



MICRO AND MACRO LIBERTARIANISM: REJOINDER TO MCMAKEN

Walter E. Block

Harold E. Wirth Eminent Scholar Endowed Chair and Professor of
Economics, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, LA, USA
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2215-4791>



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Abstract

Microlibertarianism concerns issues upon which the overwhelming proportion of libertarians agree: minimum wages, rent control, free trade, drug legalization. Macro libertarianism concerns issues upon which there is little or no consensus: voluntary slavery, immigration, abortion, covid vaccinations and the Israeli war with Hamas. The present paper is concerned with only the latter two controversies. McMaken (2024) takes the position that while Block's views on microlibertarianism are valid, and even, perhaps, commendable, his perspective on these latter two issues is nothing short of highly problematic, not to say abominable. The specific charge of McMaken's is the Block places his support for Jews in general, and Israel in particular, ahead of libertarianism. Thus, while he may be a good microlibertarian, he is no longer, if ever he was, a good macrolibertarian. The present paper offers a defense of the views of the latter vis a vis the charges of the former.

Keywords: Macrolibertarianism; microlibertarianism; forced vaccinations; Israel; Hamas.

MICRO AND MACRO LIBERTARIANISM¹

I will in due course be highly critical of my learned colleague's essay but shall start off on a very positive note regarding The Problem with Microlibertarianism by McMaken (2024).

This eminent libertarian starts off by dividing libertarianism into micro and macro fields. What is

Address of the author:

Walter E. Block

wblock@loyno.edu

the former? It consists of analysis of and commentary on what might be called 101 libertarianism, or Economics in One Lesson by Henry Hazlitt (1946) type examples of this political economic philosophy. Rent control is a rights violation and leads to poor housing and homelessness. The minimum wage law is a snare and a delusion. It does not raise wages. Rather, it preys upon the least, the last and the lost of us, exacerbating the unemployment rate of the poor, the ones who can least afford this result. Free trade is the last best hope for human prosperity,

¹ Although we sharply disagree on this issue, I wish to thank Guriy Borodkin for several important suggestions which greatly improved this paper. All remaining errors

of omission or commission are of course my own responsibility.



and although protectionism superficially sounds like a good idea, it is anything but. Then, too, we should privatize the post office and the sanitation department and legalize marijuana, prostitution, and gambling. I have here added to the examples of microlibertarianism furnished by this very creative author, but I doubt he would disagree with any of my additions. What they all have in common is that it would be a very rare libertarian who disagreed with any of these conclusions. It is a no brainer to realize that tariffs, wage minimum, rent control, are a violation of what Nozick (1974, p. 163) has called “capitalist acts between consenting adults.”

What in sharp contrast is macrolibertarianism? Here, we address far more difficult and weighty matters. Our eminent libertarian theoretician mentions in this regard the governmental response to covid and the war between Israel and Hamas now raging in Gaza. Again, I add a few more cases. What they all have in common is that they are far more complex from a libertarian point of view, and, that libertarians are heavily divided on these issues. For example, abortion. Ron Paul is strongly pro-life, and Murray Rothbard is equally convinced of the pro-choice position. It would be difficult in the extreme, nay, impossible, to mention two more highly credentialed libertarians than them. Just as is the general public, the libertarian community is greatly divided on this issue. Then, there is the voluntary slave contract, with the present author and Nozick (1974) in support of its legalization, and a whole host of eminent libertarians taking the opposite point of view. What about immigration and open borders? This is so complicated, that Murray Rothbard who cannot be accused of anything other than sticking to his guns, actually changed his mind on this issue, so much so that I could write of a Rothbard I and a Rothbard II on this matter (Block, 2011).

