

**WHY LIBERALISM WORKS: HOW TRUE
LIBERAL VALUES PRODUCE A FREER, MORE
EQUAL, PROSPEROUS WORLD FOR ALL**

(DEIRDRE NANSEN MCCLOSKEY)

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This is a special review. It is special because it is the last of its kind. I no longer intend to spend my time, and your time, on books that I know to be completely wrong, merely to show they are completely wrong. I am keenly aware of what I call “the closing door,” embodied in the words of John 9:4—“the night cometh, when no man can work,” which Samuel Johnson had engraved on the inside cover of his pocket watch. This does not at all mean that I am stopping writing, only that I will no longer write in the vein of correcting errors of the political Left. For the hour is late, and the Right has better things to do.

Thus, I will no longer review, or read, leftist claptrap. That includes a substantial majority of modern popular works, essentially all books on history and politics that receive wide publicity, from the latest anti-Trump screed to anything on race, along with a great deal else. It also includes many, though not all, older leftist works that are leftist canon. Does it profit me to read any such book and demonstrate its innumerable falsehoods and logical errors? No, because I know the truth already, and I know the minds of all these writers and the vast majority of their readers are a closed circle, filled with lies and impervious to the truth. I will discover nothing new, and they benefit by me wasting my time, because opportunity cost.

True, my writing about such books might profit others who are less informed or have spent less time evaluating leftist claptrap, and who are drowning daily in the disinformation spewed out by leftist media and culture. But I can add the same value for those people by sometimes discussing leftist propaganda when I am discussing legitimate works. All the leftist agitprop I am now going to ignore is worse than worthless. It is total lies, which, fascinatingly, is a relatively new departure for the Left. Over decades, the Left was rewarded for slanting and twisting the truth, never punished, and now that they have total control over the organs of communication, culture, and power, simply disregarding the truth in the service of power, serving instead lying propaganda, is

the inevitable consequence. What you reward, you get more of. For the Left, since 1789, after all, the ends justify the means, and the purported goal of their utopian cult is now in sight, so any tool is justified. So I understand why they lie, and how and why the *New York Times* today became no different than the *Pravda* of 1988. But I see no reason I should legitimate their webs of lies.

It is all a question of priorities. My core priority is to establish the Foundationalist state, under which human flourishing may again occur. What is the chief obstacle to the Foundationalist state? The power of the Left, and the corruption of the West it has wrought, by rejecting the pursuit of excellence and accomplishment, and by corroding individual virtue. Working to demonstrate that the Left lies as it breathes merely grants power to their lies. As I have said, the only way out is through, and that means, most of all, offering a positive vision of what the future can look like, as opposed to the world visible around us wrought by the Left—and them implementing that vision.

More broadly, I no longer care what any organ of the Left, or any individual leftist, thinks or says about any topic. At all. I don't need to understand them better; I already understand them completely, and what they have to say that is not lies, is evil that has led us to our current degenerate and decayed society, for which they bear primary responsibility. Nor is it important to understand better their motivations: greed, love of power, millenarian fervor, sheer stupidity, love of destruction, hatred driven by racist ethnonarcissism, animal rage generated by envy of beauty and accomplishment. No, there is no reason whatsoever to engage the Left, except in the act of utterly and permanently breaking their power and imposing a decent society. The time for debate with the Left is over; the time for the re-imposition of reality arrived long ago.

The Left, always and everywhere, has known the existential nature of the struggle, and the exterminatory character of their program, and in every case acted to the extent its power allowed. Today in America, they no longer pretend the Right is even permitted to debate; after all, error has no rights. They are now imposing their final end-state on us, a project they will soon complete if they are not stopped. Our only goal should be to smash the Left and impose the will of the Right, in a complete reformation of our society—if we can, a topic for another day. What form that imposition of will might take remains to be seen.

It could be a democratic turn to a Viktor Orbán-type leader, though more aggressive, who combines economic populism and nationalism, and is not afraid to use existing tools to break the Left. It could be a fragmentation of the country, along Kurt Schlichter lines, where the Left is confined in their own new country to descend into Venezuela, or worse, and the Right can form a renewed society. It could be many other things, each prefigured by history. But the path leads inevitably to war, whether hot war or cold war. It already is war, though a war fought only by the Left. Time to fight back, effectively.

