

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism

George H. Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE SYSTEM OF LIBERTY

“Classical liberalism” 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.

George H. Smith is an independent scholar and writes a weekly column for the Cato Institute’s [Libertarianism.org](#) 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 audio series on “Great Political Thinkers,” “The Meaning of the U.S. Constitution,” and “The Ideas of Liberty.” His articles and book reviews have appeared in such publications as *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *Reason*, *Liberty*, the *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, *Free Inquiry*, and *The Humanist*.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism
George H. Smith
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism

George H. Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The System of Liberty

THEMES IN THE HISTORY OF
CLASSICAL LIBERALISM

GEORGE H. SMITH



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism

George H. Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521182096

© George H. Smith 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Smith, George H., 1949–

The system of liberty : themes in the history of classical liberalism / George H. Smith.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00507-5 – ISBN 978-0-521-18209-6 (pbk.)

1. Liberalism. 2. Liberty. 3. Individualism. I. Title.

JC574.S54 2013

320.51'2–dc23 2012039029

ISBN 978-1-107-00507-5 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-18209-6 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for
external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee
that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism

George H. Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To

Walter E. Grinder, to whom I owe more intellectual debts than

I can ever repay

and

Treg Loyden, who believed in this book

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism
George H. Smith
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page ix</i>
Introduction	1
1 Liberalism, Old and New	7
2 Liberalism and the Public Good	26
3 Liberal Ideology and Political Philosophy	49
4 Sovereign State, Sovereign Self	73
5 The Anarchy Game	95
6 The Radical Edge of Liberalism	113
7 The Idea of Freedom	133
8 Conflicts in Classical Liberalism	152
9 Individualism	173
10 Methodological Individualism	197
<i>Epilogue</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>219</i>

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism
George H. Smith
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00507-5 - The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism

George H. Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

This book was made possible by the generous financial assistance of the Cato Institute. I especially wish to thank two people at Cato.

Tom G. Palmer, a colleague of mine for many years, was involved with this project from the beginning. Dr. Palmer's contributions over a period of years, which included suggested revisions in two drafts, were invaluable.

David Boaz, executive vice president of the Cato Institute, shepherded this book through its final stages. His patience and encouragement in the face of repeated delays were worthy of a saint.