

front matter to

**How to be a Humane Libertarian:
Essays in a New American Liberalism**

Deirdre Nansen McCloskey

February 22, 2017

Table of Contents

Preface [*included here below*]

Part I: **Ethics, and Ethical Change, Make Liberalism Work**

1. Humane liberalism is ethical
2. The unethical cannot be repaired by mere laws or economic incentives

Part II.: **Humane Liberalism Enriches People Materially**

3. Liberalism made the United States rich, 1800 to the present, but did not destroy our souls
4. Liberalism was the plan of equality, liberty, and justice
5. The liberal plan made the West rich, and now the rest
6. Trickle up or down is not how the economy works
7. Work and trade are good for you
8. The liberal idea, in short, made the modern world

Part III: **But People Do Not Live by Bread Alone**

9. And people don't live by prudence alone
10. Modern life is in fact not especially prudent
11. The sacred and the profane intertwine
12. Quit worrying about "consumerism"

Part IV: **Christian Liberalism Liberates**

13. "Christian liberalism" is not oxymoronic
14. "Christian prudence" is not oxymoronic, either
15. Some strains of Christianity are anti-economic
16. But markets and innovism can fit Christianity
17. Being a good Christian won't hurt the economy

18. The bourgeoisie, that is, can be good

Part V: A Humane Liberalism is Good for the World

19. Liberalism is for Italians

20. For Chileans

21. For Hungarians

22. Even for Russians

Part VI: The Enemies of Liberalism are Mistaken

23. The economic sky is not falling

24. The West is not declining

25. Trade is ancient, not inhuman, and Karl Polanyi got it wrong

26. Michael Sandel can't buy the cooperative character of markets

27. Marxism is not the way forward

28. Marxians stopped studying economics in about 1867

29. A post-modern liberal feminism is possible and desirable

30. Imperialism was not how the West was enriched

31. Liberalism is good for queers

32. The minimum wage was designed to damage poor people and women

33. Do worry about the environment, but prudently

Part VII: In Particular, the New Obsession with Inequality is Misplaced

34. Making people equal is not a true or humane liberalism

35. Piketty is mistaken

36. Europe should resist egalitarian policies

37. Pessimism about market societies is not scientifically justified

38. The rich do not in a liberal society get richer at the expense of the rest

39. Piketty's book has serious technical errors

40. Inequality is not unethical if achieved in a liberal society

41. Redistribution doesn't work

**Part VIII: Ethics Matters, Facts Matter, Rhetoric Matters
to a Humane Liberalism**

42. Liberalism, to repeat, can't be a-ethical
43. Nor can liberalism be fact free
44. Free speech supports a free economy, and vice versa
45. Rhetoric is not merely bullshit, and saying so kills liberalism

Preface

I offer you some essays written over the past couple of decades making the case for a new and humane American libertarianism.

Outside the United States what I have in mind is still called "liberalism," and that's the word mainly used here. The economist Daniel Klein calls it "Liberalism 1.0," or, channeling the C. S. Lewis book *Mere Christianity* on the minimum commitments of faith, "mere Liberalism."¹ David Boaz of the Cato Institute has written a lucid guide, *Libertarianism – A Primer* (1997), and in 2015 as *The Libertarian Mind*. I wish David had called it *The Liberal Mind*.

In desperate summary, humane liberalism 1.0 is Democratic in social policy and Republican in economic policy. Chiefly it is the conviction that we should not push people around. As Boaz says at the outset of *The Libertarian Mind*, "In a sense, there have always been but two political philosophies: liberty and power." Liberals believe we should not use violence, whether for leftish or rightish purposes, at home or abroad. We should depend instead on voluntary agreements, such as exchange-tested betterment, or civil conversation, or voting constrained by minority rights. In a word, we should rely on the much-misunderstood "rhetoric." Humane liberalism is deeply rhetorical, the exploration (as Aristotle put it) of the available means of non-violent persuasion--what I'm doing right now, for example.