Oh, I will read plenty of books I disagree with, in whole or in part. But those will be books that illuminate the way forward. I will no doubt still find much to criticize in some books. I will continue to read and analyze books that I know are partially wrong, such as those written with a whole or partial Left bias that are not works of politics or history (e.g., science or economics), because in those something of value can often still be found. I may sometimes read books that I strongly suspect are completely wrong, say anything new from Jonah Goldberg, but that could still contain something of interest, especially books whose readership may include those on the Right working toward victory. I may read classic Left works, because they are classic, thus they may contain something of value, and moreover I know they inform my enemies, so knowing their contents is of use. Lenin, for example. (Not all old Left works are classic, of course. Take Edward Said's *Orientalism*—I tried reading that, and it was worthless, lying trash, and laughably, obviously so.) But for the most part, I will read either books that are not political at all, but of interest to me for other reasons, or books that I see as useful in building Foundationalism.

More generally, I intend to spend as little time as possible discussing political matters with the Left. They can read my works, or not, and there may be exceptions to my general rule. But why discuss political matters with leftist commenters on my writing, or with my left-leaning relatives? Their worldview consists wholly of lies, destructive lies, lies that corrode all societal virtue and wholly block all societal accomplishment. They cannot be convinced otherwise; like any cult member, and cult is what the Left is, as shown by that their ideology does not permit any new fact to contradict their prebaked conclusions. Someone must rule; now it is them, and changing that is the challenge of the next decade,

followed by the suppression of their evil works and the proper education of both our children and our brainwashed adults. Meanwhile, with leftists with whom we have a social relation, we can talk about other things—although since the Left insists on politicizing all of life, there is, sadly, often very little we can talk about.

But before I call it a day, let us discuss this book. In it, childlike naivete alternates with low malice, combining in an execrable stew. I read *Why Liberalism Works* because it claims to be an answer to Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed*, a key text of today's post-liberal Right. To my disappointment, other than in its title and one unbelievably stupid sentence inside, this book completely ignores Deneen's book, and also ignores all claims and arguments of today's post-liberals. Instead, it substitutes, for engaging with ideas, heated repetition of bogus ideological claims. It's crushingly boring and tiresomely predictable. But reading this book made me understand more fully why and how we are all force fed propaganda, of which this is merely an exemplar, on a daily basis, and led me to the decision outlined above. I'm happy for that, at least.

The author, Deirdre McCloskey, is what we can call a "choice extremist." This is a type of libertarianism, but not confined to limiting the state. Rather, it is an endorsement of man as mayfly, impelled by no other desire than maximizing pleasure, and insistent that any limitation on such pleasure is evil incarnate. People like McCloskey, who claim to be centrists seeking human flourishing, offer the distilled essence of the worst of the Left, without the leavening concern for social fabric that some of the Left offers, or used to offer. A clean sweep will begin with these people, McCloskey and his neoliberal allies, many long falsely seen as conservatives. For me, this book was unpleasant to read, and this review a drag to write. Still, I read the whole book, every word, hacking through the ignorant writing and annoying tone of unjustified superiority combined with a jarring, oily pseudo-femininity. You're welcome.

Totally aside from its other defects, McCloskey's book is poorly structured, because rather than writing a new book, he cobbled together numerous existing short writings, added some filler, divided them into four rough groups, and presented the results as a tasty pottage to his masters at the American Enterprise Institute and other similar bastions of mendacious toadies to leftism and chaos. Constant repetition is therefore the hallmark of this book; it could have been a fifth of its length

and said the same things. Again, you're welcome. Rather than analyze the fifty essays in this book sequentially, I'm going to summarize the author's key claims, which are merely repeated with slight variations and emphasis throughout the entire book. Let's get on with it.

