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# 1

## Liberalism

### The Four Fears of Liberalism

Liberalism is the search for a society in which no one need be afraid. Freedom from fear is the most basic freedom: if we are afraid, we are not free. This insight is the foundation of liberalism. To proclaim our inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is simply an eloquent way of stating the not-so-exalted wish to live without fear.<sup>1</sup>

That no one should be afraid begs the question, “afraid of what?” Of course, some people will always fear spiders, and most people will fear death. Liberalism is powerless against these kinds of fear, which will always trouble our sense of security and limit our freedom. What liberals fear is arbitrary power, and liberalism is about building a society in which we need not fear other people, whether singly, in groups, or, perhaps most of all, in uniform—that of the police officer, the soldier, the priest. At its most basic, liberalism derives from the fear of an all-powerful individual, a despot. The spirit of tyranny hovers over the cradle of liberalism and is never absent from liberal concerns. In any society, the greatest potential enemy of freedom is the sovereign, whether sovereignty is exercised in the name of God, a monarch, or the people, because the sovereign has the greatest opportunities for despotism. Whoever is sovereign

1. To contextualists who might object that this definition is not actually used by most people who call themselves liberals, I would reply that it meets Quentin Skinner’s criterion that “no agent can eventually be said to have meant or done something which he could never be brought to accept as a correct description of what he had meant or done.” Liberals would acknowledge warding off fear as a description of what they were doing. See Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” 48.

is the greatest source of fear. Hence liberal attempts to limit the powers of the sovereign and its agents.

While from a liberal perspective, no one ought to be afraid, from illiberal perspectives, there *are* people who ought to be afraid: those who belong to the wrong religion, the wrong class, the wrong gender, the wrong ethnicity. This is not the case for liberals, or at least, eventually not for liberals. Recognizing that freedom from fear ought to apply to atheists, or Black people, or women is something that takes place over time, and the progression is not linear. Nonetheless, securing the social and political conditions necessary to give people a feeling of security—the feeling that their person and their community are free—is the historical core of liberalism.

Recognition of the crucial role of fear in whether or not we are free goes back at least to Montesquieu, who argued that “political liberty . . . comes from the opinion each one has of his security.”<sup>2</sup> Modern historians and political theorists largely ignored this insight until Judith Shklar’s brilliant 1989 essay “The Liberalism of Fear” stressed the fundamental role of fear in the creation and development of liberalism.<sup>3</sup> Human beings have been afraid of each other since before civilization began, and the Bible transmits humanity’s longing for a time when “every man shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.”<sup>4</sup> But while despotism is as old as time, and the dream of escaping from it at least as old as the Bible, liberalism is not. People never wanted to be subject to cruelty, but for millennia they had no strategies for ending it. The choices available were fleeing from power, seizing it, or submitting to it. Most people chose submission. Despotism, the reign of fear, as Montesquieu notes, is the worst form of government, yet historically the most common.

It is our equal capacity to be afraid, and our equal need for liberalism to ward off our fears, that is at the root of liberalism’s historical relationship with equality. Many people have incorrectly identified liberalism with equality, and it is true that we have less reason to fear our equals than our superiors. But equality can also be a source of fear: a plebiscitary dictatorship is no less a despotism for being the will of the people, and fear of majority tyranny has a long history in liberalism: “unbridled majorities are as tyrannical and cruel as

2. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 157.

3. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear.” See also Alan Ryan’s development of this point in *The Making of Modern Liberalism*, 9.

4. Micah 4:4, *Bible*.

unlimited despots,” wrote John Adams in the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Equality is not constitutive of liberalism the way fear is.

Another, even more common error is to identify liberalism with some list of “rights,” whether human, natural, contractual, or constitutional. Claims that people had rights began long before liberalism and have been used by many people who were not liberals. Of course, liberals, too, have often talked about rights. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789, even if written a few years before the word “liberalism” was invented, is a landmark of liberalism, as is the American Declaration of Independence. As liberals have always recognized, rights can be important bulwarks against fear and enablers of hope. They can be instruments of equality. They can even serve as a substitute for religion.<sup>6</sup> But like equality, rights are not necessarily a panacea for liberals, and their relationship to liberalism has varied. As Robert Nozick put it, liberals have more often adopted a “utilitarianism of rights” than a theory based on rights.<sup>7</sup> The history of rights sometimes parallels, sometimes diverges from the history of liberalism. While “natural rights” or rights based on a social contract have served some liberals as the foundation of liberalism, other liberals rarely or never used “rights talk.”<sup>8</sup> Mainstream liberals did not talk much about the social contract before World War II, and when they did talk about rights, these did not necessarily take priority over other claims. Isaiah Berlin grasped this well: “The philosophical foundations of . . . liberal beliefs in the mid-nineteenth century were somewhat obscure. Rights described as ‘natural’ or ‘inherent,’ absolute standards of truth and justice, were not compatible with tentative empiricism and utilitarianism; yet liberals believed in both.”<sup>9</sup>

Understanding the history of liberalism must begin with studying the *problem* it addresses: the problem of fear. What liberals feared, or feared most, has

5. John Adams to John Stockdale, May 12, 1793. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-1461>.

6. On rights as a substitute for religion, see Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, henceforth *Democracy*, 1: 391.

7. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, ch. 3.

8. Tocqueville himself is a good example. Despite his remark about rights and religion, there is little discussion of abstract rights in *Democracy in America* or *The Old Regime*. Natural rights and rights in a legal sense play their strongest role in liberal thought in the United States. This has often persuaded Americans that such is the case everywhere. Even in the American case, however, the link is not as strong as sometimes assumed. See Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion*.

9. Berlin, “Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century,” in *Liberty*, 65.

changed over time. A history of liberalism must relate the development of liberalism to particular historical fears and name the powers liberals sought to limit at a particular time. Each new form of liberalism is the result of a new fear that has called for a new response. Understanding this is essential to understanding why and how liberalism changes over time. People in the twenty-first century are not liberals for the same reasons Locke or Kant might have been.<sup>10</sup> “Fear” is too abstract in the singular, and “despotism” is too broad a term to tell us much about the source of fear. We need to know just what it is that liberals in a given time and place fear most.

For some observers the fear of a despotic state and a despotic religion is really all that there is to liberalism.<sup>11</sup> For Shklar herself, the liberalism of fear responded to a single, historically undifferentiated fear, the fear of cruelty. In reality, liberals have responded to many different fears. While liberalism originated with a primordial liberal fear of despotism, it evolved historically as the result of four fears which have had particular resonance in Western thought.

These four fears were the fear of religious fanaticism; the fear of revolution and reaction; the fear of poverty; and the fear of totalitarianism. These fears were in turn responsible for proto-liberalism; liberalism proper; modern liberalism and its classical liberal opponents; and anti-totalitarian liberalism. This historical succession led to the complex and layered nature of liberalism today. New forms of liberalism did not necessarily make old forms disappear. The development of modern liberalisms at the end of the nineteenth century, when some liberals began to see the struggle against poverty as central to the liberal project of fighting fear, did not mean the disappearance of the fear of revolution and reaction. Liberalism is like an oyster, and grows by accretion, one layer deposited on top of another, never covering it entirely.<sup>12</sup> Multiple forms of liberalism persist to this day, as they will until the fears that inspired them in the first place no longer exist. As John Dewey put it, we should be “suspicious of all attempts to erect a hierarchy of values: their results generally prove

10. A point made by Joseph Raz, *Ethics in the Public Domain*, 171.

11. Thus Charles Larmore: “since the sixteenth century there have been two basic problems to which liberal thought has sought a solution. The first has been to fix some moral limits to the powers of government. . . . The second problem has stemmed from the increasing awareness that reasonable people tend to differ and disagree about the nature of the good life.” Disagreements over the good life are originally religious, according to Larmore. Larmore, “Political Liberalism,” 339–340.

12. Michael Freeden makes a similar point in discussing the “layers” of liberalism, although he identifies those layers differently. See *Liberalism*, 37–54.

to be inapplicable and abstract. But there is at every time a hierarchy of problems.”<sup>13</sup> The hierarchy of problems liberals face at any given time is the hierarchy of their fears.