Yes, I know: some violence is necessary. Got it. But big, modern states depend on it too much. Little, non-modern states depended on it, too. States do. By contrast, the markets for goods and the markets for ideas depend on persuasion, "sweet talk." "Here's \$3." "Thank you, ma'am. Here's your de-caf caramel macchiato grande." "Libertarianism is actually the original theory of liberalism." "Oh, I see."

The Blessed Adam Smith recommended in 1776 "the liberal plan of equality, liberty, and justice." The first of Professor Smith's triad is equality in social standing, which he favored. A man's a man for a' that. The second—equal *liberty*—is the economic right you have, equal to anyone else's right, to open a grocery store when you want. The third, justice, is equality before the civil and criminal law, that is, the individual before the state. The justice of one citizen towards another, as Klein points out, is "commutative" justice (procedural as against distributive justice), which Klein summarizes in the modern idiom as "not messing with other people's stuff."

The theme, you see, is equality derived from the equal natural rights of each of us. Smith and his avant-garde contemporaries from Voltaire to Mary Wollstonecraft were voluntaristic egalitarians. They were persuaders, not enforcers, using rhetoric, not guns. Smith's first job was teaching rhetoric to Scottish boys. In a fitful development after 1776 "liberalism," from a *liberalitas* long understood by the slave-holding ancients as "a characteristic of a non-slavish person," came to mean the theory of a society with free people only. No slavery at all. No pushing around. Sweet talk. Persuasion. Humane. Voluntary. Minimal violence. No racism. No dominance of women by men. No imperialism. No messing with other people's stuff. Maximum liberty to pursue your own projects consistent with other people's projects. It is the best version of being an American, or a human.

¹ See his lecture at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-wl4SFggM4&feature=youtu.be&t=321>

New in the eighteenth century, for two centuries humane liberalism has worked astonishingly well. Yet by the late 1800s in the United Kingdom and the United States the Fabians and the Progressives in Britain and America redefined liberalism as slow socialism. They advocated a régime of pushing around, with little voluntary agreement about it—a higher and higher share of national income spent by the government out of coerced taxes, a higher and higher share of personal income transferred to favored people, more regulation of one's stuff by experts imposed on more people, more "protection" offered to this or that group, more police-enforced licensing of occupations, more armies, more nationalization. Thus "liberalism" as defined nowadays in the United States. David Boaz quotes the great economist Joseph Schumpeter's witticism about the theft of the word "liberal": "As a supreme, if unintended, compliment, the enemies of private enterprise have thought it wise to appropriate its label."² Slow socialism, and then a conservative nationalism, too, had the unintended effect of crowding out the devices of a free people, such as families as ethical schools or self-provision for old age or trade-union insurance against unemployment or a prudent wariness about foreign adventures. It crowded out, too, a serious debate on the devices of liberty and government, yielding harsh dogmatisms of left and right.

The High Liberals, and then also their enemies the Burkean Conservatives, seized what they imagined to be the ethical high ground. "Our motives for extending the scope of violence are pure and paternalistic," the Fabians and Progressives have been saying since around 1900, joining in this the Conservatives since Thomas Carlyle. "Our policy of coercion is designed to help the pathetic, childlike poor, so incapable of taking care of themselves. Leaving matters to them and their markets is dangerous, unlike domestic compulsion and foreign wars. You Liberals 1.0 do not agree. Why should we listen to such bad people?"

Yet as the great (American-definition) liberal Lionel Trilling wrote in 1950, the danger is that "we who are liberal and progressive know that the poor are our equals in every sense except that of being equal to us." It is an attitude detected in 2016 by the Trump voter. Elsewhere Trilling wrote that "we must be aware of the dangers that lie in our most generous wishes," because "when once we have made our fellow men the object of our enlightened interest [we] go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion."³ Every nurse or mother knows the danger. And when she loves for the beloved's own sake, she resists it.

The progressives and the conservatives kindly left the word "libertarianism," finally adopted in the 1950s, for the mere Liberals 1.0 who followed Smith and John Stuart Mill, such as the economist Milton Friedman all his life, the philosopher Robert Nozick in his early middle age, and me in my maturity. My father was an eminent political scientist, a New-Deal Democrat drifting rightward, and I vividly remember him around 1960 using "libertarian" as a term of contempt. For a long time it kept me from taking humane liberalism seriously.