First, McCloskey draws the line of demarcation that snakes through the entire book. We have "true liberals." And we have everyone else. True liberals are awesome. Everyone else is bad, and bad precisely to the extent he differs in any way from true liberals. By "true liberal," McCloskey means someone who is a fan of the core tenet of Enlightenment political philosophy, of emancipation from all unchosen bonds, an atomized free actor in every facet of his existence. True liberals, you see, adhere to the Golden Rule, which is, properly viewed, merely Adam Smith's principles of free trade applied to all activities of life. In fact, total emancipation is dictated by God—McCloskey claims that some fictional "Abrahamic egalitarianism" is common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and in case we are unclear, calls Smith, *ad nauseum*, "the Blessed Adam Smith," who revealed the correct interpretation of the Gospel, which previously had escaped all of us.

The rest of the book is merely endless variations on ascribing superlatives to "true liberals" and attacking everyone not a "true liberal," though flavor is added by changing the adjective occasionally from "true" to "humane," "sisterly," or "motherly." To support this division as an intelligent way to view the world, McCloskey's tool is not evidence or reason. Rather, his only tool is ignoring or totally mischaracterizing opposing arguments while using tendentious, emotion-laden terms. In the second paragraph of the Preface, for example, he contrasts true liberals, who have "splendid arts and sciences, . . . toleration, . . . inclusiveness, . . . cosmopolitanism" with "illiberal regimes," from whose "violent hierarchies" true liberals have liberated us, though "brutal, scaremongering populists" such as Viktor Orbán are still fighting their inevitable defeat by the true liberal paladins. The rest of the book does not vary from this pattern.

Second, in order to praise true liberals as the source of all that is righteous, McCloskey offers a puerile and false chain of historical causation. It is hard to exaggerate how simplistic this book is. In a nutshell, which is all we are offered, in the late 1700s, true liberalism began, when demands for emancipation and atomized liberty, that is, the Enlightenment, began. This political philosophy created the "Great Enrichment," "economic

betterments for ordinary people,” by “giving voice” to people who were formerly voiceless and utterly passive. This has continued, so now we are rich and getting richer, which is all that matters.

Now, McCloskey does recognize the glaring problem in this set of claims, which is that only clowns believe that the Industrial Revolution had any connection to the Enlightenment. So he dodges by trying to separate the supposed Great Enrichment from the Industrial Revolution. He claims that the latter was a mere commonplace, frequent throughout history, of doubling income, but that the Enrichment was a new thing in history, created purely by true liberalism. In one of the most bizarre passages of a book that is filled with them, McCloskey claims that equally important industrial revolutions also occurred in Islamic Spain and Song China. Before 1800, you see, progress was regarded as dishonorable and sinful, something “economists and historians are starting to recognize”—led, of course, by the most insightful historian of the modern age, McCloskey himself. Our unexceptional industrial revolution continued, creating the Great Enrichment, because “liberalism inspired the masses to devise betterments and to open new enterprises and to move to new jobs.”

These are radical historical claims, but no evidence at all is offered for them, or any other historical claim. McCloskey is a historian by trade, but almost zero history appears in this book. To be fair, that may be the nature of such a cobbled-together book; he mentions his trilogy of other books about “bourgeois values,” with a passing claim that those books support what he says here, so perhaps one has to read those too to get any actual arguments from history. I won’t read them, because life is too short.

But back in the real world, there is no mystery as to how the Industrial Revolution created the economics of the modern world, and there is no such thing as a separate Great Enrichment. The West, starting in England, combined the advances of the Scientific Revolution (created purely by Europeans) with the right cultural practices, such as hard work and the rule of law, added some other factors endlessly debated (coal? intelligence? sea power?) and thereby escaped from the Malthusian Trap, which had never occurred a single time anywhere else in the world. Once created by the West, this package feeds on itself, and can be exported to any culture willing and able to adopt the gifts of Western technology

and culture. Some are; most aren't either willing or able, and haven't been for the past two hundred years. If they do, and to the extent they are willing to adopt these cultural and technological practices (which do not include frippery such as democracy), countries are lifted out of poverty, a process continuing, in fits, starts, and steps backward, today. The end. The rickety and ahistorical claims that McCloskey makes are simply objectively false, which he probably realizes, since beyond announcing conclusions, he makes no effort to support them. (No surprise, McCloskey ignores China's and Singapore's adoption of Western technology and methods to escape the Malthusian Trap, since those successes alone disprove every single claim he makes.)

