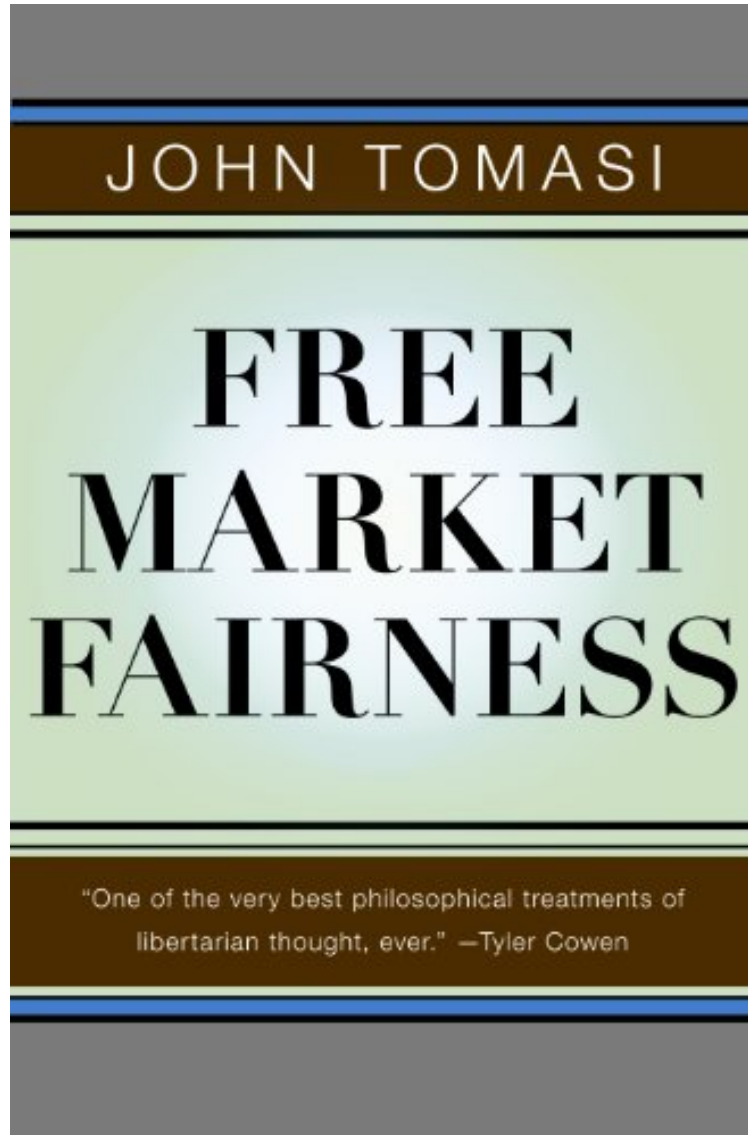


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Free Market Fairness

John Tomasi

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John Tomasi : Free Market Fairness before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Free Market Fairness:

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Rawlsian Libertarianism By Shawn Klein When Tomasi's book first came in 2012, it got a lot of attention in libertarian circles. He challenged a lot of preconceived notions about libertarianism, fairness, and justice. Tomasi sets out in this book to create a kind of hybrid between the commitments typically associated with libertarians (and/or classical liberalism, market liberalism, etc.) and the commitments normally tied to what he calls High Liberalism (welfare liberalism, modern liberalism, egalitarian liberalism, etc.). A