Age 16 or 17, I was a Joan-Baez socialist, singing the labor songs. I dreamt I saw Joe Hill. Then in college, the better to help the poor—which remains my objective, as of all us humane liberals (though we want to *actually* help, rather than merely signal how very charitable we conceive ourselves to be)—I majored in economics and became a standard-issue Keynesian. I

² Boaz 2015, p. 34.

³ Seaton 1996, p. 35, which alerted me to Trilling's worry. The references are to Trilling's essay on Henry James, "Princess Casamassima," and "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," both in Trilling 1950.

was making my fellows the object of my pity, then of my newly acquired wisdom, ultimately of my coercion.

One of us three college roommates, the electrical engineer, used to read the libertarian Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action* (1949) in breaks from working on second order differential equations. I remember him leaning back in his arm chair his feet up on the desk, smoking Galoises cigarettes, with the old black-bound edition perched on his knees. The other roommate and I, both leaning left, both studying economics à la Harvard College in the early 1960s, scorned the engineer's non-orthodox, voluntaristic, and "rightwing" economics. We favored instead coercion in the style of Keynes and Samuelson and Stiglitz. Yet in truth the engineer learned more of the economics of a free society from Mises during work breaks than the two of us did in hundreds of class hours majoring in the field.

A couple of years later, in graduate school, still at Harvard, I aimed to become a *social engineer*, eager to join the other elite economists, except from the University of Chicago and UCLA and Virginia and a few other schools, in "fine tuning" the economy down in Washington. Yet it started to dawn on me what the core of economics – see *Human Action*, in the tradition of liberalism 1.0 – was actually saying. It was denying the very premise of social engineering, left and right, that the social engineer, as again the Blessed Smith put it, "can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board." And just then the social engineering on display, such as the American invasion of Vietnam, didn't seem to be working out as planned. By the time in 1968 I got my first academic job, at that same University of Chicago, a version of humane liberalism as against coercive social engineering was making sense.

Chicago was still then notorious at Harvard for being "conservative." Five years earlier, in the fall of 1963 as a Keynesian leftie, I had not even considered applying to Chicago's large graduate program. Why listen to such bad people? But ten years after rejecting the Chicago school, I was its graduate director. The Dutch say, *Van het concert des levens krijgt niemand een program*: In the concert of life no one gets a program. You're telling me.

By the late 1960s, then, I was a Chicago-School economist, and in the uses of supply and demand I remain one to this day. As a rough guide to the working for the good of ordinary people of market economies such as those of Sweden or Japan or the United States, the supply-and-demand argument has never been overturned scientifically, despite what you may have heard from Paul Krugman or Robert Reich (McCloskey 2016N). My earliest big paper in economic history, entitled "Did Victorian Britain Fail?" (1970), was an early "supply -side" rejection of using the Keynesian demand-side economics for the long run. Krugman might want to have a look at it. Another paper a few years later, "New Perspectives on the Old Poor Law" (1973), distinguished the bad effects arising from fiddling with the wage bargain (as does now the minimum wage, along with other "protections") from the good effects of giving a cash subsidy to the poor to bring them up to a respectable standard. Reich might want to have a look at it. The cash subsidy is what the left and right in economics have been calling since the 1950s the "negative income tax," such as the \$9 a month the Indian government proposes to replace hundreds of corrupt and cumbersome subsidies.

The essence of real, humane liberalism is a small government, honest and effective in its modest realm. Otherwise, leave the people alone, *laissez faire*. It's not true, as slow socialists argue, that taxation by government is innocent because it is voted on by "us" and anyway gives back services. Did you vote for the 97,000 pages of new regulations promulgated by the Federal

government during the year 1996? Did even your representatives in Congress or the White House know what's in them?

