Liberalism and the Modern Quest for Freedom

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The effort to reclaim liberalism will require some understanding of what *kind* of liberalism to reclaim. What is liberalism? What has happened historically such that it needs to be reclaimed? These turn out to be difficult questions. In this essay I propose a theoretical account of liberalism, a way of understanding what it is and why it has undergone such dramatic changes over the course of its history. At the heart of my account is the claim that liberalism did not come into being as an independent historical phenomenon but was rather a contingent aspect of a much broader, more powerfully sweeping historical movement, the "modern quest for freedom," which predates liberalism, gives rise to it, and eventually overtakes it—at which point the quest for freedom itself (notoriously) retains the name "liberalism" in the United States for reasons partly principled, partly expedient.[1] The theory of liberalism on offer here occupies the bulk of this essay, but it is not the only contribution I hope to make. My account of liberalism facilitates a unique assessment of some of

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its current weaknesses. And this in turn makes possible a concrete analysis of what an effort to reclaim liberalism might look like. In the end, I argue that the politics of warring freedoms (what contemporary liberalism has in part become) should give way to a markedly different conception of politics, which I call the politics of liberal truce.

Puzzles

A common way of understanding liberalism and its history is to distinguish between "classical" and "new"—classical liberalism emphasizing freedom from the state, especially in economics (*laissez faire*); "new" liberalism (sometimes called social liberalism) emphasizing social solidarity and individual welfare, using the state to regulate and distribute goods.[2] This is no doubt a helpful distinction, capturing a monumental shift in the focus of liberalism at or around the beginning of the twentieth century. But as a way of understanding liberalism's history in general, it leaves much to be desired. What gave rise to classical liberalism in the first place? Why does classical liberalism emphasize economic freedom instead of other "classic" freedoms such as religious liberty, freedom from foreign domination, and freedom from tyrannical rule?[3] Under what pressures did classical liberalism give way to the more collectivist and statist "new liberalism"? Why has this so-called new liberalism not remained dominant but instead given way (as it has to some extent) to even newer liberal trends, from sexual revolution to civil rights to identity politics and "LGBTQIA+" issues?

These questions cannot be answered by pointing to the distinction between classical liberalism and new. In fact, the history of liberalism is more complex than any binary distinction can capture, including that equally popular distinction made famous by Isaiah Berlin between "negative" and "positive" liberty (Berlin 1969). Perhaps one reason why such distinctions fail to capture liberalism's complexity is that they were never meant to do so. They were rather forged at moments of conflict within liberalism and were intended rhetorically to carry normative weight. Those who promoted the term "new liberalism" were *recommending* it,

not engaging in disinterested analysis.[4] So too with the defenders of "classical liberalism." And Isaiah Berlin was not making a merely academic distinction when he separated liberty into negative and positive varieties; he was making a moral argument.

It follows that those of us who wish to "reclaim" liberalism will need a better, less tendentious way of understanding its history. We should begin by frankly admitting that terms like classical and new, positive and negative, are not the same as true and false or good and bad. Liberalism, as Michael Freeden has persuasively argued, is an "essentially contested concept" (Freeden 1996, ch. 2, 2005, pp. 131–143; cf. Gallie 1955–56). There is no uncontroversial *essence* of liberalism to reclaim (Gottfried 1999, p. 28).

An Account of Liberalism

But important insights into liberalism emerge when it is considered in the context of the broader, constantly evolving quest for freedom that has been and continues to be a prominent feature of modernity in the West. Over the course of modern history individuals and groups in the West have agitated for various kinds of freedom and endeavored to secure these both theoretically and practically. Below is a list of nine distinct kinds of freedom arranged in rough chronological order, accompanied by a characteristic thinker or set of thinkers commonly associated with each:

1. Freedom from religious domination (Luther)
2. Freedom from foreign domination (Machiavelli, enshrined at Westphalia)
3. Freedom from religious civil war (Bodin, Hobbes)
4. Freedom from arbitrary rule, tyranny (Locke)
5. Freedom from government interference in the economy (Smith, Say, Cobden)
6. Freedom from rule by another, that is, by some person or group that does not include oneself or one's representative (Rousseau, Publius, Kant)

7. Freedom from economic exploitation by privileged social groups (Marx, Green, Hobhouse)
8. Freedom from discrimination based on the moral prejudices of privileged social groups (Mill)
9. Freedom from biological inequality and constraint (Nick Bostrom and the transhumanists)

What is the relationship between this historical stream of freedoms and liberalism? The answer is complex but not unfathomable. Liberalism as a self-conscious movement, a set of ideas and practices bearing the name "liberal," appeared on the scene in the early nineteenth century (more about its debut below).[5] Its aim was the advancement of the political and economic freedoms (numbers 4 and 5) whose philosophical articulation had already begun up to a century before liberalism itself became self-conscious. From its inception, moreover, liberalism quickly latched onto all the movements of freedom that preceded it in the West (freedoms 1–3) and made these a part of its platform. Nascent liberalism, in other words, embraced religious freedom, freedom from foreign domination, and freedom from civil war. But here one must be careful not to suppose that the original advocates of these pre-liberal freedoms—thinkers such as Martin Luther, Niccolò Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes—were *themselves* liberal.[6] In fact, they neither knew of "liberalism" nor would have approved of much of its political content. Nevertheless, during the nineteenth century, self-styled "liberals" latched onto these prior freedoms and managed to blend them into a doctrinal and practical amalgam along with political and economic freedoms.

What happened next to liberalism accounts for much of the confusion surrounding the term. To some extent, the liberals of the nineteenth century attempted to arrest the flow of the modern quest for freedom. They tried to freeze it at the exact point of freedoms 1–5. But they were not successful. For reasons I explore below, partly practical, partly psychological, citizens of liberal regimes in the West refused to suspend the quest for freedom at the point of freedoms 4 and 5. Instead, they pressed for "democratic" freedoms, "social" freedoms, and more. The fact that this development occurred in every liberal state in the West is one indication—perhaps even a proof—of my claim that liberalism did not arise as

an independent historical phenomenon, but was rather from the start a contingent aspect of a broader historical movement.

One may wonder: if the modern quest for freedom passed beyond liberalism, why does the word "liberalism" continue to be used today? What do contemporary authors mean when they write about liberalism's "future" (Wolfe 2010) or its "end" (Lowi 1969) or its "failure" (Deneen 2018), as if liberalism were still an extant political category? The answer is that when the modern quest for freedom began to overtake liberalism in the early twentieth century, the advocates of the newer freedoms, especially in the United States, retained the word "liberalism" (some would say *usurped* it) to describe their new socio-political ideals. This in effect means that liberalism today has three distinct significations. It may refer (1) to the theory and practice of social organization that prioritizes the first five liberties on the list above. Or (2) it may refer to the effort in theory and practice to advance newer freedoms either singly or in combination. (In this case, defense of the first five freedoms appears "conservative.") Or it may refer (3) to the overarching character of regimes that have been and still are living on this historical trajectory. The second and third senses of "liberalism" will be of particular interest in the final, more evaluative sections of this essay.

Two more features of my account need to be mentioned. The first is the phenomenon of *liberal accretion*. This refers to the fact that as new freedoms are pursued over the course of liberalism's history, older freedoms do not cease to be politically relevant but rather continue to attract adherents and are typically even *enlarged* beyond their initial scope. For example, religious freedom (freedom 1), which aimed initially at securing a place for Lutheran worship in a hegemonically Catholic world, over time came to include a place for numerous other Protestant sects, and eventually expanded into a blanket doctrine of "toleration." I shall comment on the development over time of particular kinds of freedom below, but for now let me suggest that "liberal accretion" presents a serious problem, one which liberal writers have historically tended to ignore. Liberal writers and activists alike have tended to adopt what I call the "harmony assumption," the belief that all freedoms are inherently compatible. But all freedoms are *not* compatible. Thus the more freedoms liberalism takes on, the more do problematic clashes of freedom arise within liberalism

itself—sites of conflict where the practical incompatibility of certain freedoms must somehow be resolved. I shall return to the problem of warring freedoms near the end of this essay.