Third, there are enemies of true liberalism, who want to cast the whole world into darkness and end the Great Enrichment by opposing choice extremism. These are, today, primarily the parties democratically elected in Hungary and Poland, though occasionally Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump are thrown in too. As with all of his odious neoliberal caste, McCloskey hates and fears those in power in Hungary and Poland, because their success and popularity prove everything he says false, and he is afraid their powerful ideas will spread to dominate throughout Europe and the United States (a fear that is, fortunately, well on its way to being a reality). McCloskey does not deign to tell us why Hungary and Poland are bad, or how the policies enunciated by their governments will end the Great Enrichment. He just mouths the usual total lies that the press is attacked and the rule of law eroded, without any actual attempt to demonstrate those claims. In reality, of course, censorship and erosion of the rule of law is far more prevalent in the United States and Western Europe; but that's censorship and erosion of the rule of law McCloskey likes. He's very much a fan of flexible principles—for another example, despite his claim that we should all operate only on “sweet talk,” he openly celebrates in this book how he helped destroy the life of J. Michael Bailey, a Northwestern University professor who failed to adequately celebrate sexual degeneracy.

In addition to Viktor Orbán and some Poles, there are also domestic enemies. McCloskey hates American conservatives, that is, anyone on the Right not a corporatist, Koch-type Republican, with an ill-concealed burning passion. No surprise, he never once engages their arguments, even though he chants “let's listen, really listen, to the arguments of our

supposed enemies, and consider their logic and evidence.” The core of McCloskey’s “thinking” is a crude logical trap. We should have “a society held together by sweet talk among free adults rather than by coercion applied to slaves and children.” What if that sweet talk concludes that most people want to, let’s say, ban pornography? That’s coercion! So in other words, McCloskey wants talk, as long as that talk has no chance of ending in conclusions other than the ones he has already mandated as the only acceptable ones for society. That’s just dishonest. But that’s this book.

We reach the nadir of McCloskey’s hate and stupidity in the single sentence devoted to Deneen. I was excited to get there, figuring I would get an actual response to post-liberal arguments. What I got was this, in toto. Brace yourself. “Liberalism, intones Deneen, entails ‘the loosening of social bonds’ (bonds such as slavery in the British Empire), ‘a relentless logic of impersonal transactions’ (so unlike the transactions of pious Israelites selling lumber to Egyptians, say), and the proposition that ‘human beings are thus, by nature, non-relational creatures, separate and autonomous’ (as for example in the non-relational exploration of human relationships in the bourgeois and liberal English novel since 1700).” That’s it. That’s the entirety of McCloskey’s “argument.” The first parenthetical, about slavery, is apparently meant to be a refutation of Deneen in some way I cannot fathom. I have no idea what the second and third parentheticals, about Israelites, lumber, and English novels, are trying to say; they are not tied to anything else McCloskey says elsewhere. I am still scratching my head. But I can assure you that McCloskey thinks he has crushed Deneen, which says a lot more about him than anything else.

Fourth, for McCloskey, there are no enemies on the Left. Sure, some on the Left are mistaken, notably Thomas Piketty, on whom McCloskey spills a lot of gently-phrased words. But everyone on the Left is “earnest and amiable,” just a little wrong, like the “sweet slow socialist” George Soros or McCloskey’s unnamed “beloved and extremely intelligent Marxian friend.” The *New York Times* is wrong sometimes, but “sweet” and “benevolent.” Anyone on the Right, though, is “vicious,” a “thug,” or any of innumerable similar terms, and McCloskey certainly has no friends who are conservatives.

