people. What is it that we don’t want other people to constrain? At its most abstract, this can only be having our wants (or preferences)—whatever they happen to be—satisfied or fulfilled. Mere failure to assist some want-satisfaction (to fail to provide a benefit) is not in itself to proactively constrain that want-satisfaction (to proactively impose a cost). Therefore, abstract interpersonal liberty is ‘the absence of interpersonally imposed proactive constraints on want-satisfaction’. But for brevity, ‘no proactively imposed costs’ or simply ‘no (proactive) impositions’. However counterintuitive, this eleutherology is the abstract (non-propertyarian and non-normative) liberty that libertarianism presupposes.

There are three severe optimisation problems: clashes, defences, and rectifications. 1) What if I want to do something that proactively imposes on you (say by causing smoke), but to stop me would also proactively impose on me (I need a fire for warmth and cooking)? Our want-satisfactions clash. The most libertarian option is to minimise the overall proactive impositions, which might entail compromise or compensation. 2) How far can one go to defend oneself from proactive impositions? Not so far as to cause ‘overkill’: proactively imposing to a greater extent than anything threatened (e.g., mining one’s garden to stop children using it as a shortcut). 3) If a proactive imposition occurs, what would rectify it? Whatever matches the level of the imposition (which can include a [risk-multiplier](#) proportional to the statistical chance of the imposer’s escaping detection). These now constitute a libertarian optimisation policy.

If such liberty were to be put into practice in a state of nature, then what general things would this entail? Primarily, people want to have ultimate control of the bodies that they more or less are. They do not proactively impose on other people by doing so (except in the trivial, and reciprocal, sense of being composed of resources that might otherwise have been available). Therefore, liberty entails that they have this. Next, they want to have ultimate control of any unused resources they start using, and thereby closely involve in their want-satisfactions. They do not proactively impose on other people by doing so (except in the trivial, and reciprocal, sense that those resources might otherwise have been available). Therefore, liberty entails that they have this. Otherwise, all interpersonal interactions and exchanges need to be consensual or they would proactively impose. These are the principal, *prima facie*, positive, libertarian rules that fit abstract liberty almost perfectly. These rules internalise externalities with respect to want-satisfaction, and are thereby economically efficient (tending to maximise overall want-satisfaction). To flout these positive rules infringes liberty *prima facie*. But problem cases may require the use of the abstract theory or optimisation policy.

In order to better protect and promote liberty, the above positive rules can be instituted as enforceable private-property (one added sophistication is similarly derivable [intellectual property](#)). Consequently, self-ownership and such private-property are actually contingent, practical, libertarian rules; and not what liberty or libertarianism is inherently.

Moreover, it is a further completely separate matter whether this positive system of liberty-in-practice is moral or just. And, as with the positive theory itself, this can only be conjecturally explained and defended from any criticisms—not given epistemological support.

A more-detailed explanation of this liberty-centred, critical-rationalist, theory is [here](#).