The final feature of liberalism I want to mention is the engine or engines that drive its change. What animates the choices made by those who endeavor to alter the character of liberalism? Even more broadly, what motivates the constantly changing character of the modern quest for freedom? Certainly, one way to answer this question is to notice that large-scale revolutions such as the Reformation, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution, bring unintended, negative or problematic consequences in their wake. On this account, the pursuit of new kinds of freedom may sometimes be motivated by the fact that the pursuit of earlier freedoms resulted in unexpected forms of servitude or dependence. For instance, the Industrial Revolution certainly produced unintended levels of social upheaval, geographical dislocation, and poverty among the working class. It makes sense, then, to suppose that the desire for the seventh kind of freedom (freedom from economic exploitation) arose partially in response to the unintended consequences associated with the fifth form of freedom (freedom from government interference in the economy). I try to show below (section "Illustrations of the Nine Freedoms: The Rise and Development of Liberalism") that this kind of account does shed considerable light on some developments in the history of the modern quest for freedom. But it is not exhaustive, and I am inclined to look elsewhere for other factors.

Beyond unintended consequences there appears to be something psychological at work, a kind of "eudaimonic expectation" that develops as the quest for freedom proceeds. At the outset of modern history this expectation is notably absent. The freedoms being agitated for were perceived as rather *existentially* needful, not a recipe for happiness. The quest for religious freedom, for instance, was a quest for salvation, eternal life, not a quest for worldly happiness per se. Freedom from foreign domination was similarly a matter of national *existence*; so too with freedom from civil war. But after these initial freedoms became relatively secure, the character of the quest for freedom seems gradually to have changed. It seems to have become increasingly bound up with the hope

and expectation that new forms of freedom would somehow bring happiness and fulfillment in their wake. And yet they never do. Rather, each newly secured freedom gives way eventually to a vague sense of disappointment: Freedom achieved, where is the expected result? It is not hard to imagine how liberals who felt such disappointment might search for, and then discover, certain new, previously undetected forms of constraint that now appear to stand intolerably in the way of genuine freedom and fulfillment. On this account, some of the later changes that occur in the modern quest for freedom seem to be driven by the alluring dream of human perfection. More on this below in section "Assessing Contemporary Liberalism."

Cautions

If this account of liberalism has any degree of illuminative power, as I hope it does, it certainly does not illuminate everything; and I want to be clear about the limits of what I am offering.

First, my inventory of modern freedoms is not meant to be exhaustive but merely indicative. I have tried to include enough freedoms to illustrate the existence of this distinct thread of modernity and to show the point at which liberalism arises within it. Moreover, I have *not* tried to include in my account other important liberal goods besides freedom (for instance, equality and justice), though these would have to be factored into a fuller account. I have, however, noticed an interesting phenomenon on this score, which is that when goods such as equality and justice become the focus of liberal debate, they tend to be defended not for their intrinsic worth but for the contribution they make to a fuller, more humane kind of freedom.[7] Freedom, in other words, in all its variety, seems to be the basal good of liberalism.

Another cautionary remark about the freedoms on my list is that they are more like families of freedoms than individual freedoms. For instance, "religious freedom" includes within it such particulars as freedom of worship; freedom of belief; and freedom to live out one's belief in society by evangelizing, for instance, or engaging in conscientious objection. All the freedoms listed above prove similarly multiform. This will be important

when it comes to considering the potential conflicts within and among liberal freedoms.

Next, extreme caution must be taken with respect to chronology. Though I present the freedoms above in a "rough chronological order," this in fact requires a *significant* degree of abstraction from historical particulars. I am confident that this act of abstraction is useful for purposes of analysis, but I do not wish to mislead. In England, the United States, France, Spain, and Germany (the countries I have studied) the exact ordering of modern freedoms varies for reasons peculiar to each country.[8] The actual history is much more contingent than any uniform list can convey. And yet to present the evolving quest for freedom in a rough chronological order remains useful if only to dispel the tendency to view liberalism *a-historically* as a free-floating set of "basic liberties" (Rawls 1971; 1993) or, worse, as a univocal "theory" of some kind (Deneen 2018). Liberalism is not *a theory*, though it certainly has theoretical content. It is rather a messy admixture of thoughts and practices that develop over time, simultaneously affecting and being affected by competing thoughts and practices.

With respect to these competing thoughts and practices still more cautions are in order. In the account of liberalism above, I have deliberately kept my gaze fixed firmly on the movement for freedom. But this quest for freedom is by no means the only feature of modernity; and significant developments within liberalism would not be fully intelligible without broadening the analysis. For instance, I have not factored in the power of such restraining forces as conservatism, reaction, skepticism, and religious revival, even though these have had a considerable impact on the character of Western liberalism. Similarly, liberalism's shift from "classical" freedoms to "new" could scarcely be intelligible without considering the exogenous influence of socialist thought in the West and various practices of collectivism taking shape in non-liberal countries such as Soviet Russia and Fascist Italy.[9] To attain a fuller understanding of the history of liberalism one would certainly have to consider the numerous competing forces in opposition or apposition to which it partly defines itself.

With all these cautions in mind, is the account of liberalism on offer here still worth anything? Obviously, I think it is. But perhaps I can make its worth seem less dubious if I say a word about "understandings." The

achievement of an understanding (such as this account of liberalism) does not exclude the possibility of other understandings. Nor need these alternatives be incompatible rivals. It is possible to understand a phenomenon in multiple ways, each furnishing its own kind of illumination. The test of an understanding is thus not whether it removes controversy, explains *everything*, or commands consensus, but rather whether it throws fresh light on a subject that would otherwise remain obscure. The task I have set for myself in offering this account of liberalism is thus to achieve some degree of illumination and, simultaneously, to facilitate the substantive philosophical criticism of liberalism to which I turn in section "Assessing Contemporary Liberalism."

Illustrations of the Nine Freedoms: The Rise and Development of Liberalism

In this section I try to fill out my account of liberalism by viewing its relationship to the modern quest for freedom in slightly more specific terms. What I offer here is *not a history*, though I adduce historical examples. Rather, I intend (1) to *illustrate* the nine kinds of freedom, (2) to show that each freedom, once introduced, does not vanish but rather continues to develop over time, and (3) to show how "liberalism" appears and develops within this broader movement of freedoms. Along the way, I comment on some of the reasons why a strictly linear presentation of modern freedoms (such as the overly simplistic list above) distorts historical reality.

Freedom 1: "Freedom from Religious Domination"

Religious freedom is frequently described as a "first freedom" for good reason. Not only was it the first to receive mention in the U.S. Bill of Rights, it was also the freedom that arguably gave birth to the modern quest for freedom in the West. This is a grand claim, and I do not mean to imply that the Protestant reformers intended to ignite what now seems a perpetual movement of freedom. Far from it. Yet their fateful act of

renouncing the religious and political authority of the Roman Catholic Church produced unintended consequences that likely necessitated or at least encouraged the pursuit of further freedoms (freedoms 2–4).[10]

Religious freedom at the time of the Reformation was not the sort of thing one typically thinks of today. As Lord Acton famously pointed out, the most influential of the magisterial reformers, Luther and Calvin, were themselves supporters of religious persecution—not of their own sects, of course, but of others (Acton 1907). One may thus say that early on, religious freedom "meant the right to dissent from Rome and to agree with Wittenberg." This "was for the times a new degree of religious freedom, and it brought about real and lasting change in contemporary religious life." And yet, "it was also a new bondage to a new dogmatic creed" (Ozment 2003, p. 77).