more provocative way to put what Tomasi gives us in this book is a Rawlsian libertarianism. I over simplify here, but Tomasi essentially takes the core premises of Rawls's conception of justice as fairness and uses it to defend a kind of libertarianism. Or rather, he argues that a proper understanding of what is required by justice as fairness and the moral premises behind it is best realized in a regime that thoroughly protects economic liberty (alongside political liberty). Further, the demands of social justice are best met under such a system as well. Whatever you might ultimately think about the overall argument (and I remain skeptical though sympathetic), you have to give Tomasi credit for engaging in this huge revisionary project. At worst, it is an engaging and enlightening exercise to see what might happen if you accept Rawlsian starting points but add to it the moral importance of economic liberty. It's an interesting way to learn about and further one's understanding of Rawls (as well as economic liberty). At best, Tomasi has put forward a program that reunites the divided liberal house and sets it on a more solid moral foundation. Ultimately, I don't think Tomasi's project is successful on the latter account. This is because I do not think the moral foundations upon which the project is based are the correct ones. Nevertheless, the book is worth a read by anyone interested in liberty or justice. If you are more libertarian minded, you will get a presentation of the modern liberal point of view that is fair, charitable, and clear. This better prepares you to understand the philosophical viewpoint that you are up against without misrepresentation or oversimplification. If you are more in the Rawlsian vein, you ought to read it because it will challenge many of the ways you might think about justice as fairness and related ideas. Either way, you may not come to agree with Tomasi but you will most certainly learn something.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Tomasi argues that such a regime of "market democracy" can satisfy John Rawls's difference principle. By Paul E. Crider, *Free Market Fairness* is simply an outstanding book, worthy of all five stars. The book starts with a discussion of the history of liberal thought and its three main strands of classical liberalism, libertarianism, and high liberalism (which I would prefer to call progressivism, but whatever). This history alone is worth reading. It's remarkably fair and charitable to all sides, and it sets the syncretic stage for the rest of the book. Tomasi's basic idea is simple. Economic work is a dimension along which many individuals pursue self-development and find meaning in their lives. Given this, thick economic liberty should be protected to the same degree as other basic liberties. This includes strong property rights (including of the means of production), respect of and enforcement of economic contracts, low regulation, and low taxes. Just as free speech and other basic liberties aren't absolute, neither are economic liberties. They can be overridden, but the justification to do so must be strong and cast in terms of protecting other basic liberties. Tomasi argues that such a regime of "market democracy" can satisfy John Rawls's difference principle, whereby (at the level of ideal theory) only those institutions should be chosen that are likely to benefit the least advantaged members of society. Market democracy satisfies the difference principle given the economic growth it encourages. Indeed it probably satisfies the difference principle better than Rawls's own preferred regimes of property-owning democracy or "liberal socialism". Most of this argument is directed at high liberals. But for his project to succeed Tomasi also must persuade libertarians and classical liberals that social justice is both coherent and defensible. To this end he gives a long discussion of what he calls the "distributional adequacy condition" that he argues many libertarians and classical liberals implicitly defend (or at least acknowledge the moral salience of) even if they explicitly reject social justice. This discussion involves a delightful who's who of thinkers in these traditions, including most prominently a heterodox social justice interpretation of Hayek, who, Tomasi shows, not only endorses a number of institutions aimed at protecting society's worst off, but also employs an objectivity device similar to Rawls's veil of ignorance. Namely, Hayek contends when thinking about institutions, we should ask ourselves where we would want our children to grow up if we had no idea what social class they would be born into. Tomasi makes a good case that many of these thinkers, in light of their own substantive arguments, have more of an allergic reaction to social justice (when well-defined) than they do principled objections. In an especially illuminating section on Hayek, Tomasi discussed the Austrian's concepts of *cosmos* (emergent order) and *taxis* (order of intentional design). These two kinds of order are conceptually distinct, but they shouldn't be seen as either/or. Taxis and cosmic orders coexist in nested structures. Firms obviously have a purpose, but they exist within the more cosmic order of the market. Tomasi gives the example of tweaking the boundary conditions of a sugar solution to create rock candy. The sugar and water molecules aren't individually directed; they just follow the physical forces comprising solution chemistry. The crystallization is a spontaneous process, but the macroscopic characteristics of the rock candy were determined by human design. The cosmic order is used instrumentally for human purposes. Another example would be the methods of gardening. In the same way, the rules of a constitutional or market order can and should be tweaked for human purposes, namely social justice. "When considering any social system as a whole, cosmos and purpose, far from being opposites or antagonists, go together. In the social setting, spontaneous orders seem positively to require such normative evaluations: evaluations, that is, in terms of social justice."

