

## Rethinking Individualism and Individuality: Part 3: Liberalism, Sympathy, and Evolution

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**Abstract:** At first, individualist and evolutionary liberalism reinforced one another. Afterwards the social transformations liberalism initiated amplified their differences. Individualist liberal analysis assumed limited, relatively straightforward, relationships between people. Evolutionary liberalism emphasized relationships, which were growing ever stronger and more numerous. Evolutionary liberals' emphasis on individuals' immersion in complex relationships of culture, language, and environment could handle the increased complexity of impersonal human relations. Rooted in Hume, Smith, and Darwin, evolutionary liberalism linked liberal values with evolution, not individuals. While long delayed by Neo-Darwinism emphasizing competition, recent research demonstrated cooperation is more favored by evolution, creating a solid ethical foundation for evolutionary liberal values as well as greater support for its emphasis on relationships rather than individualist concepts of self-interest and rights.

**Keywords:** Adam Smith, cooperation, Darwin, democracy, ecosystem, Hayek, Hume, individualism, liberalism, morality, rationality, rights, self-interest, social ecology, sustainability, sympathy

### I: INDIVIDUALIST AND EVOLUTIONARY LIBERALISM

Individualist liberals argue individuals are society's fundamental moral units, and all are equally so, a belief they share with liberals in general. But they also argue individuals are society's basic units in all other relevant regards. Rooted in insights from the Scottish Enlightenment, evolutionary liberals emphasize both society and those within it are shaped by evolutionary processes outside human control. Evolutionary liberal F. A. Hayek argued human reason itself grew from these processes (Hayek 1973, pp. 17-34). Malte Dold and Paul Lewis argue this evolutionarily and culturally shaped rationality can be described as "ecological rationality" (Dold 2021).

Over the years individualist liberals' foundation' has been challenged by findings that actual individuals embody their culture, times, and language, and do not exist distinct from them. While these challenges are well-grounded, individualist liberalism has remained convincing to many be-

cause we are biological individuals even more fundamentally than we are socially shaped beings. I am not you and you are not me.

Because evolutionary and individualist liberal approaches are both liberal and both friendly to markets, many liberals also assume they are compatible (Boettke 2019; Steele 2014; Vanberg 1986). Their initial impact was complementary, but what about later?

## II: LIBERALISM, THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, AND SLAVERY

The United States was the first society that adopted liberal principles as a national ethos. Emphasized in the American Declaration of Independence, a commitment to individual rights helped undermine slavery's legitimacy in the US.

The Lockean language of rights dominated the revolutionaries' moral arguments against the British Crown and in describing the country to take its place. Thomas Jefferson described Locke, Newton, and Sir Francis Bacon as "my trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced" (Jefferson 1944, p. 609). John Locke himself could have written the most famous lines in the *Declaration of Independence*. Despite his different philosophical approach, Hume stood solidly on the American side, writing "I am an American in my Principles and wish we would let them alone to govern or misgovern themselves as they think proper" (Case 2022).

Many major Founders were also influenced by Scottish thinkers, and some of the important differences during the Constitutional Convention reflected a person's exposure, or lack thereof, to the Scots. James Madison's arguments reflected Scottish influence (Browning 2022, pp. 275-6). Crucially, he used Hume's argument in favor of larger republics over smaller ones to argue for the viability of a large American republic (Wood 2021, p. 89). James Wilson, another founder influenced by Scottish thought, played a pivotal role persuading the Constitutional Convention to locate sovereignty in the people, and not the states or the proposed national government (Wood 2021 pp. 94-5; Browning 2022, p. 170).

The pre-revolutionary colonies were intensely hierarchical, with much work being done by huge numbers of indentured laborers whose status differed from slavery only in that it was not (usually) life-long and their offspring would be free (Wood 2021, pp. 102-105). Primogeniture and entail ensured the political dominance of powerful families. Women were not allowed to divorce in most colonies (Wood 2021, pp. 163-4). Politically supported religious establishments dominated many states. Arguments for individual rights as well as influence from the Scots questioned all long-established assumptions about the legitimacy of these hierarchies.

Significant liberal reforms followed upon the revolution, decisively changing the society to one so different from what preceded it that Alexis deTocqueville, who had come to study it, was amazed at how different the new nation had become from Europe. The first step towards liberal transformation after the Revolution enlarged equality between white men. However, the principles supporting equality were not racial, sexual, or ethnic, but universal.

The issue of slavery proved the thorniest one for the Founders. At the time, even the South's leaders generally disapproved of slavery for liberal reasons, and most thought it would fade away within a few decades (Wood 2021, p. 110). Thomas Jefferson, a deeply conflicted slave owner, wrote the Declaration of Independence. Every slave state signed on to it. During the Constitutional Convention New York's Gouverneur Morris, who did not own slaves, denounced slavery as bad for everyone except plantation owners (Morris 1787). George Mason, a major slave holder, wrote in Virginia's Declaration of Rights "all men are by nature equally free and have certain inherent rights. . ." (Mason 1776). Mason later refused to sign the constitution, in part because it did not abolish the slave trade (Schwarz 2000). Like many today who realize fossil fuels will devastate society as it currently exists, but do not know how to wean themselves from them, Southern leaders knew they were economically dependent on slavery, and hoped the future would somehow free them from its malign grip.

Regarding abolishing slavery, John Jay described the Revolution's impact as like a "little lump of leaven" that acted to transform the larger body (Jay 1788). It was later amplified by Quakers and early Evangelicals, and strengthened by equally right-friendly Spiritualists (Reynolds 2020). Of the American Revolution's many impacts on slavery in the New World, historian of slavery David Brion Davis wrote: "most important in the long run, was . . . the popularization among black as well as whites of belief in individual freedom and inalienable natural rights" (Davis 2006, p. 156). Before the Civil War a majority of American states had abolished slavery.

