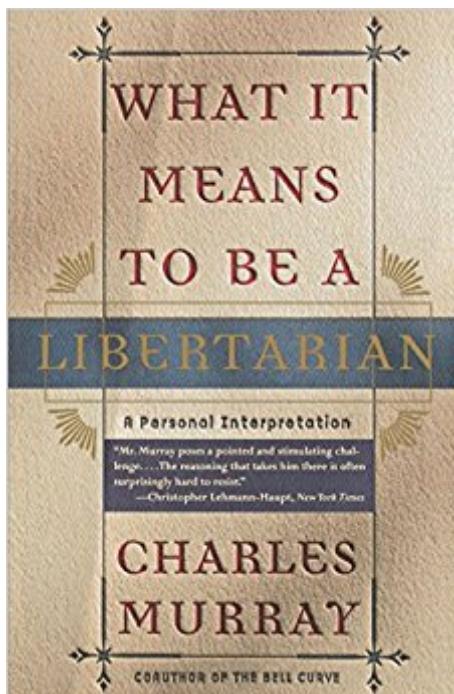


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# What It Means To Be A Libertarian: A Personal Interpretation



## **Synopsis**

Charles Murray believes that America's founders had it right--strict limits on the power of the central government and strict protection of the individual are the keys to a genuinely free society. In *What It Means to Be a Libertarian*, he proposes a government reduced to the barest essentials: an executive branch consisting only of the White House and trimmed-down departments of state, defense, justice, and environment protection; a Congress so limited in power that it meets only a few months each year; and a federal code stripped of all but a handful of regulations. Combining the tenets of classical Libertarian philosophy with his own highly-original, always provocative thinking, Murray shows why less government advances individual happiness and promotes more vital communities and a richer culture. By applying the truths our founders held to be self-evident to today's most urgent social and political problems, he creates a clear, workable vision for the future.

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## **Customer Reviews**

Murray (coauthor of *The Bell Curve*) is a skilled polemicist, and his manifesto for a radically downsized government should both gather adherents and challenge opponents. He argues from two basic points: freedom (associated with responsibility) is our birthright; and in most cases, government intervention has been ineffectual. While Murray allows for some level of state and local government, he recommends scrapping most federal agencies that deal with domestic policies. Arguing that civil rights laws have actually retarded progress against racism, he cites evidence that

discrimination against Jews and the Irish declined without legislation; but this ignores the special stigma of race. Murray advocates a \$3000 education voucher for each child and suggests optimistically that medical patients paying full fees will subsidize the costs of the indigent; but this says nothing about those in between?the majority of the population. Welfare and Social Security payments should end, to be replaced by individual saving and community support from voluntary associations. Murray's proposals posit a more responsible populace?a worthy goal?yet they also assume a neighborly concern that may be lacking in our increasingly fragmented society. Moreover, his schema fails to address international comparisons (Canadian health care) and does not acknowledge how government has shaped an unequal status quo (e.g., mortgage interest deductions but little money for public housing). Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.  
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Murray, the controversial coauthor of *The Bell Curve* (Free Pr., 1994), is back with an essay on the political views of the modern libertarian. At a time when the Libertarian Party seems to be gaining in popularity, Murray's book could have served as a treatise for the cause. However, the text is fraught with contradictions and unsubstantiated claims. For example, while Murray concedes that seat belts have reduced the number of automobile injuries, he argues against government regulations and state laws requiring them because the number of injuries to passengers and pedestrians are up, without citing a single study or paper correlating these two issues. Murray also includes no footnotes in his book and has only two brief two-page bibliographic essays. Ironically, in *The Bell Curve*, Murray and coauthor Richard J. Herrnstein argued that race and class affects the results of IQ tests and defines an individual's role in life, without taking into consideration the environment in which the person was raised. Yet here, in calling for the dismantling of federal regulations, Murray argues that it is the very environment of big government that is the problem. Go figure. Marginally recommended, at best, for general collections. [See also David Boaz's *Libertarianism: A Primer*, reviewed above.?Ed.]?Patricia Hatch, Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction, Boston, Mass.--Patricia Hatch, Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction, Boston, Mass. Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Hey folks, Charles Murray has a great talent for explaining and simplifying things. Libertarian thought is very much targeted toward personal freedom and personal responsibility and the rights of other folks to also have personal freedom and responsibility. Murray's "interpretation" of libertarian principals is very astute and should be simple for us as a society to accomplish. While I applaud his

