

Preface

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Libertarians seek a society in which people are free to do as they please with their own lives and peacefully acquired property, so long as they do not interfere with the right of others to do likewise with theirs. In such a society, much that governments currently do—all the myriad forms of forcible interference with their citizens' lives and property—would be abolished. But what would or should remain?

One libertarian tradition, drawing inspiration from classical liberal thinkers like John Locke, Adam Smith, Frédéric Bastiat, and the American Founders—and represented in the past century by, among others, Ludwig von Mises, Isabel Paterson, Ayn Rand, and Robert Nozick—calls for a constitutional government of strictly limited powers, which would be confined to the protection of everyone's negative (libertarian) rights. This position has come to be known as *minarchism*, the advocacy of minimal government. (Although some proponents and opponents of this position describe the government as “the state,” arguably this latter term carries some baggage no libertarians wish to defend, given its use by such thinkers as Hegel and Marx who meant by it something like an organic society.)

Another libertarian tradition—inaugurated in 1849 by the Belgian economist Gustave de Molinari, further developed in the 1880s by the American journalist Benjamin Tucker and the circle of writers associated with his periodical *Liberty*, and represented more recently by Murray Rothbard, Morris and Linda Tannehill, David Friedman (son of economist Milton Friedman), Bruce Benson, Randy Barnett, and Hans-Hermann Hoppe, among others—proposes entirely abolishing government, in the Weberian sense of an institution holding a legal monopoly over a given territory, and replacing it with multiple providers of protection services *competing* on a free market. This position is generally known as *market anarchism* or *anarcho-capitalism*, to distinguish it from those forms of anarchism that oppose private property and the market. (“Market anarchism” is arguably a less controversial designation than “anarcho-capitalism,” since libertarians disagree amongst themselves as to whether the term “capitalism” should be used to mean the unregulated free market that libertarians favor, or the pro-corporate regulatory regime that they oppose.) Outside of libertarian circles, the market anarchist position is best known via Robert Nozick's critique of it in his 1974 book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; ironically, academics unfamiliar with the libertarian tradition often assume (despite Nozick's footnotes) that the idea of competing protection agencies was Nozick's invention.

The purpose of the present volume is to examine the respective merits of minarchism and market anarchism from the perspective of several contemporary libertarian philosophers. The volume has been divided into minarchist and anarchist sections for the reader's convenience, although the nuances of particular contributors' arguments are such that some papers do not fit neatly into one category rather than another.