However, during this process the impact of liberal principles declined in the slave states. Unlike their fathers, later Southern leaders supported slavery and sought to expand it. The cotton gin generated sufficient wealth enabling most to overcome any respect for their forefathers' views. The Haitian Revolution raised fears in the other direction (although ending slavery in the British Caribbean was peaceful). Chattel slavery was incompatible with the country's founding principles and embracing it required repudiating liberalism. The North Carolina Supreme Court ruled "The power of the master must be absolute to render the submission of the slave perfect" (Arnhart 1998, p. 168). Slavery required supporting despotism. All that mattered was who should be ruled. The next generation of Southern leaders found themselves forced to repudiate the Declaration of Independence's recognition of rights in favor of more Hobbesian and theocratic values (Stephens 1861; Calhoun 2007; McKittrick 1963; Fitzhugh 1960).

Abolishing slavery arguably led to the greatest single social transformation in history, and its strength came from liberal ideas (Wood 2021). More impressive still, excepting only Haiti and the Confederacy, in the West abolition was accomplished peacefully (Davis 2006, pp. 241-4). In this context, the language of rights worked, and worked profoundly well.<sup>1</sup>

America's *Declaration of Independence* and the new nation had extended a constant pressure towards greater inclusion (Jay 1788). Over time women, Blacks, and others used these already accepted principles to expand the realm of identification farther than it had been before. The biggest failing in these reforms in the U.S. (and many other nations) was an endemic racism. Racists could oppose slavery, and many abolitionists were racists. Universal White male suffrage was soon established, but only with ending free Black suffrage because many Whites were concerned there were too many Black voters. (Wood 2021, pp. 123-4). The United States is far from liberal in all important respects, but liberal values now dominate the European cultural world and are increasingly important elsewhere.

### III: LIBERALISM AND THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution itself embodied a tension between the liberal concept that only citizens had political rights and the illiberal one that states had them as well, a tension absent in the Declaration but exemplified by the 10th amendment.

Initially the tension was invisible. Most early Americans identified more with their states than their more abstract national identity. In addition, the states were in the best position of any institution to push back should the national government become oppressive. But the idea of states rights implies the doctrine of political sovereignty- that power ultimately rests in a governing institution, as rights bearing individuals transferred that ultimate power to government in a social contract. This is Rousseauian reasoning, not Lockean. The Lockean reasoning behind the Constitution itself retained ultimate power with the people and states could have no rights superior to theirs.

Without depending on a doctrine of rights, in the *Federalist*, evolutionary liberal James Madison offered a different take to the same conclusion (Madison *Fed.* 45 1961, p. 289):

We have heard of the impious doctrine in the old world, that the people were made for kings, not kings for the people. Is the same doctrine to be revived in the new, I another shape . . . the public good . . . is the supreme object to be pursued; and that no form of government whatever has any other values than as it may be fitted for attainment of this object . . . as far as the sovereignty of the

States cannot be reconciled to the happiness of the people, the voice of every good citizen must be,  
Let the former be sacrificed to the latter.

Madison underlines his point in *Federalist 46* (Madison, *Fed 46* 1961, p, 295):

If . . . the people should in the future become more partial to the federal than to the State governments, the change can only result from such manifest and irresistible proofs of a better administration as will overcome their antecedent propensities. And in that case the people ought not surely to be precluded from giving most of their confidence where they may discover it to be most due . . .

For Madison, promoting happiness, not protecting rights regardless of their practical impact, is the ultimate standard for a good society. Human flourishing is the ultimate standard. In the context of the American Revolution and the decades immediately following, individualist and evolutionary liberalism reinforced one another. But different contexts could lead to different relationships.

Locke's defense of property rights depended almost entirely in rural examples. Revolutionary America was overwhelmingly rural. Links between people were mostly local and personal, as exemplified by Jefferson's praise of small farmers as the ideal foundation for a free society. 'Linkage' is the key concept to understanding liberalism's later fate in the US and other largely liberal societies. When links between people are relatively few, individualist liberalism easily harmonized with evolutionary liberalism.

#### IV: ARE THESE TWO LIBERAL FOUNDATIONS STILL COMPATIBLE?

By expanding the sphere of independent cooperation, liberal policies transformed societies. Businesses expanded and interwove people's relations together on ever larger scales. Cities grew and, as they did, cultural and economic complexities did as well. Linkages between people and between people and their environment grew more numerous and powerful. What once seemed simple issues between individuals could become far more complex and involve increasingly impersonal relationships.

As the issues liberal societies faced became less straightforward, liberals increasingly differed among themselves over approaches to public problems. Some liberals attempted to address these issues in terms of traditional individualism, others in terms of community flourishing. We see this distinction today between those calling themselves "classical" and those calling themselves "progressive" liberals. But how deep does this tension run? F. A. Hayek's work helps us understand.

Hayek is widely regarded as one of the most important figures in modern free market economics. The Austrian economic tradition, with which he is associated, approaches economic science from a individualist liberal perspective. But Hayek himself came to prefer basing his work within the Scottish evolutionary tradition (diZerega 2021, pp. 2-3). By and large, modern Austrians seek to meld Austrian methodology with Hayek's approach.

Hayek claimed human reason, foundational to methodological individualism, developed out of social life. This claim challenged to reductionist liberal approaches emphasizing individualism as foundational to society and to social science. Seeking to address this challenge, individualist liberal Peter Boettke agrees, with Hayek, that "Social inquiry must begin with a recognition of the social embeddedness of the mind." He then argues "Hayek is mainly talking about the co-evolution of reason and tradition in the epoch when man was *first* [my italics] emerging from his pre-human condition (Boettke 2019, p. 190). Boettke quotes Hayek that cultural evolution "took place not merely after the appearance of Homo sapiens, but also during the much longer earlier existence of the genus Homo and its hominid ancestors. To repeat: *mind and culture developed concurrently and not successively*" (Hayek 1979, p. 156; 1988, p. 22). But to say two developments are "concurrent" can mean either in parallel or recursively. It is here that Boettke and Hayek part ways.