The history of liberalism presented here is a history of how certain fears have shaped and dominated liberalism over time. By understanding liberalism in this way, much that has previously perplexed historians and political theorists about the liberal past becomes clear, and liberals will be better positioned to respond to many of the challenges they face today. By paying close attention to their fears, new ways of reading well-known liberal texts become possible. As Iris Murdoch noted, “it is always a significant question to ask of any philosopher: what is he afraid of.” This is all the more true when the writer concerned is a liberal. Broadening the concept of the liberalism of fear to all liberalisms clarifies many aspects of liberalism hitherto unclear, and puts into context a whole series of continuities and changes that frequently have been misunderstood or overlooked. It solves a problem remarked by Eric Voegelin and many others, for whom liberalism’s “field of optimal clarity is the nineteenth century, which is preceded and followed by fields of decreasing clarity in which it becomes increasingly difficult to establish its identity.” Seeing the history of liberalism through the lens of liberal fears restores clarity to liberal identities by making visible how different layers of liberal thought were laid down one atop the other, and how they evolved over time and place.<sup>14</sup>

Summarizing this process makes its benefits for understanding the history of liberalism apparent. In Shklar’s view, Western / European history did not deviate from the common pattern of universal despotism and fruitless fear until after the Protestant Reformation. The decades of warfare, torture, and cruelty in God’s name during the Wars of Religion that followed led many people to the revolutionary conclusion that religious toleration was a form of “Christian charity,” and made religious skeptics like Montaigne decide that fanaticism and cruelty were the greatest vices. “It is out of that tradition that the political liberalism of fear arose and continues amid the terror of our time.”<sup>15</sup> This historical judgment might be questioned (Shklar herself is not consistent), but the Protestant Reformation marked a turning point in that it inaugurated a continuing series of political developments in a liberal direction, much as the isolated

13. Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 68.

14. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London, 1970), 72; Eric Voegelin, “Liberalism and Its History,” *Review of Politics* 36, no. (1974), 504–520: 506.

15. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” 23.



scientific achievements of previous times gave way to the ongoing development that characterized the Scientific Revolution. For Tocqueville, the Reformation also marked a significant moment in the transition from an aristocratic to a democratic society, based on equal status. The proto-liberalism of this period was a response to the new problem of how to preserve people from fear in a democratizing society where theoretically everyone's fears should count equally. It was also a response to the new hopes that democratic society engendered. Liberalism has always been a compound of fear and hope.<sup>16</sup>

After the Reformation the proto-liberals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were focused on the fear of religious fanaticism and the fear of despotism in the form of absolute monarchy. In the aftermath of, or perhaps even during, the American and French Revolutions, "liberal" finally became a noun and "liberalism" a word, and it becomes possible to speak of "liberalism" without anachronism. Sometime shortly before 1800, the new fears and hopes provoked by the revolutions created the new usage. Perhaps the first use of liberal as a noun came in a letter advocating the abolition of slavery signed "A Liberal," written to the *Pennsylvania Packet* in 1780. The usage was nevertheless a little unclear, as the older adjectival meaning of liberal as "generous" or "charitable" might be the implied meaning of the signature, rather than a political position. By the late 1790s, "liberal" was being used in France by authors such as Mme. de Staël and Benjamin Constant to describe particular political positions and institutions, such as representative government, a free press, etc., although the older moral usage did not disappear. The use of "liberalism" came a little later, and only really became common after the revolutions of 1848. In the short nineteenth century (1800–1873), liberals feared despotism and religious fanaticism as their proto-liberal predecessors had, but in addition, and above all, they feared revolution and reaction, fears born with the American and French Revolutions. All these fears were embodied in the state, and thus liberals directed much of their attention during this period to limiting the state's powers. They wrote constitutions and bills of rights to prevent the sovereign of the day from practicing revolutionary or reactionary despotism, al-

16. This fulfills Bernard Williams's requirement that any theory of liberalism provide an account of why liberalism has not existed in all times and places. Williams, *In the Beginning*, 9, and in the same work, Hawthorn's "Introduction," xii–xiii. One might add that because the Reformation endured, unlike earlier heresies, there was no longer any prospect of an end to religious pluralism in Europe, and that liberalism was a novel solution to a novel problem. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1:9.

though the earlier fears of religious or personal despotism were never entirely out of mind.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Liberalism 1.0 took shape, with liberals demanding a variety of changes to address their fears, while opposing those they thought would make people less safe. The particular issues they addressed varied—for example in the short nineteenth century, suffrage questions, for White males at least, were of relatively little importance in the United States, unlike in Europe, and nationalism was not a problem anywhere at the beginning of the period—but the fears to which liberals responded remained essentially the same until the end of the short nineteenth century. During the short nineteenth century, liberalism became a global political discourse, the first.<sup>18</sup> But ubiquity is not a synonym for success. If liberalism has progressed in certain times and places, overall it has failed, or more optimistically it has not yet succeeded. There has never been a time in human history when the majority of humanity has lived in liberal societies. Being in a minority, at least on a global scale, has always been one reason for liberal fear.

In the *fin de siècle* (1873–1919) many liberals began to fear poverty. The importance of this change as part of the history of liberalism has not been properly recognized. Like cruelty, poverty has been part of human history since at least the end of the hunter / gatherer period, and was no stranger to the nineteenth century. Objectively speaking, in most places in Europe and the United States a smaller percentage of the population went to bed hungry in 1900 than in 1815. But attitudes toward poverty among liberal thinkers underwent a dramatic change around the end of the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic. Instead of the poor being a threat to freedom, natural supporters of revolution or reaction, “modern liberals” began to see poverty as a threat to the freedom of the poor. It therefore became the business of liberalism to address poverty as a source of fear. This resulted in the creation of a second wave of liberalism, Liberalism 2.0. The majority of *fin de siècle* liberals were modern liberals, subject to the new fear, who hoped to end poverty once and for all. They turned to the state to help find a remedy for poverty, and thus supported an expansion of its role.<sup>19</sup>

17. Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 64; Rosenblatt, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Liberalism’ in France,” 168–169.

18. See Atanassow and Kahan, “Introduction,” in *Liberal Moments*.

19. Edmund Fawcett used “new liberals” to describe those who called “on the power of the state to tame the power of the market.” The problem that concerned the new / modern liberals,

Other fin de siècle liberals, who often described themselves as “classical liberals,” did not share the new fear or the new hope, and thought the modern liberals were pursuing a mirage. Worse, the desire to use the government to make war on poverty would create an expensive and terrifying bureaucratic monster. Classical liberals saw in these new government personnel, even without uniforms, new incarnations of the soldier and priest exercising arbitrary powers. They saw the war on poverty, funded by government-enforced redistribution of wealth, put into practice by government bureaucrats, as inherently illiberal because it could only be carried out by a state that made some people afraid. Like the modern liberals, the classical liberals had a new fear: the state—or rather they feared the state for a new reason. Whereas the first wave of liberals had feared the state primarily as an agent of revolutionary or reactionary despotism, classical liberals feared the state primarily because of the new uses modern liberals wished to make of it. In response they adopted a far broader and more rigid adherence to the doctrine of laissez faire than typically found during the short nineteenth century. The classical liberalism of the fin de siècle was not the liberalism of the short nineteenth century, despite what many classical liberals liked to think, and is properly part of second-wave liberalism.<sup>20</sup>

The great cleavage between modern and classical liberals, which in some respects continues to this day, thus began in the fin de siècle. The older fears held in common by modern and classical liberals only served to deepen the split between them, since for classical liberals, the modern liberals were encouraging or even making a revolution, and for modern liberals, classical liberal obstinacy and blindness would lead to one. All continued to hold on to the old liberal fear of revolution / reaction, as well as the old fears of religious fanaticism and despotism, but the question of poverty divided them. The main stream of liberalism divided into two.

After World War I, new revolutions, fascist and communist, created a new kind of fear, the fear of totalitarianism. The fear of totalitarianism dominated

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however, was usually not the market *per se*, but poverty and its effects. See Fawcett, *Liberalism*, 186. The newness of the idea, at least among liberals, that poverty could be eliminated, was noted by Aron, *Essai sur les libertés*, 64–65.