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. An Important Attempt to Analyze and Synthesize Liberal Thought. By Big Bad John, Tomasi is a liberal Democrat who has obviously read widely and thought deeply about his field of political philosophy. In this important book, he first presents a history of liberal thought, then traces developments over the past century that have led us into opposing and dysfunctional camps. The extremes he charts are Left Liberalism (the folks who refer to themselves as "Progressives") and Right

Liberalism (often calling themselves "Libertarians"). The difference he highlights is the importance given to property rights. In his view, which he amply supports, the Right overvalues property rights while the Left undervalues them. Tomasi places heavy emphasis on a social justice perspective in which society is moral only if it most benefits those who are least fortunate. After a thorough analysis of the reasons why neither of the current popular extremes is very moral according to this test, he sets out his own model in which property rights are accorded the same value as other fundamental liberties. He attempts to establish that such a regime is potentially superior to those currently advocated by leftist and rightist ideologues. In my view, he succeeds admirably, and this book should be required reading to get your license to vote. Regrettably, his approach is so scholarly and his prose so dense that most people who need his viewpoint will be unable to get through the book.

Can libertarians care about social justice? In *Free Market Fairness*, John Tomasi argues that they can and should. Drawing simultaneously on moral insights from defenders of economic liberty such as F. A. Hayek and advocates of social justice such as John Rawls, Tomasi presents a new theory of liberal justice. This theory, free market fairness, is committed to both limited government and the material betterment of the poor. Unlike traditional libertarians, Tomasi argues that property rights are best defended not in terms of self-ownership or economic efficiency but as requirements of democratic legitimacy. At the same time, he encourages egalitarians concerned about social justice to listen more sympathetically to the claims ordinary citizens make about the importance of private economic liberty in their daily lives. In place of the familiar social democratic interpretations of social justice, Tomasi offers a "market democratic" conception of social justice: free market fairness. Tomasi argues that free market fairness, with its twin commitment to economic liberty and a fair distribution of goods and opportunities, is a morally superior account of liberal justice. Free market fairness is also a distinctively American ideal. It extends the notion, prominent in America's founding period, that protection of property and promotion of real opportunity are indivisible goals. Indeed, according to Tomasi, free market fairness is social justice, American style. Provocative and vigorously argued, *Free Market Fairness* offers a bold new way of thinking about politics, economics, and justice--one that will challenge readers on both the left and right.

[*Free Market Fairness's*] aim is to question opposed modes of thought and find a way between them. Saying that his book was written for 'ideologically uncommitted readers,' Mr. Tomasi invites them and others to join him in exploring the ideas he has outlined. It is an invitation well worth accepting, especially in an election year. (Adam Wolfson *Wall Street Journal*) An extremely interesting and important project. (Ethics) Tomasi is a useful corrective to both Rawls and Hayek. (Notre Dame Philosophical *Journal*) In many respects, [Tomasi] is a classical liberal, but he also retains a strong commitment to the worst off in society. He is a supporter of both free-market capitalism and of safety nets. His goal is to combine economic liberty and social justice. In attempting to transcend the standard positions, he should be commended. (Daniel Ben-Ami *Spiked*) Brilliant. . . . The heart of Tomasi's book entails serious engagement with John Rawls and his liberal theory of justice as fairness. (Ryan T. Anderson *Weekly Standard*) Tomasi takes a significant step beyond classical and some types of social democratic liberalism in an attempt to find common ground. . . . Tomasi's 'market democracy' contributes important insight to the continuing political-economic debate. (Choice) One could hardly imagine John Tomasi's *Free Market Fairness* coming along at a more opportune time. Stump-speech rhetoric seems to have turned its attention (at least nominally) towards the concept of fairness. . . . The proper role of government is up for debate again. . . . Tomasi offers a clear-headed exploration of these and other issues during a moment of noticeable obtuseness and obfuscation in American politics [as] an accident of timing, incidental to his larger project, which is both ambitious and deeply needed. (Robert Herritt *Policy*) *Free Market Fairness* is both an excellent book and an important one. What makes a work of philosophy valuable is not that it arrives at all the right conclusions, but that it asks the right questions, makes us think, and causes us to re-examine our assumptions. *Free Market Fairness* does all of those things. For this reason, it is appropriate to describe the book as seminal. (John Hasnas *Regulation*) John Tomasi has written a spirited, accessible book that successfully argues the classical liberal tradition . . . of private economic liberty as a necessary and equal partner with social and political liberties in a free and just democratic society. This integrated, constructive approach . . . also recognizes the importance of social justice, a high liberal concept that he redefines by employing the principles of classical liberal thought. . . . Tomasi has provided the intellectual and justificatory framework for classical liberal adherents to robustly explore opportunities in a market-democracy research program. (Thomas A. Hemphill *Journal of Markets and Morality*) *Free Market Fairness* is a fine book that merits promotion, a merit raise, a cohort of graduate students, a fine reputation, and all the other benefits of academic life. The book is well written and well researched. The arguments are clearly stated and well defended. Political thinkers of all stripes will benefit from Tomasi's discussion of classical liberalism and libertarianism. (Mark A. Graber *Politics*) From the Back Cover "This book provides an original defense of classical liberalism. Tomasi argues that the high liberal conception of free and equal moral persons requires robust economic liberties as a condition of individual independence and self-authorship, while also justifying social supports for the less advantaged. *Free Market Fairness* is an important contribution to liberal thought."--Samuel Freeman, University of