Societies reflect evolutionary processes and, within them, the human mind's social embeddedness exists at two levels. One began well before the first humans emerged, creating a cultural ecology within which

we live that has gradually grown and shaped us. But the converse is true as well, we shape it in turn. The relationship is recursive. At the second level, this entire process is repeated with every birth. Each new generation inherits and is shaped by, what came before them, and in turn shapes what the next generation will inherit. This reflexivity underlies tensions between evolutionary and individualist liberal perspectives.

Describing social science research, F. A. Hayek wrote what we “single out as wholes, or where we draw the ‘partition boundary’, will be determined by . . . whether we can thus isolate recurrent patterns of coherent structures of a distinct kind which we do in fact encounter in the world. . .” (Hayek 1967, p. 7). Elsewhere he explained “It would be most correct to think of progress as a process of formation and modification of the human intellect, a process of adaptation and learning in which not only the possibilities known to us but also our values and desires continually change” (Hayek 1960, p. 40). For example, entrepreneurs’ “very cast of thinking . . . would not exist but for the environment in which they develop their gifts” (Hayek 1979, p. 76; see also Pagel 2012; Deacon 1997). From this perspective patterns have a greater reality than their physical manifestation at any particular time.

Cultural group selection is an evolutionary process where individuals influence groups and groups influence individuals and, on balance, the most successful groups flourish. Causality goes both ways, and always has. Boettke equates a concurrent *parallel* process with a concurrent *recursive* process that began before there were human beings and continues to the present.

This same dynamic exists in biology. Rationality appears to be a natural emergent product of complex social organisms. Based on discoveries made since he wrote, Hayek’s comments on rationality’s origins can be modified, but in the direction opposite from Boettke’s interpretation. We now know many animals and birds use reason. For example, crows have demonstrated impressive reasoning powers, including making tools. They also show gratitude towards those who have helped them (Feinn 2021; Clerk 2018). Crows are highly social and have cultures they pass on across generations (Owen 2004; Nijhuis 2015; Dold 2021). But the seeds of culture are deeper than this.

With brains the size of a pinhead, bumblebees, learn to distinguish between different sources for rewards, and this knowledge then spreads through the community (Nuwer 2013). Honeybees’ famous waggle-dance is not instinctual, but must be taught to inexperienced bees by experienced ones (Nieh 2023). These are both examples of cultural learning. Rationality’s roots are more deeply embedded in life than Hayek thought, but he was right that it took culture to develop it.

Unlike even very intelligent animals possessing culture, such as crows, human culture enables us to preserve and build on past discoveries through complex languages, stories, writing, and other media transmitted across generations. Crows can pass on personal experience and what they have learned from other crows, but cannot accumulate and build upon knowledge in this way. Because these intelligent animals cannot preserve and build on knowledge, skills no longer immediately useful would disappear (diZerega 2020, p. 22). By comparison, we can easily find knowledge unknown to us, or anyone we know, through access to libraries or Google. This culturally embedded knowledge exists independently of everyone we have, or ever will, meet. It can survive in untranslated texts awaiting rediscovery by future generations. It can even lie unnoticed within in long scrutinized texts, unimagined even by their authors, but in time sparking a new insight (Radnitzky 1987).

Initially, we experience our cultural environment as being as objective as the natural one, and much of it remains so throughout our life, often invisible to us, tacitly embedded in the ‘natural’ flow of life within a culture (Polanyi 1962). We can only deliberately question a small part of our culturally rooted knowledge, and always from within the context of the rest. As Alfred North Whitehead observed, “Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them” (Hayek 1960, p 22).

An analogy might help concretize this reality. Think of culture as a great tree. Most of what supports it arose much earlier and is now dead wood supporting the whole. Only the inner bark and cambium is alive and growing, but it depends on the support from what came before. In a sense, we are like cells of social cambium supported by the structure created by the cells that came before us. Continuing the analogy, the

leaves of Spring appearing on an old tree are no more advanced than those that grew when it was a seedling, but their environment is different. Today's newborns are not more rational than ones many years ago, but their cultural environment is more conducive to developing a modern mentality.

What makes us individuals is even more paradoxical than this.

## V: INDIVIDUALITY VS INDIVIDUALISM

*The Lockean individual does not even exist biologically.* The long-held view that biological individuals are discrete organisms with clear boundaries between them and others came to an end when Lynn Margulis demonstrated the cells making up multicellular organisms were, themselves, collective entities (Margulis 1995). Since Margulis' demonstration, biologists have increasingly found what were long considered individuals were collective organisms, superorganisms, and even ecosystems (diZerega 2023). Scientific views about biological individuality now vary enough that biologist Charles Goodknight concluded "the concept of 'individuality' is a concept imposed by the observer" (Goodknight 2013, p. 48; see also Haber 2013, p. 201).

Seeking to describe the organisms to which her research had led, Margulis quoted Alan Watts, a teacher of Eastern thought during the 60s and early 70s: "A living body is not a fixed thing but a flowing event, like a flame or a whirlpool. The shape alone is stable. The substance is a stream of energy going in one end and out the other" (Margulis and Sagan 1995, p. 43). More abstractly, she and other biologists described such organisms as persistent focused pools of low entropy, mobilizing and shaping streams of matter into living forms (Margulis and Sagan 1995; Schneider and Sagan 2005). These are examples of what Hayek had called "recurrent patterns of coherent structures of a distinct kind. . ." (Hayek 1967, p. 7).

The presence or absence of particular bacteria influence intelligence in mice, even while remaining distinct from the larger entity (Sullivan 2022). This is also apparently true for human beings where levels of certain bacteria have been linked to varying degrees of intelligence, as determined by scores on mathematical and verbal tests" (Wong 2023, p. 9). Additionally, a parasite shaping one individual's mind might be quite beneficial while shaping the mind of a different individual in deeply injurious ways (Flegr 2013). What is more us than our minds?

Modern biology has shown our "constituent parts" extend down to much simpler biological entities, and emergent individuals reflect this influence as well as culture, history, language, psychology. These biological findings resemble how cultural and linguistic elements also deeply shape human minds. Individuality is real. It is also emergent.

