

Jan Narveson's Contractarian Libertarianism

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In this paper I examine the Canadian moral and political philosopher Jan Narveson's hypothetical contractarian justification of libertarianism. After introducing Narveson (1936-) and locating his theory among contemporary contractarian theorists and libertarians, I examine his libertarianism under three headings: his version of contractarian ethics; his derivation of libertarianism from contractarianism; and his very robust idea of private ownership. I conclude that while his contractarian moral methodology is fruitful and arguably superior to that of his fellow contractarians, it lacks some important moral considerations and that his libertarianism is sometimes too extreme to be convincing in that it denies altogether the justifiability of the state and ignores the present people's duty to future generations. Still, I find in his works many insights into both ethics in general and libertarianism in particular and admire the originality and boldness of his theory.