20. The term “classical liberal” may have been coined in 1883 by the French economist Charles Gide, a modern liberal who used it to describe strict laissez-faire economists, like Bastiat and Say. Gide did not think doctrinaire laissez-faire was a characteristic liberal trait, and considered saying these people should not be viewed as liberals at all before inventing the term classical liberals for them. See Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 224–225.

twentieth-century liberalism and was the main focus of the third wave of liberalism, Liberalism 3.0. Liberal responses to totalitarianism took a number of forms, sometimes deepening previous liberal divisions, sometimes attempting to overcome them. During the first two generations of anti-totalitarian liberalism, roughly 1920–1950 and 1950–1968, many liberals made enormous efforts to reconcile classical and modern liberalism. Thereafter, liberal differences once again widened. In the third generation of anti-totalitarian liberalism (1968–1992 or 2000), the poverty question was transformed into a question of socioeconomic equality. The fear of poverty became a fear of the consequences of inequality in general, construed not only in economic but also in racial and gender terms. This was not altogether an innovation. Equality of legal status, at least for White men, had been a liberal concern from the beginning. But in the latter part of the twentieth century the concern with equality broadened and deepened. This culminated in the egalitarian liberalism associated with John Rawls. It was rejected by libertarians and neoliberals who, even if they usually accepted the modern liberal fear of poverty, resolutely opposed egalitarianism as a form of totalitarian tyranny. In the late twentieth century, liberals were increasingly divided between egalitarians and their libertarian and neoliberal opponents. A very few dissented altogether from the dueling utopias they embodied, and developed a liberalism of fear that took pains to avoid the utopianism of its rivals.

In the early twenty-first century, liberalism was thrown into flux by the arrival on the scene of a new source of fear incarnated in a new set of opponents, the populists. The rise of populism and the weak and ineffective liberal responses to it challenged liberals to develop a fourth wave of liberalism, Liberalism 4.0. The challenge of populism, however, has not at time of writing found a definitive liberal response. What is clear is the profound threat populism poses to liberal democracy worldwide since 2000. This has imperiled the marriage between liberalism and democracy described in the phrase “liberal democracy.” Both the marriage and liberalism are still looking for an effective counselor.

There is another aspect of liberal fear that has changed over time. What matters is not only *what* people are afraid of, but *who* is afraid. Is it as individuals that we are frightened of being dragged out of bed in the middle of the night to be taken to the torture chamber because of what we personally said about the government? Or are we terrified, not because of anything we did, but because of the group or community to which we belong, because we are Jews living under Nazi rule? Or because we are women with no legal recourse when

a husband mistreats us? Or Black Americans stopped by the police when walking down a street in a White neighborhood? The question of “who” fears can matter as much as the question of “what” one fears. Over the course of the history of liberalism those whose fears receive priority in liberal thought and practice has varied, just as what liberals have been most afraid of has varied. Contrary to what many have assumed, liberals have not historically focused on the fears of individuals, rather than groups. Class oppression and class expression have very much been traditional liberal concerns. Whether liberalism is individualist or not in philosophical terms is historically a matter of circumstance, not a constitutive characteristic of liberal thought or practice. But the individual or group orientation of liberal fears is not unrelated to the history of those fears. In the *fin de siècle* modern liberals were more likely to be concerned with the oppression of groups, for example with the pressure on immigrants to conform to someone else’s culture and values, or with the oppression of the poor as a class. By contrast, classical liberals tended to think more in terms of individuals, although this usually did not apply to their thinking about women.<sup>21</sup>

Many different groups and individuals have supported liberalism, for many different reasons, motivated by many different fears. Potentially everyone has something to fear from the arbitrary exercise of power, so everyone is a potential liberal. Nevertheless, observers have long recognized that the middle classes are the social group most likely to be liberals, and within the middle classes, the professional classes—those who earn their living from their intellectual capital and expertise—are often the most liberal. The question why this is so is no sooner asked than answered in the context of liberalism as the search for a society in which none need be afraid: the middle classes are historically the most frightened. This explanation works *a fortiori* for those whom Max Weber called “pariah peoples,” notably the Jews. However, in some times and places elements of the middle classes and ethnic / religious minorities have been frightened by liberalism, and become illiberal in response.<sup>22</sup> Sources of both support and opposition to liberalism have varied over time, as will be seen in many of the chapters below.

Liberals have not cared about all groups, classes, or individuals at all times. As Tocqueville noted, “the same man who is full of humanity for his fellows when the latter are at the same time his equals, becomes insensitive to their

21. See the discussion of Jane Addams in chapter 7.

22. See the discussion of liberalism and populism in chapter 11.

sufferings from the moment when equality ceases.” Hence liberals have not taken into account the fears of women, colonized peoples, and other groups and classes because they were not considered equals. The story of the expansion—and contraction—over time of whose fear liberals took into account is one of the subjects of this history. It was by no means a one-way street: many German liberals rejected anti-semitism in the 1840s only to become anti-semites in the 1870s; there were liberals like Herbert Spencer who started out as advocates for women’s suffrage and then changed their minds. Liberals were never united in their attitudes toward imperialism and colonialism. But in what must be considered progress, on the whole twenty-first century liberals take into account the fears of more people, both as individuals and groups, as well as more of their fears, than did liberals in the nineteenth.<sup>23</sup>

### The Three Pillars of Liberalism

During the short nineteenth century, the great majority of liberal thinkers relied on three pillars to ward off their fears. These three pillars of liberal thought and action were freedom, markets, and morals, or, to put it another way, politics, economics, and religion or morality. Freedom is a notoriously slippery concept. It is used here, as it has been used by liberals, in two ways: very broadly, to designate the sum total of liberal aspirations with regard to markets, morals, and religion as well as politics; and more narrowly, in political terms, to mean the opportunity for political expression and participation, and placing political limits on the arbitrary exercise of power.

Although political freedom is essential to liberalism, liberals have rarely adopted exclusively political means to oppose fear. In order to be safe, more than a parliament and a bill of rights is necessary.<sup>24</sup> Liberals therefore have talked about markets and morals as equally essential means for keeping wolves, human and otherwise, from the door. They have relied on private property, market economies, and religious and moral incentives, as well as constitutions and political institutions, to achieve the dispersion of power necessary to keep people safe.

23. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 4:994. For those who find the idea that liberalism could be about anything but individuals shocking, see Gaus, *Modern Liberal Theory*, and Levy, “From Liberal Constitutionalism to Pluralism,” 21–39, 26ff.; Levy sees liberal individualism and group pluralism as in tension. See Levy, *Rationalism, Pluralism, and Freedom*.

24. A point made by Jeremy Waldron, cited in Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 682–715, 684.

More often than not, liberals have founded freedom in the broad sense on all three pillars; a foundation liable to crack if one of its supports is missing. All three pillars are needed for the construction of a legitimate liberal order, to build a shelter against fear and to create a space in which human aspirations can flourish. Unfortunately, over time there has been an increasing tendency for liberals to rely on only one pillar, and in particular to reject any moral / religious basis for liberalism's struggle against fear.

While most liberal thinkers have always emphasized one or two pillars more than another (there are also national and chronological variations), it was typical of liberalism until around 1873 to rely on all three, although there were always minority voices who excluded one or two of the pillars from their intellectual edifices. This increased from the fin de siècle onward, when many liberals produced competing histories of liberalism designed to prove their own genealogical authenticity and delegitimize their enemies.<sup>25</sup> In order to accomplish this goal they separated what previous liberalisms had joined, whether positive and negative freedom; utilitarianism and perfectionism; laissez-faire and government intervention; and many other views that were more typically found together in historical context.