A more thoroughgoing religious freedom came only gradually and with much bloodshed. The principle, "cuius regio, eius religio" (princes have the right to determine the religion of their own state) did not emerge until the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, and even then was not consistently respected. The legal right of different Christian sects to practice their faith in private did not emerge until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and yet that treaty only recognized the legitimacy of Lutheranism, Catholicism, and Calvinism. Smaller sects such as the Anabaptists had no legal rights. In fact, full religious toleration in Europe was still a desideratum during most of the seventeenth century, as evinced by the persecution of the Huguenots in France and the Waldensians in the Piedmont in 1688. Thus, the movement for religious freedom that began at the time of the Reformation continued to develop over time and has, indeed, remained an active force in liberal politics today.

Freedom 2: "Freedom from Foreign Domination"

What I call "freedom 2" followed at least in part from the unintended consequences of freedom 1, because when the Protestant reformers attacked the authority of the Catholic Church, they attacked an indispensable part of the network of powers that had held European civilization together during the Middle Ages. For this reason, the Reformation

sparked a massive political crisis. As it happens, the Reformation coincided with a crisis of authority within the Holy Roman Empire, a conflict between Charles V's Spanish and German inheritances, and it exacerbated that crisis by enticing local dukes to challenge Charles' hegemony. In the wake of the Reformation the empire rapidly divided along religious lines, with southern and western regions remaining Catholic while the north, east, and many large cities became Protestant. For the next century and a half, Europe would be enveloped in wars to increase either the Catholic or the Protestant territories and to unify religion within state borders.

During this initial Reformation period, the problem of securing the state against foreign invasion (freedom 2) occupied the minds of Europe's most gifted statesmen and theorists. Machiavelli's best-known political texts, *The Prince* and *The Discourses on Livy* date precisely to this period and present the problem literally as a matter of freedom. Indeed, the final chapter of *The Prince* is a direct call "to liberate Italy" from foreign invaders (Machiavelli 1985, p. 101). Of course, the term "freedom" in Machiavelli's texts often refers to "republican freedom," the form of self-rule that, for instance, Florence managed to achieve for a period during Machiavelli's lifetime. But for Machiavelli such freedom was always a contingent and, ultimately, instrumental good. The overriding concern of his texts is with the freedom of the state itself as an entity continuing through time with the power to acquire. And Machiavelli makes clear that this demands that the constitution of the state (what he calls its "orders") be adaptable (a) to the moral conditions of its citizens and (b) to the geopolitical situation in which the state finds itself. Machiavelli wanted nothing more than a unified and freed Italy. He studied Livy because that Roman historian narrated the development of ancient Italy from a congeries of regional powers into a republic with the power to acquire and, finally, into an ever-expanding empire. Not since Livy's time had Italy been so united and free.

Another example of freedom 2 (this one practical rather than theoretical, and much further down the historical stream) was the Peace of Westphalia, negotiated in 1648, which legalized the concept of territorial sovereignty and forbade states from intervening in the affairs of other states. It is estimated that approximately eight million people perished

during the European wars of religion including the Thirty Years' War (Clodfelter 2017, p. 40). The treaties of Westphalia aimed at putting a stop to such bloodshed. This partly attests to the claim I made above, that originally the modern quest for freedom involved freedoms that were *existentially* needful.

Freedom 3: "Freedom from Religious Civil War"

Well prior to the Peace of Westphalia the quest for the third kind of freedom, release from religio-political conflict *within* states, had already begun. What this problem seemed to demand was a new understanding of the grounds of political authority for an age in which neither Pope nor Emperor commanded universal respect. And the problem was so keenly felt in the kingdom of France in the final quarter of the sixteenth century that it attracted the attention not only of the Politiques, but also of one of France's most talented political theorists, Jean Bodin. In his *Six Livres de la République* published in Paris in 1576 (four years after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre), Bodin distinguished between a happily homogeneous political association in which law, custom, language, and religion are uniform, and a more complicated kind of political association where sharp differences along these lines are reconciled within a self-sufficient whole called a state or commonwealth (*république*). Bodin went on to describe in great detail the appropriate form of political authority in a state, which he called *souveraineté*. And though he ascribed a virtually unlimited power to the sovereign, he did so in the belief that this would foster the possibility of different religions' living side by side under an authority that makes a place for them all.[11] Thomas Hobbes's (no doubt more familiar) theory of sovereignty contained in *De Cive* (1642) and *Leviathan* (1651) was animated by a similar concern for civil peace in an age of civil war, though his approach was to strive for religious settlement rather than toleration.

In the realm of political practice, the Edict of Nantes (1598) signed by Henry IV was not far from Bodin's vision and was aimed at lessening the threat of religious civil war. Later, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) also tried to address the problem by simultaneously bolstering the principle of

cuius regio, eius religio while guaranteeing (in section 28) rights of worship to Christians living in states where their sect was not the established church.

It is interesting to observe the dovetailing that occurs over time in the quests for freedom 1 (religious freedom) and freedom 3 (freedom from religious civil war). For it was not the doctrine of absolute sovereignty developed by Bodin and Hobbes that ultimately brought religious civil war under control in Europe (to the extent that it did come under control) but rather the development of a doctrine and practice of *toleration*. Certainly by the 1680s, toleration was being urged in Europe (especially in England and the Netherlands) not simply as a matter of religious principle, but as a carefully worked out *political* principle. John Locke in particular (though he was far from alone) had come to see that the use of absolute sovereignty in matters of religion was failing to produce either religious unity or relief from civil war. As a result, he studiously wagered that if religious differences were rather tolerated than repressed, they might eventually cease to erupt into violence (Kraynak 1980). This idea of toleration took time to catch on; and as recent historians have reminded us, the results were uneven well into the eighteenth century (Kaplan 2007, p. 352). But the main point I am making here is simply that the rise of toleration belongs as much to the third as it does to the first family of freedoms.

I have not yet commented on the endurance of the quest for freedom 3 over time. In one sense this freedom seems unique insofar as it was eventually *achieved*, even if it took time: religiously inspired civil wars came to an end. But this appearance recedes quickly upon reflection. The problem of religiously inspired civil unrest and even outright war continued to menace Western states well after Westphalia, and every effort to tamp it down constitutes an episode in the history of freedom 3. Moreover, if one takes a rather broader view of what is "religious" and includes the conflict between "secularism" and "religion" as an instance of religious civil war or at least "culture war," then it becomes clear that the effort to free ourselves from this socio-political problem is far from over. On the contrary, it sometimes seems as if contemporary politics is little more than a civil war by other means, a colossal struggle on the part of rival religious or quasi-religious factions for control of the state. Below I develop this thought into a more systematic critique of contemporary liberalism.

Freedom 4: "Freedom from Tyranny"

As the quest for freedom 3 ensued across Europe the desire was soon felt for another kind of freedom, namely, freedom from absolute, arbitrary rule. The desire for this freedom arose in part because the theory and practice of absolute sovereignty (including the theory of the divine right of kings) that accompanied the quest for freedom 3 was beginning to seem like something ominously familiar from ancient accounts of politics, namely "tyranny," that classical nemesis of freedom. What I call freedom 4—"freedom from arbitrary, tyrannical rule"—was thus directed at removing or at least constraining this source of oppression.

The instrument that was used, first in England, then in the United States, France, and Spain, was "constitutionalism." But here I must make an important distinction. When constitutionalism was used as a check on *monarchical* rule, it was indeed an instance of freedom 4. But constitutionalism could also be used as an instrument for new experiments in non-monarchical rule, such as the "commonwealth" in England, an extended republic in the United States, and a democracy in France. These ventures in republican and democratic politics are actually instances of the sixth kind of freedom, and I shall discuss them below under that head.