Consider language. In a language the meaning of words are defined relationally rather than as discrete units. The meaning of terms is best understood through "family resemblances" constituting, in Wittgenstein's words, "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing" (quoted by Wallace 2019, p. 58).

Beginning in earliest childhood, thoughts can shape the body and the body can shape thoughts. (Eisler and Fry, pp. 78-89). Social rules, and the systems they shape, in turn shape human agency (Lewis and Lewin 2015, p.7). Repeated actions in accordance with a rule or way of perceiving lead, in Paul Lewis' words, "to the formation of new cognitive (neural) structures and therefore to people having new dispositions to conceptualize and respond to their circumstances in certain ways . . . social rules can become physically embodied in people . . ." (Lewis 2012, p. 375; see also Damasio and Tranel 1993).

Languages depend on practices external to and independent of those who speak them. When comparing Potawatomie with Western languages, Robin Wall Kimmerer describes how a language's proportion of verbs to nouns can powerfully impact how speakers perceive the world (Kimmerer 2013, pp. 48-59). The language we speak can also influence how much weight we assign to the future (Fisher 2023, p. 47). Differences arise when people of different cultures play standardized games designed to evaluate participant's rationality (Dold 2021). George Lakoff observes "Does the way we think shape language? Yes. Does language shape the way we think? Yes" (Lakoff 2009, p. 232; also, Baroditsky 2011, pp. 63-5; Baier et al. 2023).

These images of individual and society are far removed from Locke's image of individual humans as unitary beings which, in various forms, continues to dominate Western thinking. Kathleen Wallace argues whether this description is psychological, from egoism to the social self, or of humans as biological organisms ultimately explained genetically, from these perspectives the body is a "container" of psychological or bodily functions. Instead, the self is "a *network* of interrelated biological, genetic, physical, social, psychosocial, linguistic, semantic, and so on" (Wallace 2019, pp. 8-9). Individuals are dynamic adaptive patterns emerging from networks of relationships rather than being discrete things entering into relationships. Morality emerges from these patterns. It is from these relationships that the foundations of liberal ethics arise.

## VII: SYMPATHY AND MORALITY

David Hume and Adam Smith considered "sympathy" morality's foundation. The words sympathy and passion have shifted their meanings since their time, and so I will clarify them here. Even in their time sympathy's meaning was not always clear. Smith wrote "Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps originally the same [as pity or compassion] may now . . . without much impropriety, be used to denote our fellow feeling with any passion whatever". (Smith 1969, p. 5). Importantly, sympathy was not an emotion, or "passion" as Hume would say. Importantly, by "passion," Hume meant feelings able to influence our actions.

Today the term 'empathy' which did not then exist, is similar to sympathy,' and the overlap in their use can be confusing to modern readers (Zuniga 2014, pp. 141-2). Sympathy is the foundation of the passions, and so pre-rational. In his essay on Hume, Henry Aiken explained "*Any* emotion is sympathetic insofar as it is an emotion aroused by the perception or imagination of similar feelings in others." Sympathy "is a *cause* for common attitudes—and an *effect*" (Aiken 1948, pp. xvii-xxiii).

As I read Hume and Smith, sympathy is a virtually automatic response to encountering another being, while what we call empathy requires a more sustained engagement. When I see someone hit his thumb with a hammer, I wince, but my wince is not preceded with the thought "I'm glad that wasn't me." The thought comes later, if it comes at all. Yochai Benkler describes experiments where, when a woman sees their partner receive a shock "these women showed the exact same activation in the exact same emotional areas [of the brain] as when they were shocked." More generally, when we observe others our neurons fire in remarkably similar ways to what they would do if we were doing the act ourselves (Benkler 2011, p. 83).

Adam Smith (1969, p. 10) observed when we are pleased by observing or displeased by not observing in others:

fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast . . . both the pleasure and the pain are always felt so instantaneously, and often upon such frivolous occasions, that it seems evident that neither of them can be derived from any such self-interested consideration

Gloria Zuniga y Postiga (2014, p. 142) argued we can get a deeper meaning of what Smith is describing via the work of Edith Stein. As Zuniga put it, for Stein:

We are able not only to distinguish inanimate from animate objects in ordinary acts of perception, we are also able to shift to a particular mode of perception whenever we encounter a sensing living being. Accordingly, our perceptual directedness of that physical being is amplified with an affective quality. But this is not a cognitive process since it does not involve acts of inference or deduction.

Stein called this "empathetic perception." Zuniga calls it "compassion" (2014, p. 145). I like Hume and Smith's term "sympathy." Whatever we call it, it is virtually automatic, its intensity is shaped, in part at least, by the person's real or imagined relationship to us. I like Zuniga's description that "sympathy serves as

the door that allows individuals an entrance to collective experiences with others in different realms (moral, economic, political, and so on) (Zuniga 2014, p. 145).

Perceiving commonality sparks sympathy, which can lead to emotion. *Then* reason enters, followed maybe by action. As Hume famously observed, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions” (Hume 1948, p. 25). Our feelings motivate us to act, our reason tells us how. However, for a passion or feeling to matter in the world, as Hume observed, “we must be assisted by relations of resemblance and contiguity in order to feel the sympathy in its full perfection” (Hume 1948, p. 7). Because sympathy precedes reason and emotion, it is potentially open-ended and it is this open-endedness that makes a liberal ethic possible (Hume 1948, p. 192):

suppose that several distinct societies maintain a kind of intercourse for mutual convenience and advantage, the boundaries of justice still grow larger in proportion to the largeness of men’s views and the force of their mutual connections. History, experience, reason sufficiently instruct us in this natural progress of human sentiments ...

Darwin (1874, p. 138) thought similarly. In *Descent of Man* he observed:

As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to all men of all nations and races.