The most important of the reunifications that this work will urge is a return to the three-pillared arguments that liberals usually relied on during the short nineteenth century, a combination of political, economic; and moral / religious justifications of liberalism that post-WWII liberals too often abandoned in favor of narrower views. Although true of all of them, this is especially the case with regard to one pillar: from the mid-twentieth century, liberal historians and political theorists have tended to ignore the moral pillar of liberalism, or to narrow it down or hollow it out so much as to leave it unable to support anything. For some, notably Isaiah Berlin and many of his successors, liberalism had and ought to have no moral pillar, and liberals ought to hold no "particular positive doctrines about how people are to conduct their lives or what personal choices they are to make." This view was expressed by Berlin in a highly influential essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty," which distinguished between negative freedom, freedom from coercion; and positive freedom, the capacity to become one's own master with concomitant ideas about what sort of life one should lead in order to attain self-mastery, freedom as autonomy.

25. The prime examples will be found in the works of L. T. Hobhouse, A. V. Dicey discussed in chapter 7, but similar efforts can be found in Friedrich Hayek, Isaiah Berlin, and Judith Shklar.

Liberalism, in his view, was exclusively about freedom from coercion. It was not based on any particular way of life or morality, and any attempt to base liberalism on a moral / religious pillar was therefore illiberal.<sup>26</sup>

Historically, the moral pillar has been central to most liberalisms, and most liberals have endorsed a “comprehensive” liberalism, meaning that their notions of freedom relied on “conceptions of what is of value in human life, as well as ideals of personal virtue and character, that are to inform much of our non-political conduct.”<sup>27</sup> Most liberals have held strong positions about the kinds of lives people should and should not lead, precisely because they thought such doctrines necessary to avoid societies in which cruelty would flourish. “A republic cannot exist, wrote Benjamin Constant, “without certain kinds of morality.”<sup>28</sup> Tocqueville stressed that no American thought that a people could be free if they were not religious, and he agreed.<sup>29</sup> To the question of whether liberalism could survive without the support of religious principles, the answer was typically no, at least through WWI. Most liberals did not imagine that either free markets or free governments could endure without some level of agreement about how people should conduct their lives or what kinds of personal choices they should make. Perfectionism, the view that people ought to strive for what is best, not merely for whatever they want, or for whatever might be useful to the community, usually shared space within liberalism with utilitarian attitudes about non-coercion / negative freedom. Liberals sought both the material progress and happiness characteristic of utilitarianism, and the intrinsically desirable life of perfectionism.<sup>30</sup>

26. Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty*, 169, 178. The origins of this view as a reaction against fascism and communism are discussed in chapter 8. Berlin later claimed that he had been misunderstood, in part because of careless writing, and that he had always recognized that negative and positive freedom both had good and bad, liberal and illiberal forms. See chapter 8, and Berlin and Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes,” 93. The quotation is from Shklar, who endorsed the strong distinction the later Berlin rejected. Shklar, “The Liberalism of Fear,” 21.

27. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 175.

28. Benjamin Constant, *Observations on the Strength of the Present Government of France*, tr. James Losh, Google ebook, 79.

29. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 1:475.

30. This will surprise those who think liberal perfectionism an anomaly. See Weinstein, *Utilitarianism*, 10n27; Damico, “What’s Wrong with Liberal Perfectionism?,” 397–420; Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3. The presence of both utilitarianism and perfectionism overlaps with the distinction between pluralist and rationalist traditions of liberalism made by Jacob T. Levy, with pluralist toleration associated with utilitarian



Regarding a moral / religious pillar as necessary to a liberal society, a crucial component in making a world without fear, did not mean that liberals endorsed any form of religious or other fanaticism. Liberals were pluralists—another of Berlin’s terms—about how people ought to live their lives. They always accepted that views would diverge, and turned divergence, and even limited conflict, into means of limiting power and encouraging progress. Instead of seeing eternal conflicts among different value systems as tragic, as Berlin did, many liberals recognized them as a means of freeing people by limiting power: the existence of prominent conflicts over values might discourage governments or social groups from enforcing one side. However, liberals usually did not think the content of those diverging views unimportant or irrelevant. They expressed strong views about what was acceptable. The results mattered, not just the process. Stamping out fear required something more than just rules of procedure, whether in politics, economics, or morality. The relationship of liberal views of the good life to illiberal views that required some to be afraid so that others might flourish and realize their salvation has been the subject of much debate within liberalism.<sup>31</sup>

The moral and political pillars of liberalism have generally exerted a considerable influence on the economic pillar of liberalism (and vice versa). This has contributed to the economic pillar being only occasionally a *laissez-faire* one before liberal argumentation thinned out in the late twentieth century. Great supporter though he was of commercial society, whose development in his view was the greatest check on cruelty in human history, Adam Smith was no doctrinaire advocate of *laissez-faire* policies—he made exceptions precisely when it came to fostering political community and morality and religion. This was why the majority of proto-liberal and liberal thinkers from Smith through the mid-twentieth century did not endorse a doctrinaire version of *laissez-faire*, and why *laissez-faire* economics itself was generally not described as liberal until the late nineteenth century, as will be discussed in chapter 7. Liberals defended the existence of private property and relied on markets, to be sure, but it was not until late in the twentieth century that a reliance on markets and private property to keep people secure was identified

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views and rationalist autonomy associated with perfectionism. See Levy, “Liberalism’s Divide.” For a similar distinction, see Dunn, *Western Political Theory*, 34.

31. See Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 69, 78, 151; On pluralism see Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty” in Berlin, *Liberty*, 212–217.

with laissez-faire policies by many or most liberals. At the same time, until the late twentieth century laissez-faire itself was usually justified on moral grounds by its advocates.<sup>32</sup>

The three pillars were not used just to build liberal castles in the sky. They not only defended people from cruelty in abstract theory but in practical political battles. Liberal parties and politicians used them as much as liberal theorists. A good example is Jonathan Parry's characterization of the political language of the Liberal parliamentary party in Britain in 1830–86 as falling into three main categories: "constitutional themes," that is political freedom; arguments for low taxes and free trade, i.e., markets; and "arguments about moral improvement and the development of the moral conscience." The same was true of liberal parties elsewhere in Europe and America. This will be seen in the chapters devoted to liberal responses to such issues as the suffrage, nationalism, and feminism.<sup>33</sup>

The four waves of liberalism correspond broadly, albeit not perfectly, to the cultivation or neglect of three-pillared arguments for liberalism (see appendix). It is the contention of this book that liberalism has been most convincing as program, language, and social analysis when it has relied on all three pillars, and that the relative weakness of liberalism at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first has much to do with neglect of the moral pillar of liberalism.

## Hope versus Fear

The history of liberal fears is necessary to understand liberalism, but it is not sufficient. Any definition of liberalism, and any history of liberalism, must recognize that liberalism is not just a party of fears, but a party of hopes. Surely nothing could be more utopian than the biblical aspiration for a society in which all could sit under their vine and their fig tree undisturbed. The three pillars of liberalism, freedom, markets, and morals, have supported liberal hope as much as they have been ramparts against liberal fear. Liberals promised more than just progressive liberation from fear. They promised continued, unprecedented improvement in freedom; continued, unprecedented material improvement; and continued, unprecedented opportunities for self-perfection

32. Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 81.

33. Parry, *Politics of Patriotism*, 35.

and moral development.<sup>34</sup> Freedom, markets, and morals supported both the positive and the negative sides of liberalism. Fear was to freedom from coercion as hope was to freedom as autonomy—always recognizing that there was some overlap between the two.<sup>35</sup>

It is a commonplace that nineteenth-century liberalism was characterized by faith in progress. At all times, for every liberal fear, whether of religious fanaticism, revolution, poverty, or totalitarianism, there has been a corresponding liberal hope or set of hopes. Their more or less utopian hopes distinguished liberals from more pessimistic conservative or republican traditions of political thought which focused on ultimately losing battles (in this world at least) with sin and secular forms of corruption.

Many, perhaps all, of the contradictions typical of liberalism derived from efforts to encompass both hopes and fears. The oft-remarked tensions in liberalism between optimism and pessimism, between liberals as the confident heirs of Voltaire or the frightened successors of Robespierre and Napoleon, were based on the concurrent fears and hopes liberals typically harbored. A good example is the liberal cult of education. It was sometimes propelled by fear, as in Robert Lowe's famous statement that "we must at least educate our masters," but it was more often motivated by hope. Such faith and hope (and for that matter charity) could hardly have been generated by fear alone. Even if, in the case of conflict, fear often trumped hope (loss aversion applies in politics as much as in economics), and utopia was subject to indefinite postponement, faith in progress has always been at the heart of liberalism. Liberals have based their hopes on the same three pillars of freedom, markets, and morals that they have used to ward off their fears.