European history does not display a linear movement through freedoms 4–6, but rather a halting one with significant reversals under the general heading of "restoration." To make matters worse, the emergence of freedom 5, economic freedom, occurred roughly at the same time as freedoms 4 and 6. Thus, if one tries to present the history of these freedoms as sequential, one distorts their complex reality. I remind the reader, therefore, that I present them sequentially only for purposes of exposition and analysis.

The English Bill of Rights (1689) that was drawn up after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 constitutes a prime example of the constitutionalism associated with freedom 4. Of course, England had enjoyed a long history of medieval constitutionalism stretching back to the Magna Carta (1215). But under the pressure of Stuart absolutism in the seventeenth century, significant constitutional advances were made that were captured in the Bill of Rights: That document proscribes royal interference with the law, bans the monarch from establishing new courts or acting as

judge, disallows taxation without parliamentary approval, prohibits standing armies or interference with the people's right to bear arms, and guarantees freedom of speech, especially but not exclusively in parliamentary debate. The rise of these guarantees was in part the product of fierce political conflict between the crown and the parliament during the seventeenth century, but it was also influenced by theoretical writings in pamphlet and treatise form. Composed between 1679 and 1681, John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* dates to this exact period.

In the United States, the Declaration of Independence (1776) can also be interpreted as an example of freedom 4. Although its primary purpose was to dissolve the political relationship between the colonies and England, it was not a repudiation of monarchy per se. Rather its charge was that "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an *absolute Tyranny* over these States." Significantly, the document endeavored to prove this in its lengthy "bill of particulars" by referring to specific constitutional and common-law limits on monarchical power that the king was said to have violated.

France's various adventures in constitution-making after the Revolution are too tortuous to describe here. They all owe a great debt to Montesquieu, whose *Spirit of the Laws* (1748) had already served to popularize the ideas of English constitutionalism in absolutist France.[12] But at least one example of the kind of constitutionalism associated with freedom 4 can be found in the "Charter of 1815," written by Benjamin Constant upon the return of Napoleon from exile on Elba. This constitution, short-lived though it was, bore some similarities to the Charter of 1814 promulgated by the Restoration King Louis XVIII, which was also quite liberal in some ways. On the one hand, the Charter of 1815 unambiguously named Napoleon "Emperor of the French," but, on the other hand, it advanced a number of unprecedented freedoms. A "chamber of representatives" was to be composed of more than 600 members elected for five-year terms, and a lengthy list of substantive rights was guaranteed to French citizens, including for example, equality before the law, freedom of worship, the right of private property, freedom of the press without censorship, and the right of petition.

The Charter of 1815 was not Benjamin Constant's only achievement in the quest for freedom 4. During the Restoration, he had been a strong advocate for placing fixed limits on monarchical power, what the French call "guarantism." Specific guarantees discussed at the time included division of powers, non-dismissible magistrates, and the independence of provincial and communal bodies.[13] Again, the effort here was not to establish a democracy or a republic, but rather to prevent monarchy from becoming tyrannical. In fact, Constant famously propounded the distinction between what he called "modern liberty" (e.g., of person, family, religion, property, and industry) and "ancient liberty," which meant freedom to participate in government (Constant [1819] 1988). Constant's view was that widespread democratic participation in government was incompatible with modern life because citizens had other, more important enterprises to pursue than political rule.

Freedom 5: "Freedom from Government Interference in the Economy"

Freedom 5 initially consists in the movement across Western Europe away from Mercantilism toward a system of economic free trade and free enterprise. In France, for example, "physiocrats" such as François Quesnay (1694–1774) and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727–1781) argued that the wealth of nations was best gauged not (*pace* Mercantilism) by the amount of a monarch's gold or the relative balance of trade with other nations, but rather by the amount of productive work, especially in agriculture, occurring within the nation's economy. Moreover, the physiocrats' emphasis on individual self-interest as the best guide to what ought to be produced and consumed, and at what price, was a direct attack on state intervention in the economy and certainly anticipated Adam Smith's famous account of the "invisible hand" in his monumental treatise, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Another, later example of freedom 5 occurs in the middle of the nineteenth century in Manchester, the seat of the world's textile industry, where factory workers and owners alike were severely disadvantaged by the British government's "Corn Laws" (1815–1846)—protectionist

tariffs on imported grain that effectively raised the price of food in England. Opposing the Corn Laws, men such as Richard Cobden and John Bright fought passionately for a system of free trade. Both men were founders of the Anti-Corn Law League and members of Parliament in a party that was already calling itself (though not yet officially) the "Liberals." (The formal creation of the Liberal Party in Britain occurred in 1859, the year Lord Palmerston formed his second government.) The success of the liberal opponents to the Corn Laws—and one should include Sir Robert Peel and William Gladstone in this group as well—marked a major victory for economic "liberalism" in Great Britain.

It is now possible to inquire into the rise of liberalism and to better understand the controversy surrounding its character. If one focuses only on England, the rise of a formal group calling themselves "liberal" appears to be associated primarily with freedom 5 (freedom from government interference in the economy, or the "doctrine of free trade"). But in fact, one of the earliest uses of the term "liberal" in the modern, political sense occurred not in England but in Spain, in 1812.[14] That was the year that a party of the Cortes (Spain's first legislature) drafted and enacted the "Constitution of Cádiz" in an effort to avoid the restoration of the absolutist Ferdinand VII and to create a constitutional monarchy instead.[15] The advocates of this constitution called themselves the *Liberales*, and their effort was clearly more bound up with freedom 4 (freedom from absolute rule, constitutionalism) than freedom 5, even though one of the provisions of their constitution also addressed free trade.[16]

This suggests (and this is the view I hold) that the rise of a self-conscious movement called "liberalism" was so bound up with freedoms 4 and 5 that to associate it exclusively with either would be a mistake. And this makes sense if we consider the extent to which the classic texts of freedom 4—texts such as Locke's *Second Treatise* and Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*—already evince a deep concern for economic freedom and economic growth. The entire fifth chapter of Locke's work, we recall, concerns private property and the tremendous *economic* gain that awaits a country whose government secures it. As for Montesquieu, it was no exaggeration when Lord Keynes referred to him as "the real French equivalent of Adam Smith, . . . head and shoulders above the physiocrats in penetration, clear-headedness, and good sense" (Devletoglou 1963, p. 1).

A second point to observe about the rise of liberalism in the nineteenth century is the extent to which it immediately brought under its banner all the modern freedoms that preceded it in time. For instance, the Liberal Party in England was from the start supportive of religious Nonconformists; and both Lord Palmerston and John Bright were noted supporters of religious freedom (freedom 1) (Wolffe 2005; Holton 2002). Likewise, the Spanish Constitution of Cádiz began by asserting Spain's territorial sovereignty (freedom 2), as well as her domestic sovereign power (freedom 3), which was to be constitutionally limited rather than absolute (freedom 4). From the start, then, liberalism incorporates earlier, classic freedoms. What results is an ever-growing body of freedoms expanding over time. This much on the rise of liberalism. What remains now is to illustrate its historical development.