J. Baird Callicott, who with Larry Arnhart, has perhaps done the most to explore the connection between Hume, Smith, and Darwin, observed (in a very Hayekian fashion) “With the acquisition of power of speech and some capacity for abstraction, our ancestors began to codify the kinds of behavior concordant and discordant with their inherited communal-emotional bonds (Callicott 1999, p. 167).

## VIII: SYMPATHY IN ANIMALS AND THE SEEDS OF MORALITY

Years ago, at an environmental conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I heard an economist claim there was something deeply mistaken about environmentalists’ concern with the other-than-human world as a good in itself. Environmental concerns were understandable only in terms of self-interest. In response, I pointed out that Aldo Leopold, perhaps our most important environmental thinker, had written while many regret the demise of the passenger pigeon, which none of us has ever seen, no passenger pigeon would have mourned our own passing. Leopold concluded: “For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun” (Leopold 1970, p. 117.) I suggested the economic point of view he defended was what one might expect of a raven, not a human.

Subsequent research indicates I might have been unfair to ravens.

Hume (1983, p. 176) observed:

Tis from the resemblance of the external actions of animals to those we ourselves perform, that we judge their internal likewise to resemble ours; and the same principle of reasoning, carry’d one step further, will make us conclude that since our internal actions resemble each other’s, the causes, from which they are deriv’d, must also be resembling.

A common reply to Hume is the old skeptic’s argument I cannot know you have a mind, but hiding behind an animal rather than a human. This barrier, Mary Midgley pointed out, already exists between one person



and another: “The barrier does not fall between us and the dog. It falls between you and me” (Midgley 1983, p. 13). It was a weak argument before Darwin and a nonsensical one after him.

In a recent experiment, capuchin monkeys learned to do certain tasks for a food reward. Like many humans, myself included, capuchins prefer grapes to cucumbers. When two monkeys situated side by side were rewarded with cucumbers, they were both satisfied. However, when one monkey was rewarded with a cucumber, and the other with a grape, for the same behavior, the one receiving the cucumber ultimately threw the now insulting ‘treat’ out of its cage (Yerkes 2003). In human terms the offended capuchin reacted angrily when convinced it was being treated unfairly. And a sense of fairness is rooted in sympathy.

A skeptic, (or perhaps an economist), might say this behavior demonstrated purely selfish behavior. Fairness didn’t matter, getting less than someone else did. But consider the following experiments.

Two capuchin monkeys had to work together to pull a tray of food to their cages. Before they began pulling, the monkeys had to decide which one would receive a grape and which one would get a less desired apple slice. The monkeys generally alternated roles, so both earned some grapes and some apple slices. In the few cases where the dominant monkey hogged the grapes, the other monkey tended to quit participating, despite the apple slice normally being desirable (Brosnan 2006; 2010). An economically rational capuchin would have continued cooperating because apple slices were better than nothing at all.

Capuchins can also seek rewards for others. Franz DeWaal (2010) writes:

we place two of them side by side, while one of them barter with us with differently colored tokens. One token is ‘selfish,’ and the other ‘prosocial.’ If the bartering monkey selects the selfish token, it receives a small piece of apple for returning it, but its partner gets nothing. The prosocial token, on the other hand, rewards both monkeys. Most monkeys develop an overwhelming preference for the prosocial token, [and] dominant monkeys (who have least to fear) are the most generous.

Bonobos prefer to eat with others, even strangers, rather than eating alone (Hamilton 2021). Bonobos will also voluntarily enable another access to food they could never have had for themselves, no matter what they did (Starr 2017).

Rats act in a similar fashion, freeing trapped others and sharing food with them. They do this when they either know the trapped rat, or are familiar with that strain of rat. In way we find uncomfortably familiar, they will not do this for strangers of different strains of rats. But *once they know the stranger*, they will work to free it as well. Subsequent experiments have significantly enlarged the number of species sharing concerns about fairness and cooperation. (see Preston 2020; also DeWaal 2016, pp. 197-201; Safina 2015; Bekoff 2009).

Nor is such behavior a monopoly of mammals. Ravens and carrion crows react to the capuchin test the same way when cheese is the preferred reward and a grape the booby prize (Wascher 2017). Further, in tests of cooperation to achieve a common reward, once a cheater is exposed, its victims will no longer cooperate with it, though they continue doing so with others (University of Vienna 2015; see also Preston 2020; DeWaal 2016, pp. 197-201; Safina 2015; Bekoff 2009).

According to Darwin, among mammals, affection and sympathy were selected for because they increased reproductive success and the social organizations they made possible further increased this success (1874, p. 145). Birds appear similar. A capacity for sympathy is likely inseparable from social life among complex organisms.

Based on sympathy and reason, human morality, developed qualities already existing among other species (Prum 2017, p. 524). Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues demonstrated, like capuchins, among human beings concerns with fairness override ‘rational choice’ and individualistic self-interest, even at the cost of personal gain (Kahneman 1986). Peggy Mason, lead researcher for some of these experiments, pointed out: “Our study suggests that we don’t have to cognitively decide to help an individual in distress; rather, we just

have to let our animal selves express themselves” (Castro 2011). Elsewhere Mason observed “Humans are mammals and I think that this not only tells us something about rats and other non-human animals but it also tells us about humans” (Mason 2014).

Rebecca Solnit’s *A Paradise Built in Hell* describes the spontaneously arising communities of mutual aid that arise during disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Despite dominant cultural myths about aggression arising in apocalyptic circumstances, when the day-to-day routines of society are disastrously disrupted, generosity, kindness, and even sacrifice emerge among strangers (Solnit 2009). Such generous behavior does not last after life “returns to normal.” Hume, Smith, and Darwin emphasized sympathy precedes, and is shaped, by rational calculation, and this example supports their view. It may be in normal times that social roles override our natural sympathetic capacities. When these roles are sufficiently disrupted, our more inherent inclinations re-emerge.