The extent of liberal hope has waxed and waned over time, but liberalism has always been utopian, in the sense that the world liberals strove for, a world without fear, was without historical precedent. The liberalism of the short nineteenth century identified itself with faith in progress and was strongly utopian.

34. The list is derived from Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, 241. It is characteristic of his period that Kristol ascribes these three promises to "capitalism," rather than "liberalism," partly to avoid the confusion over the word in contemporary American culture, and partly because, although Kristol opposed it, the tendency of liberalism at the time was toward economic reductionism and exclusive reliance on the market pillar.

35. Even if not always. See Alan S. Kahan, "Jacob Burckhardt's Dystopic Liberalism," in *Liberal Moments*, ed. Atanassow and Kahan, 113–119.

In the fin de siècle, modern liberals added the hope of ending poverty to the liberal mix. By contrast, the “end of ideology” movement of the 1950s regarded any whiff of overt utopianism as dangerous because it was identified in their minds with revolution and reaction, or rather totalitarian communism and fascism.<sup>36</sup> They relied on purely technocratic and bureaucratic solutions to what made people afraid as the only safe means of proceeding. In response, the liberalisms of the late twentieth century, whether egalitarian, libertarian, or neo-liberal, were almost all utopian. In very different ways, they all stressed how their various paradises could be achieved, and fear finally put to rest. A contrasting reaction, albeit much less influential, was the invention of what its first formulator, Judith Shklar, called “the liberalism of fear.” In a sense her liberalism of fear, which in her view was distinct from liberalisms that sought autonomy, prolonged the end of ideology movement. But instead of claiming that ideology was dead in the face of clearly contravening facts, Shklar saw the end of ideology as something to hope for and aspire to. Bernard Williams, however, developed Shklar’s liberalism of fear in a perfectionist direction while maintaining an emphasis on realism and a strong sense of the historically possible.<sup>37</sup>

Liberal hopes, varied as they might be, have always had one thing in common: they are based on civil society. For liberals civil society, not the state, is the common source of a free politics, a free market, and of morals / religion. Benjamin Constant distinguished between ancient liberty, exclusively concerned with political participation, and modern liberty, essentially private in nature. The two might be combined to some extent, but the distinctively modern part of freedom was that which was located outside the state. Despite all the liberal emphases on constitutions, theories of representative government, and even the educational role of political participation, it was never solely or even primarily politics that made human beings happy in the liberal view, or made them better people. Liberal hopes for making people happier or more perfect came from civil society. Achieving this was beyond the capacity of the

36. A world without ideology was also unprecedented, and thus radically utopian in its own way.

37. Shklar argued that her liberalism of fear and the liberalism of personal autonomy were entirely separate, in her own way repeating Isaiah Berlin’s sometime mistake about negative and positive freedom. There is no justification for this until the late twentieth century, when Shklar and Ryan wrote. The view that the liberalism of fear can be distinguished from liberalism based on personal development or natural rights does not hold up historically, nor in the view of Bernard Williams philosophically. Cf. “The Liberalism of Fear,” 26–27; Ryan, *Making of Modern Liberalism*, 8.

state. Liberals always feared the state, they sometimes hoped for its help, but they never expected it to be the source of salvation. Liberal faith lay in civil society.

Understanding liberalism as a blend of fear and hope gives us insight into a phenomenon that has frequently vexed historians: liberal contradictions.<sup>38</sup> This has been clear since liberalism was invented. In the nineteenth century, Mill observed that in France “the *libéraux* comprise every shade of political opinion, from moderate to radical.” Critics of liberalism spoke contemptuously of a “liberal cocktail.”<sup>39</sup> Some of the contradictions in liberalism arose from the fact that liberals responded to different fears in different proportions. But many derived from the fundamental contrast at the heart of liberalism, and perhaps of human nature, between fear and hope.

If fear and hope are contrasting, even conflicting attitudes, they are not always contradictory. One can be both fearful and hopeful at the same time, and liberals often have been. Indeed, simultaneously holding contrasting or even contradictory attitudes has often been characteristic of liberals and of liberalisms. This has been the case, for example, with regard to utilitarianism and perfectionism; democracy and elitism; spontaneity and design; and historical and eternal truths, contrasting attitudes often found in the same liberal thinker or strand of liberalism. Perhaps the most common contradiction was a situation in which some liberals responded by supporting reforms—they joined what in the nineteenth century was called “the party of movement”—while others wanted to reject or limit reforms and joined the “party of resistance.” Many liberals shifted from one to the other depending on circumstances, a phenomenon seen in England after 1832 and France after 1830, or again during the American Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. What is worth stressing is that liberals have often preferred to try to hold both positions simultaneously. Thomas Macaulay alternately adopted perfectionist and utilitarian views; John Stuart Mill argued that all sides in any enduring dispute had an element of the truth in their possession and tried to take all into account; Friedrich Hayek insisted on spontaneity in economics but designed a legal framework for it; all without any anxiety about con-

38. See, among others, Bell, “What Is Liberalism?” 683; Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 1–5.

39. Mill, *Essays on French History and Historians; Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, 109; cited in Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 76.

sistency. The history of liberalism is a matter for lumpers more than for splitters.<sup>40</sup>

Definitions of liberalism may express at least four different kinds of illocutionary force: what it *is/was*; what it *ought* to be; how the definition helps *explain* the history of liberalism; and how it *contradicts* previous definitions and improves upon them.<sup>41</sup> The definition of liberalism proposed here, that liberalism is the search for a society in which no one need be afraid, and that it has historically been based on four fears, three pillars, and hope, is an attempt to describe liberalism as it was, is, and ought to be, while explaining its evolution over time, and naturally improving upon previous efforts. It has been structured in such a way that the different illocutionary elements of the definition may be evaluated independently.

For the most part, however, definitions and histories of liberalism express one of two illocutionary intentions: they define or describe what liberalism *is*; and / or state what liberalism *ought* to be. Definitions based on what liberalism *is* usually aim to be comprehensive: what are all the ways in which people use the word? An example defines liberalism as “the sum of the arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognized as such by other self-proclaimed liberals, across time and space.” This definition is useful to the political theorist, crossing “time and space” so that a thinker or text not considered liberal in their own time may still be considered liberal if 200 years later many liberals call them so, allowing political theorists to leap across historical contexts.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, a more purely historical example of a comprehensive definition of what liberalism *is* would be: to “clarify what the terms ‘liberal’ and ‘liberalism’

40. Darwin popularized the distinction between “lumpers” and “splitters.” Splitters like to see many separate species in nature, where lumpers see only a few. The origin of the distinction may lie with Plato, who in the *Phaedrus* (265c-e) wrote that when we think we engage in both *synagoge* and *diairesis*—“collection” and “division,” that is, lumping and splitting (I owe this point to Timothy Stanton). Isaiah Berlin preferred another ancient Greek distinction, that between the hedgehog, who knows one thing, and the fox, who knows many. Many liberals are foxes, but not all.

41. The illocutionary force of a phrase is what it is primarily intended to do by its author. The concept, developed by the English philosopher J. L. Austin, has been fruitfully applied to the history of political thought by Quentin Skinner. See Skinner, “‘Social Meaning’ and Social Action,” in Tully, ed., *Meaning & Context*, 83–84.

42. The intention of this clause is likely to save Locke and Hobbes for liberalism. See Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 686–687.

have meant to the people who used them.”<sup>43</sup> In both cases what is “liberal” is whatever has passed for liberal, at a given moment for the historian, or at any moment for the political theorist or philosopher.