Freedom 6: "Freedom from Rule by Another"

Freedom 6, "freedom from rule by another," is arguably the first of the freedoms considered here that did not owe something substantial to the unintended consequences of the Reformation.[17] Instead, it was inspired by certain Renaissance writers in Italy who had taken a renewed interest in Roman legal and political writings on "republicanism," and also by a group of writers during the Commonwealth Period in England from 1649 to 1660.[18] (Marchamont Nedham, James Harrington, and John Milton were among the principal advocates of republican theory during this period.)[19] Freedom 6 could certainly be placed earlier on the list of nine freedoms if one wanted to emphasize the importance of these influential writers. My reason for placing it later is simply that, as Quentin Skinner has pointed out, "the cause of the English republic was not to prevail" (Skinner 1998, p. 16). With the restoration of Charles II, England returned to the path of constitutional monarchy (freedom 4). Nevertheless, as Skinner continues: "The period of the Interregnum left behind it the richest legacy of neo-Roman and republican writings of the seventeenth century, in addition to nurturing the political sensibilities of such writers as Henry Neville and Algernon Sidney."[20]

I interpret freedom 6 as containing two distinct emphases: the first, republican; the second, democratic. The "Dedicatory Letter" to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754), gives voice to the first emphasis, as does his *Social Contract* (1762). The basic contention of these texts is that a people cannot be truly free under a monarch, whether "constitutional" or not. The only meaningful guarantee of freedom is to live as an active citizen under a scheme of government that employs magistrates of the people for day-to-day governance.[21] Other instances of freedom-6 republicanism include the system of "representative government" created by the U.S. Constitutional Convention (1787) and defended by Publius in the *Federalist Papers* (1788); and the political system articulated by Immanuel Kant in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797).

The more *democratic* emphasis in freedom 6 was in evidence, but only briefly, in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution. By "democratic," I do not mean direct popular rule, but rather the extension of individual rights (especially the franchise) to all members of the political community, and the tearing down of social hierarchies in the name of equality. After drawing up the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen" in 1789, for instance, the French elected their first National Convention by an almost universal male suffrage. Other examples: In the United States, the extension of the male franchise in the early nineteenth century was part of the movement for freedom 6. So too were the democratic reforms of the Jacksonian Era, and the "woman's suffrage movement" that occurred in the United States as well as in England.

Freedom 7: "Freedom from Economic Exploitation"

The quest for freedom 7 is often referred to by scholars of European thought as a "social revolution." It involves a deliberate refashioning of liberalism in order to use the state to address the problem of economic inequality and poverty. Freedom 7 was not the first modern freedom to contemplate a fuller use of the state—this was already characteristic of Rousseau's political thought, for instance, in the *Social Contract* (freedom 6). But it was the first attempt to enlist the state in a systematic effort to redress what now seemed an unintended consequence of freedom 5 (*lais-*

sez faire and the dramatic dislocations and degradations of the working class associated with industrialism in the West).

The quest for freedom 7 appears at first closely bound up with socialism—for instance in the writings of Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), the French economist and political theorist whose maxim was, "from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs" (De Ruggiero 1959, p. 197ff). Indeed, many socialists, including Karl Marx and his followers, took their inspiration from Saint-Simon. But Saint-Simonism also influenced liberalism itself—not immediately in France, where the revolution of 1848 brought the dictator Louis Bonaparte to power, crushing the ambitions of liberal democrats and socialists alike, but in England and the United States.

In England, one finds, for instance in the writings of T. H. Green (1836–1882) and L. T. Hobhouse (1864–1929), many of the central ideas of Saint-Simonism—that the quest for individual freedom demands more than freedom from coercion, but requires also a positive concern for citizens' welfare; that welfare is a "right," not a matter of charity; that workers are not free merely by virtue of their freedom to sign a labor contract on terms deleterious to their well-being, but must also have an equal position in the negotiation of such contracts through trade associations and state regulation of wages; and, finally, hovering above all this, that "the state" must be more than a merely negative guarantor of individual freedom from harm, but also a "positive" guarantor of the conditions of well-being for every one of its members, as if these members combined to form a single, harmonious organism (the "organic" conception of the state). The difference between the liberal defenders of these ideas and the proto-socialist Saint-Simon is that for the latter they represented an *alternative* to liberalism while for the former they were rather a *modification*. The advocates of freedom 7 believed it was time for liberalism to transition from its early "negative phase" to a contemporary "positive phase."

The ideas associated with freedom 7 appeared in the United States in connection with the Progressive Movement and the New Deal. Herbert Croly's *Promise of American Life* (1909), for example, makes the classic case for a strong national government in order to free the economically

disadvantaged from the greed and corruption of the economically privileged classes. John Dewey's political philosophy does so too, though it goes even further: "Organized social planning," he writes in *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), "put into effect for the creation of an order in which industry and finance are socially directed in behalf of institutions that provide the material basis for the cultural liberation and growth of individuals is now the sole method of social action" (Dewey [1935] 2000, p. 60). This was as close to socialism as one could get while still calling oneself a liberal. And this movement was in no way limited to abstract speculation. Rather, it found a powerful voice in Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose "Second Bill of Rights" (1944), for instance, translated the goals of freedom 7 into the fixed language of rights—the right to work, to ample remuneration, to a home, to medical care, to security in old age and ill health, and to education. All these new rights represented Roosevelt's (freedom 7) effort to secure individuals from economic oppression and to protect the weak from the power of the strong. From the Roosevelt years on, freedom 7 in its economic aspect would become synonymous with the politics of the "welfare state," and it remains to this day a powerful force in Western liberal politics.

For many students of liberalism, freedom 7 seems to constitute something so foreign to liberalism's original character expressed in freedoms 1–5 that it seems a repudiation of liberalism itself. But that is a much-contested interpretation, and by setting liberalism in the context of the broader modern quest for freedom, one can see why. While it is true that the "new liberalism" associated with freedom 7 reverses the earlier attitude that liberals took toward the state, it does not reverse, but rather advances, the underlying thrust of the modern quest for freedom. In that quest, the state was not always the enemy of individual freedom; often it was its chief guarantor, as in the movements for freedoms 1–3. There is, thus, arguably nothing inconsistent about individuals and groups *returning* to the state when a source of oppression seems once again of the sort that the state might credibly resist. And one reason that the supporters of freedom 7 could credibly refer to themselves as "liberal" is that liberalism had from its inception become bound up with the modern quest for freedom in general.[22]

Freedom 8: "Freedom from Discrimination Based on Moral Prejudice"

Freedom 8 takes aim not at economic privilege but at overly restrictive social norms created and maintained by society's privileged classes. John Stuart Mill's influential book, *On Liberty* (1859) offered a paradigmatic account of this concern in what scholars call Mill's "harm principle." "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (Mill [1859] 2002, p. 13). Part of what made Mill's exploration of this principle so original was that he did not limit his analysis to the power of government over individuals but extended it to the relationship between and among individuals and groups in the social sphere. The principle requires, according to Mill, "liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong" (ibid., p. 15). Mill went so far as to say that no society can be free where this liberty is not respected, no matter the form of government or institutional structures; and he insisted that this liberty be "absolute and unqualified" (ibid., p. 16).[23]

Freedom 8 has been and continues to be a powerful force at work in contemporary liberalism. Some further examples include the Bohemian movements of the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States, the hipsters of the 1940s, the Beat generation of the 1950s, and the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s: All were engaged in the effort to free themselves from what they believed to be the overly constraining norms and prejudices of bourgeois-liberal culture. I would add that for most of its history, the quest for freedom 7 has had the status of so many "alternative" ways of life and has tended to be more social than political. That is to say, its advocates were not inclined to take the fight to political institutions. However, the last fifty years has witnessed a more aggressive form of freedom 7, one that actively seeks liberation *by the state* from what are believed to be oppressive norms, practices, institutions, and unfair inequalities within society. "Identity politics," for instance, bears

something of the character of freedom 7. It is an attempt to eliminate cultural intolerance and inequality for myriad "intersecting" minority groups on the assumption that these groups have been and continue to be oppressed by traditional attitudes and structures. On the other hand, identity politics would scarcely be conceivable if freedom 7 were the only factor animating it. Rather, it arises primarily from the loose application of Marxist class analysis to non-economic factors combined with psychological and other theories of oppression, and proceeds in imitation of the American Civil Rights Movement even when the nature of the freedoms being sought are not equivalent.