One strand in liberal theory after John Locke in the 1690s is the notion that government is composed of ethical philosopher-monarchs, who can be trusted therefore with a government spending or distributing 40 percent of what we make, and regulating much of the rest. It's higher in France (Henry Kissinger joked that France was the only successful communist country). When the head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Margaret A. Hamburg, retired in 2015 she bragged on National Public Radio that she had regulated a third of the American economy. That's accurate. Was she a wholly ethical and wholly wise philosopher queen? Such a notion has been shown by experience, lately theorized as "public-choice" economics, to be naïve. The naïveté is well illustrated by the adventures of the U.S. Constitution from the Alien and Sedition Act to Donald Trump. The kings and queens and tsars are regularly corrupted by governmental power, the tempting ability to compel by violence. And anyway a governor does not have to be careful with other people's money. She grows proud in her "programs" to spend it, and in her power to enforce her decisions. Power, you might say, tends to corrupt.

As Thomas Paine wrote in the birth year of 1776, "government even in its best state is but a necessary evil, in its worst state an intolerable one." Better keep it small. By 1849, at the first flowering of liberalism 1.0, Thoreau could declare, "I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically." In that same year in far Turin the great liberal economist of Italy, Francesco Ferrara, wrote that "taxation is the great source of everything a corrupt government can devise to the detriment of the people. Taxation supports the spy, encourages the faction, dictates the content of newspapers" (Ferrara 1849 in Mingardi 2017, p. 29).

Reducing the size and power to do violence of government is even at this late hour a practical object – achievable by parts whether or not a Painean or Thoreauesque or Ferrarite ideal is attained. It's not true that the more complicated an economy is the more regulatory attention it needs from the governors. Rather the contrary. A complicated economy far exceeds the ability of any collection of human intellects to govern in detail. A life or a home or even a company might be so governed – though any adult knows that even little societies are hard to plan in detail, and offer endless surprises.⁴ You get no program. But governing the billions of shifting plans by the 324 million individuals of the American economy, much less nation-building abroad, no – because, as Smith again put it, "in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own." And that is as it should be, in a liberal society in which people are taken to be free and equal.

What to do? Cut the multiple levels of corrupt government in Illinois. Kill off the vast programs of corporate welfare, federal and state and local. Close the agricultural programs, which let farmers farm the government instead of the land. Sell off "public" assets such as roads and bridges, which can in the age of electronic transponders be better priced by private enterprise. Restrain the American empire. Abandon the War on Drugs. Give up eminent domain and civil forfeiture and military tanks for local police. Implement the notion of Catholic social thought of "subsidiarity," by placing the modest responsibilities, such as trash collection

⁴ The libertarian Charles Koch therefore proposes to run companies the way markets run themselves. Cite

or fire protection, down at the lowest level of government that can handle them properly. Then outsource the trash collection and fire protection. To finance education, give every poor family a voucher to cash in at private schools, such as Sweden has done since the 1990s. For universal elementary education and a select few other such noble purposes, tax you and me. But eliminate the damned inquisitorial income tax, replacing it with a tax on personal consumption on a one-page form, preferably as a purchase tax on businesses, in order to reduce the scale of personal inquisition. Eliminate the corporate income tax, because it is double taxation and because economists have no idea who pays it. Give a poor person cash in emergencies, from taxes on you and me, and quit obsessing about whether she spends it on booze or Fritos. Leave her and her family alone. No pushing around.

A government does of course "have a role"--as in their irritated reply my progressive and conservative friends put it to me, relentlessly. Yes, by all means protect us from force and fraud, though of course private arrangements such as locks on doors and high-reputation suppliers and competition in markets accomplish such protections in most cases better than courts and police. Do protect us from invasion by the wild, toque-wearing Canadians and, rather more urgently, from nuclear threats by the Russians. Protect us especially from government itself, from its violations of basic civil rights such as abridging the right to vote or suspending the right to habeas corpus.

And especially the government should leave off giving *economic* "protection," such as President Trump promises against the terrible intrusions by Chinese and Mexicans who sell us long ties for men and good parts for cars at low prices. As in Mafia usage, "protection" is regularly corrupted for the benefit of the rich. It acts as a tax on enterprise and violates the equal liberty of others, whether Americans or foreigners, to compete without violence in offering good deals to consumers. Such taxation is of course the very purpose of the Mafia extracting protection money by making you an offer you can't refuse, and is the purpose, too, of the Chicago City Council preventing by ordinance the poor-person-supplying WalMart from opening in town. Extortion and protection puts a fatal drag on progress, stopping people with new ideas from competing for our purchases.