Definitions based on what “liberalism” *ought* to be give a specific content to liberalism that may or may not accord with the actual use of the word. They always exclude some people who call themselves liberals but who, in the eyes of the beholder, are not. These are prescriptive rather than comprehensive definitions of liberalism. They describe the ways people *ought* to use “liberal” even if they fail to do so in practice. Prescriptive definitions involve identifying some core issues or arguments that serve to define liberalism, and then stipulating what liberals ought to say. Frequently, prescriptive definitions create a canon of liberal texts, on the basis of which other texts may be confirmed or rejected as liberal, but when they do so they eliminate rather than illuminate the contradictions characteristic of liberalism in practice.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond defining liberalism as what it is / was and what it ought to be, explanation is a third intention behind definitions of liberalism, one that may motivate definitions of what liberalism is and what it ought to be. A definition of liberalism may be intended to help explain the historical development of liberalism, whether in the comprehensive sense (all uses) or the prescriptive sense (the “correct” uses). Finally, whether the definition of liberalism be intended as an “is” or an “ought,” whether it has explanatory ambitions or not, all definitions of liberalism share one particular intention: they suggest that some other definition(s) is wrong.

The story told in this book describes the development of liberalism in the Western world and elaborates on the definition given in the first sentence, that liberalism is the search for a society in which no one need be afraid. It is also an argument for why liberalism needs all three of its pillars to stand up against its enemies, as well as against liberals who pretend that liberalism can or should do without one or more of them. In including all liberalisms, three-pillared and single-pillared, modern and classical, nineteenth and twentieth century, egalitarian and libertarian, fearful and full of hope, the history recounted here is meant to be a liberal history. But this by no means makes it all-inclusive. Some things that would have improved the storytelling have no

43. Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 685, 689–690, 708n.32; Rosenblatt, *Lost History*, 2.

44. Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 685. A good example is Jeremy Waldron, who admits that “many liberals may not recognize” themselves in his definition. Waldron, “Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism,” 128, 134–44, cited in Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 687.

doubt been left out by accident. Others have been left out on purpose. One prominent omission, important for deciding where the story should start, is John Locke.

## Should We Start at the Very Beginning? Or, Why Not Locke?

Histories of liberalism today usually start with John Locke (1632–1704). He was certainly a very prominent proto-liberal in the seventeenth century, inspired by the fear of religious fanaticism as well as of arbitrary despotism. Nevertheless, seeing Locke as a foundational figure whose place is at the head of any genealogy of liberalism is a mistake. Starting histories of liberalism with Locke has led historians to misconstrue both Locke and liberalism, based largely on a view of liberalism that was a product of the mid-twentieth century. For the first hundred years of liberalism, liberals simply did not consider Locke a liberal. After the French Revolution, the first generations of liberals to call themselves such thought of Locke as a figure from a different world, full of archaic assumptions.<sup>45</sup> Nineteenth-century European liberals, deeply imbued with historical consciousness, thought Locke a primitive. In America, Locke's political works rapidly fell into obscurity or contempt after the 1770s.

Even in his homeland Britain, Locke's political works were generally dismissed in the nineteenth century. Typical was Mill's discussion of Locke's political theory. Recognizing the proto-liberal in Locke, he praised him for wanting to limit the power of government, but dismissed his discussion of social contracts and inalienable rights. Mill's opponent James Fitzjames Stephen agreed that Locke's political theory was "altogether superannuated and bygone." A 1913 British history of liberalism, by a Liberal party politician, attributed liberalism's origins to the industrial revolution of the 1760s and the American and French Revolutions, not to the Glorious Revolution or the seventeenth century. Locke was simply not part of the story of liberalism as told by English liberals in the nineteenth century.<sup>46</sup>

45. As had already been the case for Adam Smith. Montesquieu did not discuss Locke, but took very different positions on the origins of property, social contracts, religion, etc. See Barrera, *Les lois du monde*, 292–293; Binoche, *Introduction*, 59, 326; Bibby, *Montesquieu's Political Economy*, 114, 193n.10.

46. Blease, *Short History*; Bell, "What Is Liberalism?," 694–697. Among German liberals, Locke's reputation varied. Wilhelm Traugott Krug's 1823 *Geschichtliche Darstellung des Liberal-*



In America Locke played a bigger role, but not for long. During the American Revolution he was at first a central figure, his influence figuring prominently in the Declaration of Independence, but his star rapidly waned, to the point that by the 1780s he was hardly cited in American political writings. Between 1773 and 1917, there was no American edition of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*. In the early twentieth century, American commentators often saw Locke as a classic example of a failed Enlightenment political theorist. In 1905, the author of the standard American political theory textbook, William Dunning, described Locke as having an "illogical, incoherent system of political philosophy." After WWI, Harold Stearn's *Liberalism in America* did not even mention him, and the 1937 edition of George Sabine's standard political theory textbook described liberalism as a tradition invented in nineteenth-century Britain, and did not classify Locke as a liberal. On the other hand, Vernon Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought*, written mostly in the 1910s, did call Locke a liberal and gave him prominent if somewhat hostile treatment from a left-wing perspective, and in 1935, John Dewey gave an account of Locke as the founder of natural rights liberalism similar to those often found in late twentieth-century textbooks. Despite this, in Sabine's third edition in 1960, Locke was still considered to have exercised little influence on the "Whig liberalism" of the eighteenth century, and "the actual complexity of Locke's thought . . . makes difficult an estimate of its relations to later theories." Sabine considered Locke's ideas to be more medieval than modern.<sup>47</sup>

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*ismus: alter und neuer Zeit*, perhaps the first historical discussion of liberalism, acknowledges the importance of England's Glorious Revolution of 1688 but does not mention Locke. See <https://ia800500.us.archive.org/30/items/geschichtlichea00krug/geschichtlichea00krug.pdf>, 71–73. Bluntschli's *Allgemeines Staatsrecht*, published in three volumes between 1852 and 1881, whose first volume was translated and used as a textbook at Oxford, gave Locke only a footnote in its dismissive discussion of the idea of a social contract in volume one, and did not refer to him in its discussion of religious freedom in the same volume. Its discussion of the "liberal party" in the third volume included Martin Luther and Alexander Hamilton, but not Locke. By contrast, in the early and mid-nineteenth century the *Staatslexikon*, often described as the "Bible of German liberalism," devoted a laudatory article to Locke's political theory. But the *Staatslexikon* did not describe him as a liberal, criticized his over-emphasis on the ahistorical individual, and suggested his work was too purely English in orientation.

47. Lutz, "Relative Influence," 189–197, 193; Arcenas, *America's Philosopher*, 2, 55–56, 59, 70; 84; Bell, "What Is Liberalism?," 697n.69, 700–701; Sabine, *History*, 536, 538–539; Dewey, *Liberalism*, 6–16. On Locke in pre-Civil War America, it is still useful to consult Curti, "Great Mr. Locke," 107–151. On Locke in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, see Gunnell, "Archaeology of American Liberalism," as well as Arcenas, *America's Philosopher*.

Thus, even in America and Britain, Locke's status as a liberal and his importance for liberals were at best unclear before WWII. In 1932, Michael Oakeshott could write that "it is at least remarkable that at the present time the gospel of Locke is less able to secure adherents than any other whatever. . . ." Oakeshott went on to suggest that Locke was not merely dead, but buried.<sup>48</sup>

Yet beginning a little before WWII and gathering steam afterward, there occurred on both sides of the Atlantic one of the more curious intellectual phenomena of the twentieth century, the resurrection of John Locke as the preeminent political philosopher of liberalism. The causes of Locke's resurrection were many, but they essentially boiled down to the fact that in the second half of the twentieth century, Locke and Lockean arguments were widely perceived as useful. First, many continental European emigrés to Britain and the United States were desperate to identify liberalism with their new "Anglo-Saxon" homeland, in opposition to the continent they had fled.<sup>49</sup> The very English Locke was a suitable mascot for Anglo-Saxon liberalism. Second, many liberals *and* many opponents of liberalism wanted to sharply distinguish liberalism from socialism, or else classical from modern liberalism, and identified Locke with liberalism or classical liberalism as a means of doing this. As part of this project, Locke became an important figure in genealogies of liberalism.