Pennsylvania"Tomasi's 'market democracy' is a fresh, important research program."--Elizabeth Anderson, University of Michigan"The great political power of free market ideas in recent decades has been unmatched by philosophical and moral defenses. John Tomasi's fresh exploration of market liberty will challenge orthodoxies left and right. An important and timely book."--Stephen Macedo, Princeton University"This is one of the very best philosophical treatments of libertarian thought, ever. John Tomasi cements his position as one of America's leading social and political philosophers."--Tyler Cowen, author of *Creative Destruction*"This book represents the most ambitious recent effort by a political philosopher to square the circle: free markets and fairness. Even readers who disagree with Tomasi's conclusions will find insight and clarity on every page."--Richard Epstein, New York University"Tomasi's elegant book resembles a long and friendly conversation between Friedrich Hayek and John Rawls--a conversation which, astonishingly, reaches agreement."--Deirdre McCloskey, author of *Bourgeois Dignity* and *The Bourgeois Virtues*"Tomasi is sympathetic to, and captures much of the point of, positions to the right of his, and positions to the left. The result is disarming and genuine. Readers will find themselves turning the pages, hoping not so much to spot the flaw as simply to learn something, and they will not be disappointed."--David Schmidtz, University of Arizona"This book makes a case that needed making and that will have a large impact on contemporary thinking about social justice."--Michael Zuckert, University of Notre Dame"Hayekian freedom and Rawlsian social justice both evoke attractive visions of how human beings might live together--something seldom acknowledged in our polarized political world. John Tomasi's *Free Market Fairness* treats both traditions with depth, nuance, and unremitting fair-mindedness, and then points us toward a synthesis. Social democrats and libertarians equally need to read this book."--Charles Murray, American Enterprise Institute"Political philosophers are apt to dig in to carefully constructed ideological bunkers from which they lob argumentative mortar shells at their opponents. John Tomasi prefers instead to build bridges. Well-crafted and provocative, *Free Market Fairness* will surely stimulate much conversation--and perhaps a few mortar rounds in response."--Loren Lomasky, University of Virginia"This is a terrific book--lively, stimulating, novel, and important. Written with clarity and lightness, it is appealingly wide-ranging, spanning political philosophy, intellectual history, and more. It will be widely read and cited."--Jacob T. Levy, McGill University

About the AuthorJohn Tomasi is professor of political science at Brown University, where he is also the founder and director of Brown's Political Theory Project. Tomasi holds degrees in political philosophy from the University of Oxford and the University of Arizona. He has held visiting fellowships and positions at Princeton, Harvard, and Stanford universities, and at the Freedom Center at the University of Arizona. He is the author of *Liberalism Beyond Justice* (Princeton).