Would you want governmental "protection" from new ideas in science, or music, or cooking? Probably not. Would you "buy American" in music or spices or surgical innovations? No. As another Italian liberal, and anti-fascist, Benedetto Croce, put it in 1928, "Ethical liberalism abhors authoritarian regulation of the economic process, because it considers it a humbling of the inventive faculties of man" (quoted in Mingardi 2017, p. 25). In order to protect the Postal Service's monopoly, inspectors in trench coats used to go around in December putting the arm on little children distributing Christmas cards for free in mailboxes. In Tennessee by law nowadays any new furniture moving company must get permission from the existing companies to open. Economic protection as actually implemented—contrary to the wise and ethical and innocent philosopher kings and queens imagined at the blackboard or the lectern, or on the political stump—hurts the helpless much more than it helps them. Job protections, for example, have created in Greece and South Africa and the slums of America a dangerously large class of unemployed young people. A quarter of French people under 25-years old and out of school are unemployed, because jobs in France are protected. The bosses fear to hire, and the workers therefore cling to the wrong jobs.

Yet helping people in a crisis, or raising them up from grave disadvantage, in the form of money to be spent in unprotected markets, is certainly in order. Give money to rent a home

privately, for example. (Don't give public housing making the poor into serfs of the government.) Libertarians have a reputation for not being charitable, as being mere apologists for rich people. Not so. Dr. Adam Smith was much given to acts of secret charity. The billionaire Charles Koch, demonized on the radical left, has given for fifty years many billions to causes such as the United Negro College Fund. A lack of concern for others is not at all implied by humane liberalism, or by Christian libertarianism.

Ayn Rand had here a bad effect, with her masculinist doctrine of selfishness, and her uniformly male and self-absorbed heroes in her novels ever-popular with college freshmen. Especially men. Senator *Rand* Paul in his run for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 got far fewer votes from women than from men. Yet his policies of stopping the drug war against Black families and reducing the flow of body bags from foreign wars, like most of his proposals, were the most family-friendly on offer. As for charity, Dr. Paul regularly contributes his skill as an eye surgeon to performing sight-saving operations in poor countries. I urge him, for the sake of our shared humane liberalism, to ditch that misleading "Rand," and change his first name to, say, Adam.

Mainly let people create a growing economy, as they did spectacularly from 1800 to the present, when a new liberalism inspired the masses to invent betterments and open new enterprises and move to new jobs. It happened despite the nudging and protecting and regulating and subsidizing and prohibiting from politicians and bureaucrats and thugs armed with a monopoly of violence. The government choosing of winners in the economy, for instance, called these days "industrial policy," seldom works. Why would choosing winners work, actually? Why would someone high up in the government, supposing she is motivated ethically, know better what would be a good idea to buy and sell than someone out in the market facing prices that register cost and value? As the economist Don Lavoie concluded from a detailed study in 1985, "any attempt by a single agency to steer an economy constitutes a case of the blind leading the sighted."⁵

The strange hubris of industrial planning is an old story. The British mercantilism that Adam Smith scorned was an instance. In the United States in the nineteenth century the "internal improvements" financed by the government were mostly bad ideas (such as Ohio canals in the 1830s) and were mostly corrupted into favors for the few (ditto). Under the Obama administration the Solyndra fiasco gave away a \$535 million loan from the government to subsidize U.S.-made solar panels, panels promptly undersold by the Chinese. Both big political parties do it. A humane liberal party would not.

Worry not at all about inequality if it is achieved by smart betterment. Inequality dissipates in a couple of generations, and often enough in a couple of years, through the entry of imitating betterments, which spread the benefit to us all in the consequent lower prices and higher quality. Entry is not hypothetical: it has been economic history since the beginning, when not blocked by monopolies supported by the monopoly of violence. The economist William Nordhaus reckons that inventors in the U.S. since World War II have kept only about 2 percent of the social value of the betterment they produce.⁶ Look at your computer. Local fortunes were once built on local banking and local department stores. Their business models were soon imitated, and at length bettered, and anyway were eroded from the beginning by

⁵ Lavoie, Don. 1985. *National Economic Planning: What is Left?* Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, p. 4.