Identified with individualism, Locke was also useful when twentieth-century writers wanted to see liberalism as an essentially individualist philosophy, whether for good or ill. Harold Laski, a socialist writing a history of liberalism in 1936, wished to identify the rise of liberalism with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the better to do away with both; he found identifying Locke as defining "the essential outlines of the liberal doctrine for nearly two centuries" a useful tool in this endeavor, as Charles A. Beard and Parrington had already done in the United States, where Merle Curti's 1937 essay on "The Great Mr. Locke: America's Philosopher, 1783–1861," firmly established Locke as a supposedly perennial presence in American political thought. After WWII the opponents of liberalism continued to find it useful to emphasize Locke's importance in order to give point and relevance to their attack on him as a "possessive individualist," the enemy of community and the defender of capitalist exploitation, colonialism, and even slavery. This was a way to attack liberalism's

48. Oakeshott, cited in Dunn, "Measuring Locke's Shadow," 260.

49. Hayek went so far as to declare Tocqueville and some of his other continental favorites part of this "Anglo-Saxon" tradition. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 110–111.

moral foundations once Locke was identified as the archetypal liberal. Liberalism's enemies raised Locke from the dead as a means of burying liberalism once and for all. Conversely, for liberals who wanted to stand on liberalism's moral pillar, including some libertarians, going back to Locke's emphasis on natural rights and the social contract was a way to give a moral foundation to liberal "pluralism," even at the cost of eliminating all historical content from Locke's *corpus* (the moral foundation was rarely a Christian one as Locke would have understood it). Since many late twentieth-century liberals wished to ignore liberalism's historical concern with group fears, Locke's individualism was convenient for this purpose as well.<sup>50</sup>

Of all the Locke-conjurors, friends or foes, perhaps the most influential was Louis Hartz, whose *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* appeared in 1955, and argued that only a single ideology, Lockean liberalism, had ever dominated in America. Despite occasional abortive efforts to contest it, such as by defenders of slavery, Lockean liberalism had always ruled American life and thought according to Hartz. America was the True Pure Land of Liberalism, unpolluted by Europe's vestigial feudalism and rampant class conflict, which deflected European liberals from a Lockean course. American liberalism was unique—Hartz went so far as to claim there were no European counterparts to American Progressivism, dismissing the British New Liberals and the French Solidarists as socialists. He was not enamoured of this situation. In his view the domination of Lockean liberalism in America acted as a form of tyranny of majority opinion—he even managed to blame McCarthyism on Locke.<sup>51</sup>

Hartz's identification of America with Lockean liberalism, and of Locke with "the self-interested, profit-maximizing values and behaviours of liberal capitalism," has had enormous influence, so much so that a chronicler of the history of American political science could write that "political theorists have become so accustomed to talking about John Locke as the founder of the liberal tradition that they forget that Hartz was one of the first individuals to

50. Laski, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, 104–105. On America, see Arcenas, *America's Philosopher*, 107–109, 114–115. I have combined Stanton's four causes for the Locke revival into the first two cited here. See Stanton, "John Locke," 607; Gunnell, "Archaeology of American Liberalism," 136; 140; Stanton, "John Locke," 609.

51. Kloppenberg, "In Retrospect," 461, 464; Gunnell, "The Archaeology of American Liberalism," 130; Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, 12, 140.

characterize Locke as a liberal, let alone to ascribe to him the role of the founder of a such tradition.” Hartz was not one of the first, but he was one of the most influential. His work promoted both Locke’s resurrection and the evisceration of any actual Lockean content from the image of Locke used to represent liberalism.<sup>52</sup>

Hartz was followed by many others. In 1960, Sheldon Wolin’s highly influential *The Politics of Vision* wrote John Locke’s name firmly at the head of the liberal family tree: “If modern liberalism can be said to be inspired by any one writer, Locke is undoubtedly the leading candidate.” By the early 1960s the argument was commonly made that liberalism was a “single and continuing entity . . . so extensive that it involves most of the guiding beliefs of modern western opinion” and that Locke was its “founding father.”<sup>53</sup>

But the fact is that whatever might be said about the importance of Locke for liberalism post-1950, he might as well never have existed for liberals between 1800 and 1914. Even in the twentieth century, certainly before and even after 1945, a case could be made that a figure today known only to specialists, A. V. Dicey (1835–1920), was far more influential than Locke in framing how liberalism was understood by both its friends and foes (see chapter 7). Once the proto-liberalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was left behind (and by the mid-eighteenth century, Locke was already a “has-been” outside of the Thirteen Colonies), for the average liberal Locke hardly rose to the status of a minor historical figure.<sup>54</sup>

Does this mean the post-WWII generations that thought Locke was the original liberal were simply wrong? Or did Locke *become* a liberal only centuries after his death?<sup>55</sup> The answer depends on the definition of liberalism chosen and the context in which it is used. A contextualist definition of what liberalism *is* means that Locke was not a liberal in 1690, since no one called themselves one in 1690. But since, from the 1950s, liberals and their opponents (at first more the latter than the former) considered Locke a liberal, however

52. Kloppenberg, “In Retrospect,” 460–461; Gunnell, “The Archaeology of American Liberalism,” 130; Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 704.

53. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 263; Keith Minogue, cited in Bell, “What Is Liberalism?,” 703; 698–699; Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*.

54. In fact, even eighteenth-century proto-liberal rights talk typically understood rights very differently than Locke had. See Edelstein, “Enlightenment Rights Talk,” 531.

55. The latter is Bell’s view. “What Is Liberalism?,” 698.

mistaken they may have been in their interpretations of his writings, from the perspective of a contextualist definition of mid-twentieth century liberalism, Locke *was* a liberal, *then*. In his own historical context, Locke was a proto-liberal whose arguments rested on what would become the three pillars of liberalism. But since Locke, proto-liberal though he was, dropped out of the conversation among liberals from the 1780s through the early twentieth century, to begin a history of liberalism with him presents a misleading picture of liberalism's historical development.

Proto-liberals who were far more influential than Locke in the nineteenth century were Montesquieu (1689–1755) and Adam Smith (1723–1790), discussed in chapter 2. To begin with them means beginning with proto-liberals whose works, unlike those of Locke, were of great importance to nineteenth-century liberals. Compared to Locke they were much more directly related, both chronologically and intellectually, to liberalism as it actually took form in the nineteenth century. If the fear of revolution that would create liberalism proper was never their chief motivation, Montesquieu and Smith did have to reckon with the new economic and moral fears that would contribute to the development of liberalism. As proto-liberals, both were afraid of religious fanaticism, the “superstition” and “enthusiasm” the Enlightened loved to hate. But much further removed from the Wars of Religion than Locke, that fear was mostly in the background for them, replaced by more modern fears, whether of the moral and intellectual degradation of the factory worker in Smith, or the difficulty of preserving freedom in societies where honor and virtue were threatened in Montesquieu.

What made their writings especially important for the history of liberalism was not only their fears but their hopes, and the sources of their hopes. Montesquieu and Smith recognized not merely the need to disperse power in society and to separate powers in government, as had been the case among proto-liberals since the Reformation, but also the utility of diversity and conflict for the political, economic, and moral development of individuals and societies. Their thinking was marked by the emphasis on historical change that would be typical of nineteenth-century liberalism. Key to the changes that separated their world from previous epochs, in their view, was the development of commercial society. For Montesquieu and Smith commercial society was, for all the new dangers it presented, a pillar of freedom and resistance to oppression, in a way that thinkers who lived earlier in history could not have perceived for the simple reason that commercial society was much further

developed in the eighteenth century. Montesquieu and Smith could and did rely on freedom, markets, and morals in ways that were much closer to liberal thought than earlier proto-liberals. As we will see in chapter 2, there were significant ways in which the late eighteenth century took a long step toward the liberalism of the nineteenth century.

This chapter and the discussion of Montesquieu and Smith in chapter 2, “Before the Revolutions,” Part one of the book, are the prologue to the discussion of the first wave of liberalism in chapters 3 through 6, Part two, “The All-Too-Short Nineteenth Century.”