## IX: LIBERAL TRANSFORMATION

The view that human motives are rooted in self-love was common in Hume and Smith’s time as in ours. Hume rejected what he called Hobbes’ and Locke’s “selfish system of morals” arguing it “is contrary to common feeling and our most unprejudiced notions, [it requires] the highest stretch of philosophy to establish so extraordinary a paradox” (Hume 1948, pp. 271-272). In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* Adam Smith argued basing sentiments on self-love, “seem to me to have arisen from some confused misapprehension of the system of sympathy” (Smith 1969, p. 466).

To act in our self-interest beyond the spur of the moment we need to anticipate our future situation. We need a minimal self-awareness to imaginatively project ourselves into an anticipated future circumstance to choose a course of action superior to immediate gratification. *This future self does not yet exist*. To project our imagination into possible future circumstances requires our sympathetic capabilities (Aiken 1984, p. xxi). In Henry Hazlitt’s words, my sympathetic imagination “must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others. . .” (Arnhart 1998, p. 222). Including a future me. Rational self-interest depends on sympathy.

If this argument is accurate, psychopaths will be poor at considering their *own* long-term well-being because a psychopath lacks the capacity to sympathize with others. This appears to be the case. In his analysis of sympathy Larry Arnhart observed psychopaths show “a striking inability to follow any sort of life plan consistently, whether it be one regarded as good or evil.” They appear unable to act prudently over the long term (Arnhart 1998, pp. 222-3). The same or similar pattern of inability to value the future has been found with brain damage has injured their emotional capacities (Akitipis 2004, p. 148).

Hume and Smith were well aware our sympathy for strangers across the sea would be less intense than our sympathy for a good friend. It is impossible for human beings to have equal sympathy for every being capable of eliciting it. The more completely we recognize a being as like ourselves, the more easily we can sympathize with it (Smith, 1969, p. 125). As a general rule, sympathy, and the empathy it makes possible, grows outwards to ever less firmly linked parties. No society started off liberal, and its transformation to liberal values takes time. Initially it expands the realm of equal relations among those we perceive as most like us, only then to expand it to others. This may be the secret of liberalism’s success: liberalism expands our sympathetic skills without overburdening them.

In 2023, blogger Anne Laurie observed the day after Saint Patrick’s Day: “If you told teenaged me, fifty years ago, that the Black Vice-President and her Jewish husband would be hosting Ireland’s Indian-ancestry Prime Minister and his husband for St. Paddy’s Day, I would have complimented you on your imagination” (Anne Laurie 2023). Consider also, I think for the first time in history, many members of dominant (and liberal) cultures are seeking to make amends for their ancestors’ aggression against others.

## X: PARADOXES OF RIGHTS

Despite its success abolishing chattel slavery, individualist liberalism did not offer a strong defense against other kinds of slavery and extreme hierarchy. According to Locke, it was legitimate to enslave combatants defeated in a ‘just war.’ By rebelling, at any time these slaves could choose the death their previous aggression had earned them. But Locke’s case for a social contract was that people could not be trusted to be fair judges when they themselves were part of a dispute. What could possibly be more subject to this problem than both sides in a war? Even the Nazis felt morally justified (Koonz 2003). With enough rationalization any war could be said to be ‘just,’ as Americans should know after the American invasion of Iraq. Had Iraq won, Locke’s reasoning would have supported enslaving captured Americans. Locke’s reasoning also turned out to be of little practical barrier to the rationales for enslaving Indians and Africans (Hinshelwood 2013).

Locke’s defense of legitimate slavery does not stand alone in the individualist liberal tradition. Hundreds of years later, Robert Nozick, a leading classical liberal philosopher, argued people should have the right to sell themselves into slavery because it would be ‘voluntary’ (2001, pp. 290-2). *Context did not matter*. Nozick’s logic justified slavery before he was born, but for Scots, not Africans. In the late 1770s Scottish coal and salt workers sold themselves to a lifetime of slavery, a practice defended by claiming, like Nozick, that voluntary contracts were legal and binding (Davis 1999, pp. 490-1; Barrowman 1897). Nozick’s argument could easily legitimize pre-revolutionary America’s indentured servitude, which was far more brutal than in England (Wood 2021, pp. 102-3). The despotism of property ownership trumped ending despotism among human beings.

Nozick never explored what circumstances might lead a person to sell themselves into slavery, such as a woman needing money to treat her child’s otherwise fatal illness or, as with those Scottish workers, the need for a job to support a family. Nor did he question the impact on the ‘owner’ of holding such power over another. Nozick would have to reject Lord Acton’s observation “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Acton 1887). For the libertarian Nozick, rights trumped human flourishing.

Libertarian Murray Rothbard criticized Nozick’s argument from a rights-based approach (Rothbard 2002, pp. 40-1). But, Rothbard’s reasoning led him to argue parents’ rights would be violated were they forced to feed their children, even if the alternative was their starving to death, or suffering from a lifetime of health problems due to malnutrition (Rothbard 2002, pp. 97-112). Again, people were subordinated to a concept that abstracted context away. Not surprisingly, the Rothbards were childless.

Neither Nozick nor Rothbard could oppose noncompete agreements, employed today to prevent former employees from seeking new jobs in the same field (Westneat 2014a, 2014b). The employer, not the employee, owns their skills, and so essentially *owns a part of the employee’s mind*, something not even Southern slave owners had imagined possible. Affecting many millions of private sector American workers, noncompete ‘agreements’ hold down people’s pay because job switching is one of the more reliable ways of securing a raise (Scheiber 2023).

Absolute rights distort human relations all the way down. Do I violate my drunken friend’s property rights when I take his car keys, preventing him from driving until he sobers up? Or, by violating his property rights, do I act as a friend, and in so doing perhaps save the lives of peaceful people who might be killed in a collision with a drunk driver, my friend included? Being a friend is incompatible with an absolute doctrine of rights.

## XI: THE ABSTRACT TRUMPS THE CONCRETE

In 1882 tuberculosis was proven to spread through respiratory droplets. Seeking to protect the public, in 1896 New York City was the first to ban public spitting. By 1910, 150 U.S. cities had followed suit. Enforcement of the law was divisive, with those opposed claiming these laws attacked a natural impulse, curtailed individual freedoms and gave the government too much power (Ferro 2018; Abrams 2012).