⁶ cite

falling transport costs. The market share of United States Steel attained its highest level, two thirds of all steel made in America, on the day it was founded in 1901. It fell steadily thereafter, as Bethlehem and other steel competed. Look at the thirty companies in the Dow Jones industrial average. Only five date from before the 1970s. The twenty-five others have been replaced by such "industrials" as Visa and Verizon and Coca Cola.

The sheer passage of human generations works, too. How many rich Carnegies do you know of? Andrew could have made his daughter and her four children and their children, or for that matter his cousins back in Scotland, fabulously wealthy. But he didn't. Instead he built the library in Wakefield, Massachusetts in which I found and devoured at age fifteen Prince Peter Kropotkin's anarchist classic, *Mutual Aid*. If you want to see how dissipation of wealth through families works, look at the Wikipedia entry for "Vanderbilt Family," noting that old Cornelius (1794-1877), the richest American, had fully thirteen children (pity Mrs. Sophia Johnson Vanderbilt). His great-great-granddaughter, Gloria Vanderbilt (born 1924), made her own money by providing goods and service that people were willing to pay for. Her son Anderson Cooper of CNN did so, too.

But do worry about inequality if it is achieved by using the government to get favors, which is what a large government, well worth capturing, is mainly used for, to the detriment of the people. Guilds and other government regulations help the rich, and anyway help the politicians enforcing them. How many Huey and Earl and other Longs have dominated Louisiana politics since the 1920s? Look at Wikipedia for that one, too. Observe that such inherited political power allied to corruption is ancient. Political candidates in the Roman Republic routinely bought votes, and anyway the rich had more power in the system of voting itself. There is nothing new about politicians and businesses and billionaires buying Congress for special treatment, and gerrymandering the voting system to boot. Mark Twain said "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly American criminal class except Congress." Better keep it small.

Understand that the greatest challenges facing humankind are *not* terrorism or inequality or crime or population growth or climate change or slowing productivity or the breakdown of family values or whatever new pessimism our friends on the left or right will come up with next, about which they will write urgent editorials until the next "challenge" justifying government compulsion swims into their ken. The greatest challenges are today and have always been poverty and tyranny. Eliminate poverty with liberal economic growth, as in China and India nowadays and in the pioneering instances back to Holland in the seventeenth century, and you get equality of real comfort, the educating of engineers to control flooding and now to lessen global warming. You get stunning cultural enrichments, the end of terrorism, and the fall of tyrants. Eliminate tyranny, replacing it with liberalism 1.0, and you get the Great Enrichment and the rise of liberty seen in the past two centuries. By contrast, keep on with various versions of old fashioned kingship, or with slow or fast socialism, with their poverty-producing policies--in its worst forms military socialism or tribal tyranny, and in its best a stifling regulation of new cancer drugs by the Food and Drug Administration, and you get none of them.

That's the agenda. I realize that you will find some of the items hard to swallow, because you've been told by progressive friends that "we" need to have "programs" and "regulations," or the sky will fall. Or from the conservative side you have been told that "we" need anyway to occupy and govern by the gun all sorts of communities of poor people, among

them from our 800 military bases worldwide those lesser breeds without the law. You may view as shocking the contrary proposals to let people alone to flourish in a liberal economy – right-wing madness, you will say, enriching the rich; or left-wing madness, leading to chaos. Liberalism has allowed monopoly to increase, you will say from the left. (It has not.) Liberalism has allowed terrorism to increase, you will say from the right. (It has not.) If you cannot actually think of any fact-based arguments, maybe you will assert anyway that humane liberalism is impractical, out of date, nineteenth-century, old-fashioned, a dead parrot.

But you owe it to the seriousness of your political ideas, my friends, to listen, and to think. Lavoie also noted "the impossibility of refuting a theory without first trying to see the world through its lenses" (1985, p. 8). Try out the lenses, too.