Freedom 9: "Freedom from Biological Inequality and Constraint"

I come at last to freedom 9. By "biological constraint" I mean to refer (rather loosely) to any "given" of our biological nature—for example, our genetic makeup, intelligence, physical appearance, reproductive powers, and gender. The advocates of freedom 9 feel unjustly hindered by these givens, not only because they are "given" and not the product of free choice, but also because their "givenness" does not accord with rational principles of equality or desert.[24] Some people are given biological advantages, others disadvantages, for no discernible reason. Instances of this freedom can be traced back to the eugenics movements of the nineteenth century in England and the United States, but the quest for it becomes more prominent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[25] One reason for this is the degree of technological sophistication that is required to alter our biological nature, but another reason is perhaps the prior successes of the modern quest for freedom itself over time. To regard oneself as unfairly constrained not by another person or group but by nature herself presupposes a very high degree of security from other, more menacing forms of oppression. It would not have occurred to earlier generations of liberals that one's biological constitution could be a chief obstacle to freedom and a matter of political concern.

I include a wide range of diverse phenomena within freedom 9, and in some instances the intention of the agent matters more than the

technique being used. For instance, birth control is not a freedom-9 phenomenon in itself (the use of birth control goes back to remote antiquity), but when the "right" to birth control becomes a political movement aimed at removing the inequality between women and men in their sexual status, it becomes an instance of freedom 9. Medicine too is as old as civilization, but the assertion of a right to free and equal healthcare at public expense is, again, an instance of freedom 9. The right to physician-assisted suicide, to abortion, to gender reassignment surgery: these are other well-known examples. I also group the "transhumanist" movement with freedom 9 insofar as its goal is to transcend the human species, "not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity" (Huxley 1957, p. 17; see also Bostrom and Salvulescu 2009; for a critique see Lawler 2005). This is a program that will undoubtedly require the active participation of the state, not only for financial support but also to ensure the fair distribution of biological enhancements.

Assessing Contemporary Liberalism

Again, I do not offer the foregoing as a *history*. It is rather a series of lightly sketched examples of nine kinds of freedom and the place of liberalism within it. Liberalism is, on the one hand, a nineteenth-century phase of an underlying movement for freedom stretching back to the Reformation, but it is also a continuation of that movement. Liberalism changes because the movement does not stop with the achievement of this or that particular freedom (economic, political, etc.) but continues in the pursuit of ever more freedom. In the remainder of this essay I want to hint at the power of this account to facilitate philosophical criticism of contemporary liberalism. I shall limit my analysis at this point to American liberalism; and while there is so much that could be said, I shall limit myself to three points. These three points will in turn issue in a brief reflection on how we might begin to "reclaim" some kind of liberalism worthy of reclaiming.

Liberalism's Eudaimonic Expectation

In section "An Account of Liberalism," I teased out three potential meanings of "liberalism." In this more evaluative part of the essay, I want to focus on the second and third meanings: namely, the effort in theory and practice to advance newer freedoms either singly or in combination; and the overarching character of regimes that have been and still are living out this "modern quest for freedom." For purposes of exposition and analysis I shall refer to these as "liberal advancement" and "liberal character."

Liberal advancement is a fascinating phenomenon to isolate and study. It can be pursued in different ways. One way (presented here in the manner of an ideal type) is *incremental and organic*. Inconveniences within the practice of liberal social arrangements are detected by those experiencing them; thought is given to how these inconveniences might be remedied; costs and benefits are assessed, not just for the individuals in question, but also for the entire social organization, which is understood always to involve a delicate balance of political goods: for example, freedom, stability, predictability, justice, peace, improvability. Ultimately, a *question is posed* (rather than an answer assumed) whether the attempt to remedy the present inconvenience is worth the cost of upsetting the current balance of goods. If this question is answered affirmatively, change is cautiously pursued, and the effects are monitored for unintended consequences.

Another, virtually opposite approach to liberal advancement (also an ideal type) is *sudden and autonomous*. Inconveniences are detected. These may arise from the practice of liberal social arrangements but just as often they hail from theory: "poverty ought not to exist," "Ozone emissions should be decreased by 50% in five years." Typically, these inconveniences are understood and presented as *injustices*. Thought is given to how they might be remedied, but due to the heavy normative weight ascribed to them, they seem too urgent to permit cost-benefit analysis; indeed such calculations seem crass when it comes to such weighty moral matters; the attitude here is deontological. Accordingly, the question *whether* these inconveniences ought to be remedied is never asked. Immediate change is demanded. Its advocates act autonomously, disregarding the effects of

change on the broader social organization and the delicate balance of political goods.

Glancing back at the illustrations of liberal freedoms above, I am struck by the extent to which their continual advancement has been pursued more in the sudden and autonomous manner than in an incremental and organic one. Moreover, in recent decades the very pace of sudden and autonomous change has increased, not from one family of freedoms to another, which has remained relatively consistent, as *within* each family of freedoms, especially within freedoms 7–9. In other words, American liberalism seems to be racing with unprecedented speed toward ever-new forms of economic, social, and biological freedom, all of them now cast in terms of social *justice.*

It is worth asking why this is happening and what effect it has had on "liberal character," the overarching character of a regime that lives at this breakneck speed. No doubt the intended effect was an ostensibly moral one: to improve the moral quality of liberal life by removing as many injustices as possible. Of course, the removal of so many purported injustices requires the coercive force of the state; and it would be surprising if elite liberal actors were not also motivated by power itself, perhaps instrumentalizing the cause of "justice" in order to exercise and maintain power. But be that as it may, the effects of sudden and autonomous liberal advancement are not limited to the intended ones. The side-effects are everywhere to see: political conflict, exhaustion, disorientation, and perhaps most seriously, a resulting ordering of freedoms and other political goods that is irrational and difficult to accommodate.

Why have liberal citizens not noticed this problem and taken the proper precautions? Why do we continue to celebrate "activists" and "activism" as if these were unalloyed goods? Looking beyond the love of power, which I assume to be operative but not at such levels that it accounts for the massive *number* of liberal citizens who pursue sudden and autonomous change, I can only imagine a deep (but flawed) *psychological* motivation. Contemporary liberals are motivated at least in part by a sincere belief that this constant pressing for change will eventually bring about a state of moral perfection (or at least unending moral improvement). They desire mankind's gradual release from every form of injustice and from every obstacle to complete freedom.

This motivating hope for the attainment of perfect peace, justice, and freedom, is rarely if ever articulated by the liberals who entertain it. Rather it has something of the character of a mystical belief for which no fully rational defense can be given but which, once assumed, animates an entire way of life among a community of believers. But the difficulty is that such a final state of perfection cannot in principle be attained through political activism or through any other human means. It cannot be attained because (1) the problem of evil is constitutional for man, not the result of unjust conditions and poor social planning, and (2) the problem of citizens' forming attachments to rival goods and creating factions around those goods is constitutional for society, not the result of insufficient liberal enlightenment.

Liberal Accretion and the Warlike Quality of Contemporary Liberalism

A fundamental problem with the continual accumulation of freedoms over time (liberal accretion) is that not all freedoms are compatible; indeed, all freedoms are incompatible if pressed too far. An absolutized religious freedom—to take one example—can threaten state borders (freedom 2), undermine domestic political order (freedom 3); turn governments into instruments of religious tyranny (freedom 4); and place weighty constraints on economic activity (freedom 5). We know, moreover, that religious freedom can clash with freedom from social discrimination (freedom 8), as the recent lawsuits over same-sex weddings attest. I shall not belabor this point by showing how each of the nine freedoms exists in tension with the others, but it is a fact that can be easily demonstrated. As political philosopher John Gray has pointed out, "vitally important liberties do not dovetail into a single, harmonious pattern. They are sites of conflicts of value" (Gray 2000, p. 76).