idealism and hope for our libertarian future, the negative skeptic in me thinks our nation and society has long since passed its tipping point where we can achieve a true libertarian society. To me, it seems we are on the same path as our socialist nanny-state neighbors in Europe and elsewhere. Murray is a great thinker with admirable ideas for our future, but it can never come about under our current constitutional government. Our only chance for a libertarian society relies on our reforming our government under a new constitution carefully crafted to avoid the pitfalls we have made under our current one. If we were to reform our government with the goal of a libertarian society, I would nominate Charles Murray to be one of the thinkers involved in crafting a new constitutional government. Best wishes, Dave Wile

Charles Murray gives an eloquent defense of libertarianism, defending freedom at a time when it is under attack from left wing academics. Building on arguments put forth by scholars such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Robert Nozick, and Richard Epstein, Murray gives explicit recommendations for how to reduce the power and scope of government, and expand individual freedom.

A concise, readable overview of libertarian thought. The book can serve as an introduction to someone exploring the topic and presents some of the most fundamental anti-big-government arguments, eg. the trendline test or the regulation opt-out thought experiment. The reader should note, however, that this is only the author's personal interpretation of libertarianism and does not provide a comprehensive overview. Indeed, Murray's "small" government features services such as a federal school voucher system that would make many other libertarians shudder.

Charles Murray introduces the reader to his view of Libertarianism, with a "small l". The vision painted by Murray in the 180 or so pages is nothing short of revolutionary. The pros and cons of a libertarian society are rationally explored, and the common and expected objections are hit head-on by the author in a practical way that both makes the reader think about the possibility that libertarianism just might be a solution to some of the country's ills, but also allows for the admission that there are practical challenges with a libertarian way of living - which cannot be glossed over or ignored. This isn't a scholarly textbook, and the style is very approachable and allows for a quick read. The information contained in the book itself isn't footnoted or heavily supported by statistics. However, the author does have a comprehensive list of other sources to go peruse to build your knowledge and explore the foundations of liberal thought. A solid and interesting read, and one that

many of the country's fiscal conservatives would probably find hits close to home. Murray's view of practical libertarian thought creates a basis from which actual change may be explored.

As an introduction to libertarianism, Charles Murray's "What It Means to Be a Libertarian" is often compared to David Boaz's "Libertarianism: A Primer" which also came out in 1997. They are both excellent, but completely different in style and approach. Murray's book is shorter (roughly half the length), more theoretical and philosophical, and calm in tone. He conveys an elegant vision for how society ought to function, and argues convincingly why this is realistic rather than utopian. Liberals and conservatives should both agree with his vision of how things ought to be, though they may remain unconvinced of the feasibility: sometimes relying on the invisible hand that guides the economy is as difficult as trusting the invisible hand that holds up an airplane. This is an elegantly written and extremely readable book, and an excellent introduction to what libertarians are for as well as what they are against.

Murray has done a great job of defining what a libertarian (small l) believes. His organization and examples are great and the book is well written. Libertarians have to understand that libertarianism is a kind of Utopian dream. Too many people are afraid to let go of what they think protects them from -- whatever. Others would bend the rules in a truly libertarian society and try to be dictators, but the principles are great. As in being a Christian or Jew, one can't attain perfection, but it's honorable and worthwhile to work towards the perfect model. Good book, good read. If only the populace would understand this it would be a wonderful country.

This provides a great perspective into the Libertarian political view. It poses great arguments, going against what a lot of mainstream ideas are. It also bridges the gaps from the left and right and explains similarities. If you are a Libertarian or want to know more about Libertarians political views, this is a very great and easy read.

Charles Murray articulates the Libertarian doctrine that replacing individual responsibility with governmental responsibility has made the country less prosperous and less civil. Individual freedom requires corresponding individual responsibility. He reviews the growth and dominance of government over the past fifty years and argues that the trend might be reversed to the benefit of all.

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