During the covid pandemic ‘Anti-vaxxers’ also talked of “freedom” and “rights.” From their perspective, requiring masks and vaccines made some individuals mere means in service to others, a clear assault on individualist rights theory. The cost in lives was substantial. According to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, covid vaccines were associated with 670,000-680,000 fewer hospitalizations and 330,000-370,000 fewer deaths among Medicare beneficiaries in 2021 than had they not happened (Samson 2022). For many individualist liberals, saving hundreds of thousands of older people from deaths brought about through no fault of their own could not make up for the loss of “freedom” from requiring masks and vaccinations (Nelson 2022).

This kind of basic tension between the individual and society runs through every variety of individualist liberalism and, as the tuberculosis example demonstrated, has for a long time.

To be sure, some individualist liberals defended banning spitting in public, requiring masks, and getting vaccinated. But their reasoning differed from that of evolutionary liberals, focusing only on personal morality. When Margaret Thatcher observed “There is no such thing as society,” many of her critics thought she denied individuals have any obligations to others. Ramesh Ponnuru defended her, explaining “we do not emphasize those [moral] obligations enough, and use the word ‘society’ in a way that obscures them. Thus, people sometimes act as though some abstract ‘society,’ rather than individual taxpayers, pays for government benefits, or blame ‘society’ rather than parents for the abuse and neglect of children” (Ponnuru 2019). Thatcher was emphasizing the importance of individual moral obligation.

Ponnuru’s comments illuminated an important distinction between individualist and evolutionary liberals. For individualist liberals moral values had to come from religion or philosophy. This is why so many individualist liberals emphasize Christianity as needed to preserve morality, even if they themselves do not believe. They must find it *somewhere*.

This individualist framing potentially does enormous harm to society, and to liberal principles. Experiments have demonstrated when a rationality game is called the “Wall Street Game” only about 33% cooperate whereas when it is called the “Community Game,” about 70% cooperate, *even though the rules are identical* (Benkler 2011, pp. 68-9). The Antivaxxers’ and gun absolutists’ positions sacrifice the immunocompromised and school children to serve other individuals’ far-from-vital interests. The social fabric of relationships, especially with the elderly, weak, and very young, is dissolved. Families are destroyed, hospitals overwhelmed, and “long Covid” threatens to burden Thatcher’s non-existent society with long-term care requirements for many (Nelson 2022).

These concerns are of more than theoretical importance. Grafton, NH, a small town of 800, was chosen by many libertarians as a destination to settle, change its laws, and thereby turn it into a showcase for how individualist liberalism could transform a society. They succeeded in dominating the town, and transforming it, but not in a way that encouraged anyone else to do the same thing. It was a failure and individualist liberalism was a major cause (Hongoltz-Hetling 2020; Greene 2022; Blanchfield 2022; Austin 2020).

## XII: COOPERATION AND NATURAL LAW

Political Scientist Robert Axelrod held a competition to discover the computer program that could win the iterated prisoner’s dilemma game (Axelrod 1984). The game begins when two people are arrested for a crime. They are guilty, but each knows if both are silent they will get a year in prison, because while evidence for a crime exists, there is not enough to demonstrate its severity. The prosecutor knows a more serious crime occurred, but lacks sufficient evidence to convict on it. The prisoners are separated, and each told if they inform on the other, they will get a six-month reduction, while the other will get 4.5 years. However, if each implicates the other, both get 4.5 years. They cannot communicate with one another. What do they do?

In Axelrod’s computerized version, the parties involved play this game over and over, with points substituting for years. It turned out cooperative strategies fared better than competitive ones, and the one that

ultimately won was called “Tit for Tat.” Start by cooperating. As soon as the other side fails to cooperate, retaliate once. Return to cooperating when the other side does.

*Do not escalate.*

Escalating retaliation risked further escalation, depressing both scores. In addition, according to these competing programs there was no advantage in seeking to lower the other’s score. The winning strategy focused only on improving its own score. Cooperative strategies like this were labeled “Nice.”

Seeking to make the game more like life, Axelrod then created a version where the game’s environment consisted of many different strategies, played against one another. Unsuccessful ones were eliminated from play, with the next round pitting the remaining strategies against one another. This weeding out continued until a single best strategy emerged. In his words (1984, p. 52):

At first, poor programs and good programs are represented in equal proportions. But as time passes, the poorer ones begin to drop out and the good ones thrive. Success breeds more success, provided the success derives from interactions with other successful rules. If, on the other hand, a decision rule’s success derives from its ability to exploit other rules, then as these exploited rules die out, the exploiters’s base of support becomes eroded and the exploiter suffers a similar fate.

Axelrod reported “The ecological analysis shows that . . . Not being nice may look promising at first, but in the long run it can destroy the very environment it needs for its own success.”

Cooperation appears hard wired as superior to competition into the very fabric of reality. The evolutionary dice appear loaded, if lightly. Yochai Benkler quotes scientist Martin Nowak in *Science*: “Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of evolution is its ability to generate cooperation in a competitive world. Thus we might add ‘natural cooperation’ as a third fundamental principle of evolution beside mutation and natural selection” (Benkler2011, p. 36; Nowak 2006). Nowak’s observation is fundamental to evolutionary liberalism’s remarkable compatibility with evolutionary theory.

Sympathetic encounters with others, real or imagined, human or not, help create our sense of being connected with or separate from others. By being open to relationships beyond the narrowly instrumental, sympathy precedes and helps build a deeper sense of self in relationship with, other selves. Human beings can take this capacity for sympathy farther than perhaps any other life form, and liberalism’s power to transform is based on this.