## Liberals and Liberalisms

After the prologue’s discussion of proto-liberalism, chapters 3 and 4, “After the Revolutions” and “Many-Splendored Liberalism,” introduce some of the ideas of the leading liberal thinkers of the nineteenth century, ideas that may be familiar to some readers, but that are given a new reading in the context of the fears of first-wave liberalism in general and the writers’ own particular fears. The writers examined are Kant, Madison, Constant, Macaulay, Tocqueville, and J. S. Mill, each of whom represents a significant facet of liberal thought. These two chapters deal with the creation of a more or less consensual set of liberal attitudes over the course of the period 1815–1873, the “short” nineteenth century, based on the fear of revolutions (and their shadow, reactions), and on the three pillars of freedom, markets, and morals.

A different approach to the history of liberalism is adopted in chapter 5, “Liberalism on the Front Lines: Freedom, Nation, and God”: the chapter looks at liberalism not by reading theoretical texts, but by discussing political controversies over suffrage, nationalism, and Catholicism, struggles essential to the development of liberal democracy, liberal nation-states, and liberal (and illiberal) attitudes toward religion. As with the analysis of liberal thinkers, the case is impressionistic rather than comprehensive. One reason the argument departs from analyzing thinkers is to adopt a broader approach to both issues and the people who responded to them. Understanding the way in which liberals in practice did or did not rely on freedom, markets, and morals / religion to ward off their fears and empower their hopes helps to unpack the arguments liberals made. It shows how they could all be considered liberal in their time even if, from some perspectives, they could be considered contradictory or even illiberal.

Chapter 6, “Liberalism with Something Missing,” is the last chapter in part two. It looks at a minority tradition in nineteenth-century liberalism, liberals who preferred to stand on one pillar, whether Benthamite utilitarians, *laissez-faire* economists like Bastiat, or devotees of the survival of the fittest such as Herbert Spencer. This rejection of moral perfectionism (partial in Spencer’s case) and greater reliance on economics foreshadowed what would become mainstream liberalism in the late twentieth century. In describing the development of liberalism and making claims about putatively “mainstream” versus “minority” rhetoric, the argument is again suggestive rather than quantitative. Part two thus covers the development of the first wave of liberalism through about 1873, the year of John Stuart Mill’s death.

Part three, “New Fears, New Hopes,” chapters 7 through 11, discusses the evolution of the second and third waves of liberalism, and potentially a fourth. It discusses the history of liberalism from the *fin de siècle* onwards, examining the successive waves of liberalism that arose in response to new fears: the fear of poverty; the fear of totalitarianism; and the fear of populism. While in many respects the approach is transatlantic, the differences that emerge in various times and places between American and European liberalisms play a greater role in this period.

Chapter 7, “Modern Liberalism vs. Classical Liberalism,” treats the *fin de siècle* liberal response to the problem of poverty and the rise of two main competing forms of liberalism, modern liberalism and classical liberalism. The cleavage is considered not as evidence of the decline or even the disappearance of liberalism, but rather as evidence of the way in which liberalism had become the dominant operating system of Western political and social thought by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup>

In the *fin de siècle*, modern liberals sometimes proclaimed themselves socialists in order to fight poverty, liberalize socialism, and / or ward off the threat of revolution or reaction, just as in the short nineteenth century liberals had sometimes joined revolutions in order to end them (see chapter 2). Classical liberals rejected this move, and sometimes called themselves “liberal conservatives” while their opponents described themselves as “liberal socialists” (both always maintained that they alone were the true liberals). The split between modern and classical liberals thus echoed the tension during the

56. Contra the arguments for decline to be found in Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, and in different forms in Leonhard, *Liberalismus*, and Hazareesingh, *Political Traditions in Modern France*.

short nineteenth century between liberals who aligned themselves with the party of movement or reform and those who chose the party of resistance.<sup>57</sup>

Progressivism in the United States, New Liberalism in Britain, and Solidarity in France, identified with such thinkers as Jane Addams, L. T. Hobhouse, and Léon Bourgeois, represent modern liberalism, while classical liberalism is represented by A. V. Dicey. The chapter closes with a discussion of modern liberals' flirtation with the Hegelian temptation to rely on the state for salvation. Hegel was liberal in most things, except, crucially, in his ultimate rejection of civil society in favour of the state. The modern liberals of the *fin de siècle* were frequently tempted to follow in his path, a temptation felt even more strongly after the World Wars.

Chapter 8, "Liberalism's Limits," discusses three issues that took on particular salience in the *fin de siècle* and thereafter: radical nationalism; imperialism / colonialism; and feminism. In contrast to the mostly positive relationship between liberalism and nationalism during the short nineteenth century discussed in chapter 5, the relationship between liberalism and nationalism in the *fin de siècle* (and thereafter) was increasingly fraught with tension. This tension often crystallized in debates over anti-semitism, which is considered in light of the Treitschke Affair in Germany. The "nation" was a double-edged sword from a liberal perspective: it protected its own members from fear, yet it could be a source of fear for others. This was especially true when "nation" became "nation-state," and even more so when the nation-state became an imperial / colonial power.

The relationship between liberalism and imperialism discussed in the chapter repositions the scholarly debate over liberalism and empire as a discussion of the triad of liberalism, nationalism, and imperialism. The relationship was complicated: liberals took divergent positions, as can be seen in the debates over colonialism in the French legislature. There was no necessary connection between concern with poverty and rejection of imperialism. Modern liberals sometimes drew support from imperialism, as was the case for Friedrich Naumann. Finally, the relationship between liberalism and feminism, which from a liberal perspective was a question of whether or not women's well-justified fear of men ought to be recognized, is discussed over the whole course of the nineteenth century and the *fin de siècle*, through the writings of Mary

57. The relationship between classical liberalism and conservatism continued to be controversial in the twentieth century, when Hayek, who sometimes considered himself a classical liberal, felt compelled to write an essay about "Why I Am Not a Conservative." See chapter 8.



Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and John Stuart Mill, as well as the post-WWI debate over women's suffrage in France.

Chapter 9, "A World in Crisis and the Crisis of Liberalism," describes some of the forms taken by the third wave of liberalism after WWI. Liberalism 3.0 emerged in response to the challenges posed by the emergence of totalitarianism. Fascism and communism in the 1920s and '30s, the Cold War in the 1950s and early '60s, and the more diffuse totalitarian threats of the late twentieth century were the focus of three generations of anti-totalitarian liberals. Totalitarianism became the main focus of liberal fear, although the fears of revolution / reaction or of poverty did not disappear. In many respects the emergence of the third wave of liberalism was epitomized by Walter Lippman's 1937 book, *The Good Society*. The book inspired the 1938 Colloque Lippman, held in Paris and attended by liberal luminaries as diverse as Friedrich Hayek and Raymond Aron. The Colloque was devoted to the question of how liberalism was to respond to its catastrophic failures. The discussions of Hayek, Isaiah Berlin, and Ordoliberalism that follow the examination of Lippman's book and the Colloque present some of the most important third-wave liberal responses to the problem of totalitarianism. They highlight the attempts of the first generation of anti-totalitarian liberals to bridge the *fin de siècle* divide between modern and classical liberalism, and to overcome the *fin de siècle* tendency to separate the three traditional pillars of liberalism, freedom, markets, and morals, and in particular to limit appeals to morality and religion.

Chapter 10, "Hollow Victories, 1945–2000," begins by describing the divergence between American and European usage of the word "liberal" that took place in the middle of the twentieth century. While liberals on both sides of the Atlantic remained devoted to creating a world without fear, the way in which they used "liberal" to describe their aims gradually became quite different. Nevertheless, the "end of ideology" movement of the 1950s, which largely encompassed the second generation of anti-totalitarian liberals, was very much a transatlantic phenomenon. It dominated liberal thought and practice in the 1950s and early 1960s, and combined both an acceptance of modern liberal concerns with a determined rejection of any form of moral / religious pillar for liberalism.

The second generation of anti-totalitarian liberalism was also marked by a conference, this one in Rome in 1955. Hayek was one of the few who attended both the Colloque Lippmann and the Rome conference, but his resolutely ideological view of liberalism met with rejection at Rome. Anti-utopianism and the rejection of idealism in favor of practical, limited reforms was the curi-

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