If I can offer a friendly amendment to Mr. McMaken for the title he has chosen for his essay, it would be to change it from “The Problem with Microlibertarianism” to “The Problem with ONLY Microlibertarianism. For neither he nor I, nor indeed any libertarian worthy of his salt, has any real problem with microlibertarianism. It is the bricks and mortar of our philosophy. In contrast, he and I both agree that while microlibertarianism is necessary for our movement, it is not at all sufficient. Just as a bird needs two wings to fly,

libertarianism needs both elements. No analogy is a perfect one, and this one is wanting in that the two wings of a bird are virtually equal in power, while microlibertarianism is indeed far more important to followers of the perspective I share with Mr. McMaken, than is microlibertarianism. Heck, even the conservatives agree with the economic aspects of microlibertarianism as do the liberals with the ones having to do with personal liberty. Macrolibertarianism, in contrast, stretches to the furthest reaches of this philosophy.

What are we to make of McMaken’s distinction? There is a saying: “There is nothing new under the sun.” False. This essay establishes that author as a very creative libertarian. And an incisive one. It is very important, crucially important, that we make this distinction. I have been a libertarian, now, for more decades than I care to mention, and have never in all my lifelong days in the movement, heard of this distinction. It is a very important one, and I think I speak for all libertarians when I say we owe him a great debt of gratitude.

After all these enthusiastic encomiums, the reader will wonder whether I can make good on my initial announcement of criticism to follow. Unhappily, I can.

First, consider this statement of his: “In the case of pandemics, for instance, some microlibertarians even embraced vaccine mandates. Walter Block, for instance, has called for the death penalty for those who refuse a vaccine mandate, writing: ‘Would I compel the 60 percent to get the vaccination on libertarian grounds? You’re darn tootin’ I would. Not so much to save them. That would be paternalism. But, rather, in order to save the lives of the 40 percent who are vulnerable. If any member of this 60 percent refused this vaccination, I would execute him as threatening mass murder of 40 percent of the population.’”

But he conveniently left out this statement of mine:

“Suppose that I sneeze at you, and you will certainly die as a result.”

I further elaborated on that point here:

“Let me make the best case for forced vaccinations. Assume a minarchist libertarian government. Should it compel people to be

vaccinated against the XYZ disease? Here are it's (sic) characteristics:

'If you contract XYZ, there is a 100% chance you will die a painful death. 40% of the people on the planet cannot tolerate the vaccination against it. We know who they are through a test which is 100% reliable. The vaccine will not in any way harm the other 60% of the people. This majority will all with 100% probability, contract this disease. They will die from it unless they are vaccinated. Also, again with 100% certainty (there is no doubt in this example, none) the 60% will spread the disease to the 40% vulnerables. The drug costs nothing, works perfectly in preventing the XYZ disease and there are no side effects of it whatsoever, again for sure.'" (Block, 2020)

I am astonished that a scholar of McMaken's undoubted and numerous contributions to libertarianism and general scholarship should make this error, and that any editor would allow it to pass. He completely drops the context in which I was "darn tootin'" to compel a vaccination against the carrier's will. I made up a completely hypothetical, unrealistic situation, and McMaken treats this as if I was talking about the actual covid case. This egregious error of his parallels the New York Times quoting me as favoring actual slavery when in an interview with them² I supported, only, a voluntary slave contract.³ This is a very low point in internal libertarian debate. McMaken is truly guilty of a gigantic philosophical "howler."

Next, my critic asserts as follows: "When it comes to the war in Gaza, leading microlibertarian Block has encouraged the 'heroic Prime Minister Netanyahu' to be more aggressive in his efforts to 'pulverize' women and children in Gaza. Are there any limits on the Israeli state in this view? Not so long as the 'threat' needs to be stamped out by strong state action."

I have indeed called Netanyahu "heroic." And I have no doubt that I at one point or other used the word "pulverize" when it come to the bestial murderous Hamas. But I defy McMaken to point to a quote from me where I called upon anyone "to 'pulverize' women and children in Gaza." Indeed, I am on record as regretting the collateral damage visited upon such innocents, based on Israeli need for self-defense and the fact that Hamas embeds itself amongst Arab civilians and uses them as shields (Block & Futerman, 2024B).

In the covid case, McMaken drops context. Here, he accuses me of writing the exact opposite of what I actually wrote. This is highly problematic. A scholar of McMaken's accomplishments ought to be ashamed of himself.

Mr. McMaken is attempting to paint me as some sort of apologist for Judaism, and not a libertarian at all.⁴ He states:

"Are there any limits on the Israeli state in [Block's] view? Not so long as the 'threat' needs to be stamped out by strong state action."

