



# What It Means to Be a Libertarian: A Personal Interpretation

*Charles Murray*

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"In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the American Founders created a society based on the belief that human happiness is intimately connected with personal freedom and responsibility. A few people, of whom I am one, think that the Founders' insights are as true today as they were two centuries ago. We believe that human happiness requires freedom, and freedom requires limited government. Limited government means a very small one, shorn of almost all of the apparatus we have come to take for granted during the last sixty years.

Most people are baffled by such views. Don't we realize that this is post-industrial America, not Jefferson's agrarian society? This book tries to explain how we can believe the less government, the better. It contains no footnotes. It has no tables and but a single graph. My purpose is to explain a way of looking at the world."  
--Charles Murray, from the *Introduction*

The twin pillars of the nation created by America's Founders were strict limits on the power of central government and strict protections of individual rights. Now, at the close of the twentieth century, that state is gone--and Charles Murray wants to bring it back. In *What It Means to Be a Libertarian*, he offers a radical blueprint for overhauling our dysfunctional government and replacing it with a system that fosters human happiness because it safeguards human freedom.

Most Americans, Murray argues, have reluctantly come to accept that a sprawling, costly, and intrusive government is an inevitable part of modern life. *What It Means to Be a Libertarian* encourages each of us to liberate ourselves from ingrained ideas of what government is and consider instead what it ought to be. Imagine, for example, a federal government that is not just smaller, but *small*, with an executive branch reduced to the White House and trimmed-down departments of state, defense, justice, and environmental protection. Imagine a federal code stripped of all but a handful of regulations and a Congress so limited in power that it spends only a few months of each year in session. Imagine a society in which the government's role is once again to prevent people from initiating the use of force, leaving them otherwise free, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement."

In this very personal book, Charles Murray paints a vivid portrait of life in a genuinely free society. He explains why limited government would lead to greater individual fulfillment, more vital communities, and a richer culture. He shows why such a society would have stronger families, fewer poor people, and would care for the less fortunate far better than does the society we havenow.

Writing in the tradition of the Revolutionary pamphleteers, Charles Murray has crafted a brilliant treatise that presents a clear, workable alternative to our current government. Without footnotes, in plain language, *What It Means to Be a Libertarian* returns to the truths our Founders held to be self-evident and applies them, justly and compassionately, to this country's most urgent social and political problems.

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