The mere fact that freedoms exist in tension is not in itself the cause of the warlike quality of contemporary liberalism. But there are several causes related to how citizens negotiate (or fail to negotiate) the tensions in question. One cause is our contemporary "rights talk," and the underlying way we think about rights. Most rights, as I understand them, are

little more than particular freedoms we desire to insulate from the vicissitudes of everyday politics. We do so by putting a rhetorical, protective shell around them, saying in effect that *these* freedoms are different; they are more fundamental and should be privileged when confronted by rival freedoms and other rival goods. A further and even more problematic step is taken when we refer to these privileged "rights" as "absolute rights." Absolute means "set loose from all contingency," and rights that acquire this status can never (in principle) be negated or diminished. Yet, if all or most of our freedoms are regarded as "rights," and *absolute* rights at that, and if these absolute rights are in fact incompatible in significant ways, then how can liberal citizens possibly negotiate the conflicts that arise among liberal freedoms? "Absolute rights" cannot be the subject of negotiation; they are by definition unconditional. This is one reason for the warlike quality of contemporary liberalism (see further Glendon 1991).

A second and related reason is the phenomenon I call "inverted liberalism." This occurs when a society enthusiastically grants recognition in law and public policy to the newest liberal freedoms without considering the potential conflicts between the new and the old. Sometimes societies deliberately sacrifice the old on the altar of the new. But because the history of liberal freedoms begins with those that are more existentially needful than later ones—indeed, a matter of life and death—the continual preference for new over old amounts to a severe curtailing, if not outright overturning, of the foundations of freedom itself. This curtailing is visible today in the areas of religious liberty, secure national borders, sovereign political authority, constitutionalism, and economic liberty (to mention only the first five freedoms). The problem is actually quite understandable: the enthusiasm for novelty and the degree to which the old and established may be taken for granted results in a discernable bias, what we might call "presentism" or simply the "progressive bias." But the problem is serious. A liberal society that eats away at its own foundations is not sustainable. Or to put this more concretely, political communities that lack religious freedom, secure borders, sovereignty (both external and internal), constitutional limits, and economic freedom, will not remain stable and productive communities for long. The "warlike" quality of liberalism results from this problem every bit as much as it results from "rights talk." The clash between the old and the new becomes a clash

between the forces of revolution and preservation, between an unbounded zeal for change and the sober recognition that survival demands constraint.

A third cause of warlike liberalism builds upon and deepens the notion of competing freedoms. It is that nine freedoms are not merely freedoms; they are also so many competing conceptions of the good and, indeed, ways of life (cf. Gray 2000, pp. 69–104). For example, in the liberal West today we find citizens for whom religion (freedom 1) is the most important part of their identity. For others, a patriotic nationalism (freedom 2) fills that place, while for others still it is economic activity (freedom 5). Today, there are also many liberals for whom race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are by far the most important features of their identity, and they live lives devoted to the battle against discrimination in these areas (freedom 8). But if freedoms are in some respects incompatible, then the lives that are built around those freedoms will also house incompatibilities. And this too explains the warlike quality of liberalism. Liberalism leads to (or perhaps reflects) a deep-seated pluralism among possible ways of life, not just a benign pluralism of "difference," but a pluralism of conflict. Thus, all the various liberal identities, ways of life, fight for the right to thrive without constraint.

Finally, and working in concert with the causes just identified, liberalism develops warlike qualities because of the increased size and scope of government. Modern governments in the West have become increasingly "telic," by which I mean that they are devoted to the achievement of substantive sociopolitical ends. For example, a government engaged in a "total war" against another country would be a "highly telic" government. It would have a substantive purpose (victory) and would likely devote every available resource to that end. But there are many ways for governments to be highly telic without engaging in external wars. Some examples are the "war on poverty" of the New Deal, the "war on drugs" of the Great Society, the wars on crime, disease, and inequality. These are all substantive political ends that liberal societies have endeavored to pursue. The problem is that when governments attempt to pursue highly telic agendas in the context of a deeply pluralistic society, the number of citizens *opposed* to the ends that are ultimately chosen is likely to be very high. As a matter of principle, it is impossible to take a radically diverse set of people down a single political path without violating freedom and

formal (political) equality, the bedrock principles of liberalism itself. Thus, as pluralism increases, the telic scope of government should *decrease*, but the opposite has been the norm for some time. The result is angry citizens who sense that their most fundamental rights to freedom and formal equality have been illegitimately taken away; and in order to defend these rights they become warlike political activists against the government and its supporters. This occurs both on the Right and the Left, depending on which side is pursuing the telic policies in question.

The Problem of Liberal Meaninglessness

My second criticism of contemporary liberalism is that as it becomes warlike, and as more and more social institutions such as universities, churches, and businesses are pressed into service for "the cause," citizens gradually lose contact with the humane practices that bring deep meaning to human life. I shall return to some of these practices briefly, but for now let me suggest that liberalism itself, insofar as it amounts to a quest for human freedom, is to a surprising degree "meaningless."

I do not want to be misunderstood. I acknowledge that people who feel oppressed find meaning (understandably) in liberation. They often find meaning, too, in the camaraderie that the fight for freedom affords. I am not claiming therefore that the history of the struggle for freedom is entirely void of meaning. However, freedom is a paradoxical thing. Seek it as we may, its achievement never seems to bring with it the fulfillment we imagined. We remain restless and anxious about who we are and what we should be doing with our lives. Nor is this accidental. Mere freedom can never assuage the human longing for meaning because freedom is an essentially negative thing, while its meaning is positive. Freedom—even when it goes by the name "positive liberty"—is not *something*, but the removal of some felt constraint. Freedom therefore does not offer its possessor something to *do* with life, but only supplies one *condition* for doing something. Of course, it is true that the revolutionary pursuit of freedom can itself become something to do with one's life (i.e., political activism). But in the end, this too cannot satisfy, because it is scarcely more than a pursuit of preconditions for a life one never actually lives. The activist, on this analysis, sacrifices the present for a future he never lives.

Concluding Reflections on Reclaiming Liberalism

How might it be possible to reclaim some form of liberalism that avoids the eudaimonic expectations, the warring freedoms, and the problem of meaninglessness which plague contemporary liberalism in the West today? I think our best hope lies in the uniquely human ability to understand and *re-understand* our situation in ways that are most conducive to human flourishing. Let me suggest that how we understand *what politics is* has consequences for how we practice it. If we understand politics to be a fierce battle over public resources and the ends to which these are put, then we shall likely continue to practice liberal politics in a warlike mode. Yet, the problem with political wars (as opposed to actual wars) is that no victory is ever secure. The potential is always high that "the enemy" will try to erode or reverse our latest gains. Moreover, if politics can become warlike, it can also become something like a "total war," a commitment of more and more resources (time, talent, and treasure) to the cause. But a society in the throes of total war is a society that risks sacrificing the very things that make life in general, and political life in particular, worth living. Intense and protracted political warfare represents the *failure* of politics, not its basic character.

If in a different vein we understand politics to be the creation and implementation of some great national vision, a "coming together" over what our future should be and how we might best get there, we would be entertaining a view as old as Greek antiquity, but one that is, significantly, at odds with the foundations of liberalism (*pace* Lilla 2017, ch. 3, who calls on the Democratic Party to articulate such a vision). Liberalism in its religious aspect, in its economic aspect, and in its social aspect entails a conscious rejection of the belief that politics can or should present citizens with a single vision of the good. Rather liberalism is a form of political life that tries to secure for individuals and groups the freedom to make their *own* decisions about the good. And this freedom becomes ever more important as liberal societies become more pluralistic. For, as I said above, the more pluralistic we become, the less possible is it for us to pursue a common *telos* without violating the freedom and political equality of our fellow citizens. In a society as pluralist as ours, the "politics of telic vision" leads inevitably to coercion.