Fifth, true liberalism must struggle against bad policies, some of which are pushed by evil people and some by ignorant people. Any policy that has any element of “coercion” is bad. The worst policy of all is any restrictions whatsoever on immigration. We are told that “bad people” in the United States “wish to deport law-abiding and hardworking immigrants, in response to a scientifically bankrupt economic notion, which is anyway unethical, that immigrants take jobs away from natives, or a scientifically bankrupt sociological notion, also unethical, that their children will never become properly American.” If the “Hungarian farmer or West Virginia coal miner” complains that he can no longer feed his children, he has no legitimate complaint, rather, “what is being complained about is change, and as it happens desirable change.” We know it is desirable because it is happening because of the free market, for “Profits are a signal of general worthiness.” The end. Really. You can see why neoliberals love this stuff, but the normal reader wonders why no effort, none at all, is ever made to demonstrate the truth of these claims and why we are never, not once, given any suggestion that we should perform cost-benefit analysis on any social policy. McCloskey’s claims and demanded social policies are uniformly and without exception wonderful and costless, and this truth is self-proving. Any questioning proves you are “authoritarian” or “fascist,” not “humane” and McCloskey’s “dear friend.”

Sixth, total emancipation in all areas of life will lead to total human flourishing. We are guaranteed that it is an absolute certainty that so long as we are true liberals, unlimited wealth will be ours, which will make us happy (not for McCloskey any wondering about the relationship, beyond a certain point, of wealth to happiness). And not just happiness—the resulting “enrichment will cause . . . a cultural explosion, casting into the shade the achievements of fifth-century Athenian drama and T’ang poetry and Renaissance painting.” His evidence for this? That the 1960s, the dawn of emancipation in America, were culturally, especially in art, far superior to the Renaissance. Yes, that’s what he claims.

Woven throughout the endless repetitions of this six-point plan is much other dumbassery. We are lied to that the “classical definition of liberty/freedom is the condition of being liberated/free from physical interference by other human beings,” which is the exact opposite of the truth. Pericles would reject everything McCloskey says out of

hand, then have him flogged for corrupting the virtue of the body politic. Economic fallacies abound, most of all the exaltation of GDP as a measure of human flourishing (combined with the only other measure of human flourishing, the absolute right, derived from nothing in particular, to not be “pushed or bossed around without voluntarily given consent or contract”). “Leisure . . . should be accounted as income.” If you can’t find a job because an illegal immigrant took it, you are still making money, peasant, so stop complaining! Third-rate thinkers like Tyler Cowen and Eric Hoffer are extolled as brilliant. If some things are better now, everything that exists now must be good. And, most of all, culture doesn’t matter for anything, and no human motivation other than the desire for maximized freedom exists.

I’m not going to waste any more time on the claims of this book, but I want to examine what this book means. That is, on its face, nearly everything in this book is shockingly dumb, and I don’t think McCloskey is dumb (though he’s not nearly as smart as he thinks he is). So why did he write it? Ah, there’s where it gets interesting, and indicative of our politics today. Every so often the real agenda’s slimy face peeks through. We see it in the occasional obeisances to a free-floating “dignity.” McCloskey’s project is to endorse a vision of humanity completely atomized, and he knows that to sell this he has to claim that all the worthwhile advances of the modern world are created by atomization. Okay, but why is McCloskey paid to purvey propaganda under the guise of being a purveyor of history and ideas, and then lionized across many forms of media? It’s because this is merely one small facet of the giant propaganda machine that spews its output across our society today.

We are everywhere surrounded by endless propaganda designed to push an agenda that simultaneously pushes the Left goal of emancipation combined with forced egalitarianism while lining the pockets of our neoliberal overlords. Every movie, computer game, or other form of media involving violence or the military features a complete inversion of reality, where female warriors exemplifying alpha male characteristics triumph over weak men with feminine characteristics. Every movie and TV show, for children or adults, celebrates homosexuals and sexual degenerates. Advertisements do the same. Wise Latinas instruct stupid white people. The propaganda machine is kept going by aggressive censorship across all media and social media, silencing

the strongest voices of opposition and ensuring that those that remain self-censor to avoid deplatforming.

Still, at the end, this is a clarifying book. It made me realize what I started this review with—that debate is a waste of time, and the choice is utter defeat by the Left, or destroying the Left. Dispose yourselves accordingly.