§

I have revised the essays to clear out repetitions, unless they are good repetitions. To make smoother a consecutive reading I've arranged the essays into a moderately coherent argument, the skeleton of which you can see by reading the table of contents. But I'm not claiming the book was through-written. It wasn't. The trilogy *The Bourgeois Era* [2006, 2010, 2016] was, as was the book *Art Carden and I wrote* [2018] as a popular and business-oriented version of the trilogy, *Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich: The Bourgeois Deal*. The present book, on an explicitly political theme (though using some of their facts and argument), is a collection of previous published essays. Part of the thrilling drama here is watching the rather obvious ideas emerge in my slow-thinking mind, as I changed gender, became a Christian, embarked on explaining the wealth of nations, saw the eighteenth-century light.

My historical and political ideas about liberalism, in other words, developing over the past two decades, have found varied expression. Consequently the prose is not uniform in tone, though I've edited it here and there to approach uniformity. The essays are "occasional," that is, occasioned by this or that invitation to sound off. They range from popular journalism, as in such similar outlets as *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*, to academic pieces defending what I regard as the foundations of a free society. In other words, each essay has its own little arc of argument, and often its own style, about political philosophy, or gay rights, or economic history, or economic growth, or Michael Sandel, or Thomas Piketty. To imagine the occasion, I provide a sentence or two at the beginning of each.

Disparate though they are in occasion, the essays point repeatedly to a single theme, to the liberalism born in the eighteenth century (so original am I), an idea which was slowly implemented, with many false turns, after 1776. And the essays exhibit my realization, which arrived in 2005 or so, that the implementation explains most good features of the modern world – especially its economic success and its arts and sciences, and its liberation of slaves, women, minorities, colonial peoples, gays and lesbians, the handicapped, and above all the poor.

It is an optimistic book, piercing the sky-is-falling gloom which seems always to have a ready market, but which is ready to be used by populists and other tyrants and anyway even by good-hearted slow socialists and moderate authoritarians to push people around, by first terrifying them. I claim that we are *not* doomed by the New Challenges. On the contrary, if we do not shoot ourselves in our feet--a lively possibility, since we have done it before, by way of nationalism and socialism and national socialism--we will rejoice over the next fifty or a hundred years in the enrichment of the now-poor, a permanent liberation of the wretched of the

earth, and a cultural explosion in arts and sciences and crafts and entertainments beyond compare.

I try to be fair, and try not to preach too much to the choir. My motto was articulated in 1983 by the philosopher and anthropologist Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. What is crucial is "our ability to engage in continuous conversation, testing one another, discovering our hidden presuppositions, changing our minds because we have listened to the voices of our fellows. Lunatics also change their minds, but their minds change with the tides of the moon and not because they have listened, really listened, to their friends' questions and objections" (Rorty 1983, p. 562).

Rorty's is a lofty standard, which I apologize for not always attaining. But I do hope we agree that it is a standard to be aimed at--as against resting comfortably at sneering and dogmatism and party passion and Russian disinformation campaigns. I am earnestly trying to convert you to a humane liberalism, which I believe you harbor anyway. I don't really think that you love pushing people around with a prison-industrial complex or with collateral damage from drone strikes. Yet I try to listen, really listen, to your questions and objections. To that end I include interviews by journalists giving voice to the well-intentioned but often illiberal objections you imagine you have to a free society.

You will judge my degree of success. If I've succeeded you will come away from the book less confident in your progressivism or your conservatism or even your amiable middle-of-the-road-ism. You will realize that they all depend to a greater or lesser degree on an exercise of the monopoly of violence. You will come to admire a liberal rhetoric. You will become much less sure than you are now that The Problem is "capitalism" or the Enlightenment, or that liberty can be Taken Too Far, or that government programs, protections, regulations, and prohibitions, are usually innocent exercises by wise bureaucrats to better the lives of Americans.

With an open mind and a generous heart, my dears, you will slip towards a humane real liberalism, 1.0. Welcome, then, to a society held together by sweet talk rather than by violence.