And again:

"On the other hand, to oppose rent control while also favoring the mass murder of 100,000 civilians is not simply a matter of having some minor 'blind spot.' It is an enormous contradiction."

Yes, indeed, I do oppose rent control.⁵ But from whence did he get the idea that I "favor... the mass murder of 100,000 civilians"? He does not vouchsafe his readership any such source or direct quote.⁶ To say that Israel is not entitled to attempt to root out Hamas is to say that it is not justified in defending itself. A country foreclosed from self-defense, especially when located in a dangerous area such as the Middle East, is a nation that can no longer exist. One does not have

² Anderson, 2014; Beane, 2014; Block 2014A; Cavallo, 2014; DiLorenzo, 2014, 2015; Henderson, 2014; Landsburg, 2014; Lingenfelter, 2014; Rockwell, 2014; Rozeff, 2014; Wenzel, 2014A, 2014B; Woods, 2014

³ See on this Block, 1969, 1979, 1988, 1999, 2001, 2002A, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007A, 2007B, 2009A, 2009B, 2013, 2014B, 2015; Lester, 2000; Nozick, 1974, pp. 58, 283, 331; Philmore, 1982

⁴ This is a charge made by Hoppe (2024). For a refutation of the latter, see (Block & Futerman, 2024A).

⁵ Block, 2002B; Block, Horton & Shorter, 1998.

⁶ One would have thought McMaken would have quoted me saying this. He does not. It seems to me he is obligated to do so, and/or to take back this unwarranted charge against me.

to read within the lines, one needs only to use a modicum of logic, to conclude that this is McMaken's precise position. Further, it would be impossible, especially in the modern era, to conduct any sort of warfare without there being any collateral damage at all. This is particularly true when a fighting force, Hamas, embeds itself in its civilian population and uses its members as shields. So, again, McMaken is asserting in effect that the IDF may not legitimately engage in defense of its country. And that is compatible with any kind of libertarianism? This would appear to be McMaken's notion of what macrolibertarianism should be all about: Israel must surrender.

It is utterly false to claim that I am first a Zionist, or a Jewish supporter, and only a long way second, am I a libertarian. I am on record, more than once, of attacking my fellow co-religionists, mostly for occupying the extreme leftward sections of the political economic spectrum (Block, 2024). If a libertarian analysis of the Israeli – Arab situation based on Lockean homesteading theory had turned out the other way than in my view the way it actually did, I would be calling not for a separate Palestinian state but rather for the Jews to vacate that entire area on behalf of the Gazans. Property rights are property rights, and they are sacrosanct for the libertarian. But which was built on top of

which, indicating a Johnny come lately status: the Al-Aqsa Mosque, or the Second Temple?⁷ Obviously the Jews were there first, long before the Arabs. The Hebrews were busy mixing their labor with the land long before their Arab cousins arrived upon the scene (Block & Futerman, 2021).

Consider the following additional evidence that I have used my libertarianism to denigrate Judaism, not support it. Exhibit A might well be my views on circumcision (Testa & Block, 2014; Block & Fleischer, 2010; Block & Farber, 2014). In my view, this is nothing more and nothing less than child abuse. It should be legally indistinguishable from clitorrectomy, which all decent people recognize as an unwarranted invasion.⁸ But the propriety of circumcision is a core, basic principle of Judaism; it is a practice that has been undertaken in this community from time immemorial. It is not a superficial attack on Judaism, such as attacking the bagel.⁹ Thus, to attack this practice is to demonstrate very basic anti-Jewish sentiments, but, my co-author and I argued, principles fully aligned with libertarianism.

I now criticize Israel for still being too socialistic, and for not pursuing its enemies with the greater force and alacrity I would have favored. Who say I don't disparage Israel and Jewry?

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⁷ (Weismann & Himeles, 2023).

⁸ An exception of course would be made if for example this body part were infected with a disease, such as cancer.

⁹ Anti-Israel protestors at UCLA asked for donations, and specifically said they do not want any bagels. See on this Donlevy (2024).

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