I propose therefore that the first step in "reclaiming liberalism" should be a deliberate rejection of these unworkable ways of understanding politics. The "politics of war" and the "politics of vision" need to be replaced by an understanding of politics as the means by which free and formally equal citizens in a deeply pluralist society cooperate in "the art of living together." The fundamental political question that should be constantly asked by citizens is not "how can we defeat the other side?" or "how can we get 'them' to do what we want?" but rather, how can "*we*" (all of us) manage to live peacefully together, given our differences, in a way that respects the freedom and formal equality of us all? Politics on this conception resembles neither a war, nor a ship about to chart a course for an exciting destination (whether the destination be conservative or progressive), but rather the ongoing negotiation of a truce between potentially rival factions who, despite their differences, do not wish to fight and have better things to do.

Such a "negotiation of truce" will call on several virtues. It will require political restraint, by which I mean a willingness to stand down when the political goods we are pursuing lack widespread popular support. It will also require a high degree of toleration, because the failure to secure a much-desired policy at the national level does not mean citizens should not try to secure it at a more local level, where pluralism is not as severe and where displeased citizens can exercise their right of "exit" (Hirschman 1970). Toleration of different political cultures and subcultures *within* liberalism will be key to the future of liberalism. Finally, liberalism as the ongoing negotiation of truce will require dispassionate political deliberation, inside and outside the institutions of power, about the best way to balance rival freedoms. Fanaticism and the unwillingness to compromise, the entire language of "absolute rights," and the practice of moral exceptionalism, will need to be recognized as unhelpful. These are characteristics of the politics of vision and the politics of war, but they have no place in a liberalism aimed at peace, freedom, and political equality.

Lastly, a good remedy for the warlike quality of contemporary liberalism and especially for the eudaimonic expectations and subsequent feelings of meaninglessness that attends it is for citizens to place less value on politics itself. To some extent this should happen as a matter of course,

when citizens drop their belief that politics is akin to "total war" or that it promises to fulfill some exciting vision of the good. When politics becomes less telic it will simultaneously become less enthralling. Yet the problem of meaningless will remain if something does not come forward to fill the void. In my view, what can fill (and *more* than fill) that void is engagement in social activities where the goods involved are deemed valuable to the participants who freely choose to engage in them. I have in mind such activities as scientific discovery, friendship, artistic creation, religion, sports, technological invention, and, especially, participation in voluntary organizations (even highly telic ones) that aim at fixing or improving some imperfect dimension of our social world. By re-conceiving the very meaning of politics in terms of truce, we create time and space for activities that stand a much better chance of delivering meaning than liberal politics ever could.

Notes

1. The insight that liberalism is not an independent phenomenon I owe to Voegelin (1974).
2. For an exposition and defense of classical liberalism, see Mises (1927) 2002. For new liberalism, see Hobhouse (1911) 1994.
3. In Mises (1927) 2002, for example, all liberties are subordinate to and instrumentally related to the goal of greater economic productivity.
4. Thinkers such as T. H. Green, L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson. For a detailed analysis of these thinkers' contribution to the New Liberalism, see Freeden (1986).
5. For a helpful account of some of the earliest uses of "liberal" as a *political* term, see Rosenblatt (2018).
6. Cf. Laski (1936, p. 3): "To the evolution of liberalism have gone contributions of the first importance from men unacquainted with, often hostile to, its aims; from Machiavelli and Calvin, from Luther and Copernicus, from Henry VIII and Thomas More, in one century; from Richelieu and Louis XIV, from Hobbes and Jurieu, from Pascal and Bacon in another."
7. Evidence from Rousseau's *2nd Discourse* and Hobhouse's *Liberalism.*

8. I have learned the most about the history of liberalism from a very fine, if largely forgotten, comparative study—*The History of European Liberalism*—by the Italian Liberal, Guido de Ruggiero, translated into English by the late British Idealist, R. G. Collingwood. Even though De Ruggiero's text carries the history only as far as 1925 (and even though he was notoriously wrong about the future of German liberalism between the wars), it remains an invaluable resource when coupled with other studies that round out the history and bring it up to date.
9. For helpful comments on the pressures that European collectivism put on American liberalism, see Katznelson (2013, p. 5ff).
10. Brad Gregory's well-known book (Gregory 2012) about the unintended consequences of the Reformation focuses for the most part on consequences different from the ones I consider here. We both, however, see a problem with plural conceptions of the good.
11. Bodin's thoughts on toleration come out more fully in his *Colloquium of the Seven about the Secrets of the Sublime*, written in 1588; on which, see Remer (1994).
12. It is frequently remarked that Montesquieu misunderstood and misrepresented English constitutionalism.
13. De Ruggiero (1959, pp. 82–90, and pp. 158–176).
14. For other early uses of the term, see Rosenblatt (2018).
15. This liberal constitution, though short-lived (because Ferdinand reestablished an absolute monarchy in 1814), became a model for several other countries around the world: for the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, the Portuguese Constitution of 1822, and the Mexican Constitution of 1824. On the historical circumstances surrounding the constitution, see Westler (2015).
16. The constitution granted a relative increase in free trade to the Spanish colonies on the American continent.
17. Perhaps one could say this about freedom 5, but scholars have long been divided on the extent to which the Reformation played a role in unleashing economic activity. The classic text is, of course, Weber (1904–05) 2011.
18. On this movement, see Pocock (1975), esp. Part II, "The Republic and Its Fortune: Florentine Political Thought from 1494–1530," pp. 83–330. On English republicanism during the Commonwealth period, see Skinner (1998).

19. Marchamont Nedham, *The Excellencie of a Free-State* (1656), James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), John Milton, *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, and the Excellence Therof Compar'd with the Inconveniences and Dangers of Readmitting Kingship in this Nation* (2nd ed., 1660).
20. Ibid. Skinner's locution, "neo-roman *and* republican writings," is crucial for understanding the difference between my freedoms 4 and 6. In his earlier writings, Skinner used the term "republican" to refer to writers who defended the classical idea of the *civitas libera* or free state. However, some of these writers, it turns out, were perfectly content to live under a constitutional monarchy. It was not "republicanism" they wanted, but strong limits upon monarchical power. In light of this, Skinner has switched his term to "neo-roman," rather than "republican" writers. However, the difference between the two groups is quite significant for my argument concerning the nine freedoms.
21. See especially Rousseau (1762) 1978, chapter 4, "On Slavery." Rousseau stands in sharp contrast to Voltaire in this respect. The latter was a constitutional monarchist. See Laski (1936, p. 238 ff)., for an argument that Voltaire, Diderot, and Helvétius all fall short of what I call freedom 6.
22. Earlier in this essay I remarked that the use of the term "liberal" to describe later phases of the modern quest for freedom occurred "for reasons partly principled, partly expedient." I have tried to emphasize the principled case here. The case for expedience is expertly laid out by Gottfried (1999, pp. 3–29).
23. An overstatement to be sure. Compare the more qualified position of Galston (2003), who refers to this kind of freedom as "expressive liberty."
24. This is an important aspect of John Rawls's political theory. See, for example, Rawls (2001, pp. 74–75): "Do people really think that they (morally) deserved to be born more gifted than others? Do they think they (morally) deserved to be born a man rather than a woman, or vice versa? Do they think that they deserved to be born into a wealthier rather than into a poorer family?" Rawls tried to address this problem of desert through his "difference principle."
25. On the eugenics movement and its connection to liberal progressivism, see Freeden (2005, pp. 144–172). Freeden's analysis shows that some, but not all, eugenicists understood themselves more in terms of my freedom 7 than freedom 9. They wanted to use eugenics as a tool for social reform.

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