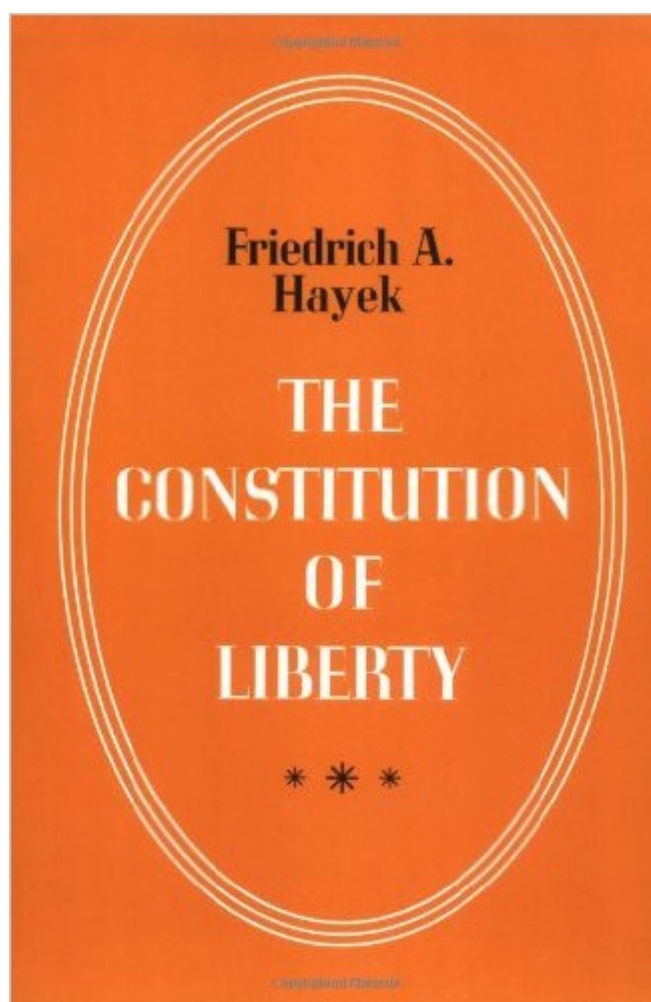


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The Constitution Of Liberty



Synopsis

"One of the great political works of our time, . . . the twentieth-century successor to John Stuart Mill's essay, 'On Liberty.'"--Henry Hazlitt, Newsweek
"A reflective, often biting, commentary on the nature of our society and its dominant thought by one who is passionately opposed to the coercion of human beings by the arbitrary will of others, who puts liberty above welfare and is sanguine that greater welfare will thereby ensue."--Sidney Hook, New York Times Book Review
In this classic work Hayek restates the ideals of freedom that he believes have guided, and must continue to guide, the growth of Western civilization. Hayek's book, first published in 1960, urges us to clarify our beliefs in today's struggle of political ideologies.

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Customer Reviews

Hayek undertook a vitally important task when he set out to write the The Constitution of Liberty. He aimed at finding the proper limits between public and private life. How far should the authority of the state extend? What areas of life should be beyond the reach of the government? Hayek is stating his version of the general principles of classical liberalism, based on utilitarian ethics. Since his arguments are utilitarian, this book has economic overtones. Hayek's purpose in restating the principles of liberal society is to defend these principles against the opposing intellectual movement of collectivism. Western Civilization succeeded largely because of its individualism. Collectivism is

undermining the basis of modern civilization in the West. Individualism is important because we each lack the knowledge needed to rationally direct the affairs of others. Some people believe that they can plan out society because they are 'experts' or because they are educated. Hayek saw that nobody can possess the knowledge needed to design a rational order for society. As Hayek put it, "it is largely because civilization enables us constantly to profit from knowledge which we individually do not possess that men can pursue their individual ends more successfully than they could alone". In writing this book, Hayek shifted his attention away from full-blown socialism and towards the modern welfare state. Hayek seems to have felt that the case for socialism had been sufficiently weakened so as to allow him to critique welfare states. Hayek accepted some types of government intervention that libertarians typically oppose. Rather than opposing each program point by point, Hayek sought out some 'lynchpin issues' that would limit state growth. Hayek argued strenuously against state control of the money supply, and suggested ways of limiting taxation. Hayek's libertarian critics typically cringe at some of his concessions, but we would all be in a much better position now if his constitution had been adopted. The Constitution of Liberty is more than well reasoned, it is subtle and profound. This book reveals Hayek's deep understanding of economics, politics, and history. While I do not agree with everything in this book, it is a must read for any serious student of political economy.

Having read The Road to Serfdom ("TRTS") a number of times, I started reading Hayek's The Constitution of Liberty ("TCOL") in a library. Finally, less than a year ago, I bought my own copy and started reading it more thoroughly, taking laborious notes. It is a remarkable achievement of a great scholar of liberty who would probably anger most conservatives and liberals, if they read him and if he did not persuade them. This is not light reading. If you want easier, then read TRTS instead - at least start with it - because the purpose of TCOL is to explain the philosophy and need for liberty in exacting detail. If TRTS is a drawing of a house, then TCOL is the blueprint. Even taking notes on it is challenging because you feel there is almost nothing you can leave out. Every paragraph has a purpose and every sentence within each paragraph too. I found it Spinozan in its approach. The footnotes in TCOL, filled with quotes from Hume and Burke and many others, takes up a lot of the page, often most of it, and you could probably take up your whole life reading the famous and obscure authors he quotes too. But, do not skip them. Although TCOL was published in 1960 (containing his wonderful essay at the end - Why I am not a Conservative), it is timeless in its reach. Not only does it help you understand the need for liberty, but you see its relevance today in almost every political argument we now have - and have ever had. I recommend another book for

libertarians or those interested in it which I think goes well with TCOL. Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* shows how philosophers like Plato and Hegel gave sustenance to totalitarians and explains how trying to support an open society with historical (a broadly used term) authority is ultimately unworkable. It did not surprise me to learn that Popper and Hayek were friends. Both were born in Vienna, a few years apart, and some of their writing approaches the same problems from different angles - Popper from philosophy and Hayek from politics and economics.

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