That cooperation trumps competition both logically and evolutionarily explains liberalism’s transformative power whenever its values are given precedence over traditional hierarchical ones. Alexis Tocqueville (1961, p. 271) noted how civil society had been transformed in the new United States:

in no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used, or more unsparingly applied to a multitude of different objects, than in America. Besides the permanent associations which are established by law under the name of townships, cities, and counties, a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of private individuals.

Significantly, Tocqueville found these qualities stronger in the more liberal north than the increasingly illiberal South (1961, p. 78).

Evolutionary liberalism’s ethical insights arise from the basic processes of life, not reason. Cooperation among status equals generated societies more prosperous, healthy, and with more kinds of flourishing individuality than others (McCloskey 2016, pp. 124-8). Liberal principles ended fear of famine, and the well-grounded fear that children would often die before their parents. Liberal principles also established liberal democracy, the first political body that has never fought a war with another of the same kind. Such achievements would once have been considered utopian. We know we are far from utopia, but we have also moved far from the curses that plagued humankind for much of its existence.

A powerful case for natural law arises within the very fabric of existence. Liberal morality does not come from divine command or abstract reason. Nor is it a variable that reflects whatever power relations might dominate a society. It emerges from within the very logic of life itself.

### XIII: EVOLUTION AND LIBERALISM DERAILED

How, then, did the primacy of competition over cooperation win such great recognition in biology and liberalism alike?

Alfred Russel Wallace who, with Darwin, discovered evolution, developed a completely competitive view of evolution. Darwin did not agree that competitive relations alone could account for the richness of the biological world. In his *Descent of Man*, he argued for sexual selection as well, and also that sympathy, morality's foundation, arose from natural selection (diZerega 2023, pp. 81-4). What is called Neo-Darwinism replaced competitive individuals with competitive genes, but kept Wallace's one-sided emphasis on competition. Darwin would have disagreed. A purely competitive perspective also dominated traditional market economics with its long-time emphasis on 'economic man.' Each reinforced the other, since evolution shed light on human nature and economics saw itself as compatible with evolutionary processes.

Neo-Darwinism's competitive view of evolution obscured finding an ethic compatible with liberal thought *within* the natural world, while contemporary philosophy weakened attempts to base moral principles *outside* the world. Individualist social science increasingly shifted to egoistic models of human action, justifying this move in part by appeals to evolution as purely competitive. Lynn Margulis was correct when she described Neo-Darwinism as a "competitive, cost-benefit interpretation of Darwin" (Margulis 1991).

There was a high cost for this move, for both liberalism and science.

### XIV: LIBERALISM AND EUGENICS

The United States had expanded liberal principles farther than most nations but its deeply rooted racism injected a powerful collectivist strain within a largely individualistic society. In biology, evolutionary competition (or cooperation) could be understood in terms of either individuals or species. Races were long considered a kind of subspecies. Woodrow Wilson argued "the men of the sturdy stocks of the north" who had made up our earliest immigration were different from "the more sordid and hopeless elements" of Southern Europe, who possessed "neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence" (Wilson 1902, pp. 212-3). Oliver Wendell Holmes observed "I think that the sacredness of human life is a purely municipal idea and of no validity outside the jurisdiction. I believe that force, mitigated so far as it may be by good manners, is the *ultima* ratio, and between two groups who want to make inconsistent types of world I see no remedy except force" (quoted in Black 2007, p. 120).

Liberal Progressives, such as Jane Addams, who were initially receptive to eugenics, thought of it in terms of improving the lives of individuals rather than improving the national "stock" (Addams 2002, p. 192). However, the logic behind seeing evolution in purely competitive terms led elsewhere, and many Progressives went there. In 1916 Herbert Croly, no liberal, wrote "When the state assumes the duty of giving a fair opportunity for development to every child, it will find unanimous support for a policy of extinction of stocks incapable of profiting from their privileges" (cited by Goldberg 2010). In 1927, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of forced sterilization laws, a view easily harmonized with the illiberal racism of the South. In fact, the Virginia law the Supreme Court upheld was written at the same time the state adopted the "Racial Integrity Act," outlawing marriages between "white" and "colored" Virginians (Hashaw 2006, p. 117).

Progressive Supreme Court justice Oliver Wendell Holmes and the more numerous conservative ones, like William Howard Taft, all endorsed involuntary sterilization of the supposedly mentally defective (Koonz 2003, p. 105). There was only one dissent, Justice Pierce Butler, a Catholic, who wrote no opinion. (I would guess his reason was religious, and so carried no constitutional weight). Between 1903 and 1945, at least 45,127 Americans were forcibly sterilized in the name of a scientific error (Black 2003). Holmes was

clearly powerfully influenced by the dominant evolutionary thought of the time (Black 2003, pp. 119-20). In his study of the relationships between science and religion, Nicholas Spencer explained how eugenics and defenses of aggressive war, both justified by currently prevailing evolutionary theory, were the root cause for the Christian opposition leading to the Scopes Trial. The text William Jennings Bryan attacked and Clarence Darrow defended endorsed eugenics as a means for eliminating the unfit (Spencer 2023, pp. 320-1).

Many individualist liberals have sought to tar Progressivism with the eugenics brush, while completely ignoring the conservative and often racist court majority that supported Holmes. In fact Bryan was a major Progressive leader and a liberal. According to some historians, Bryan did more than anyone to transform the Democratic Party into a vehicle enabling the triumph of Franklin D. Roosevelt's liberalism (Kazin 2007).

The moral crisis brought about by eugenics may be why so many biologists since have emphasized how uniquely different we are from other animals. Qualitative differences prove we are distinct in kind, creating a protective barrier protecting humanity from the implications of applying the same standards to itself that science applied to everything else. And yet, ironically, it is what we *share* with many other beings that provides liberalism's strongest foundational principles.

## XV: THE CORE FAILINGS OF INDIVIDUALIST LIBERALISM

Individualist liberalism's extraordinary strengths and profound weaknesses are both explained by the nature of the links between people. Individualism's logic applies best between weakly linked individuals, such as Locke basing property on picking up an unowned acorn or enclosing unowned land, and Jefferson's virtuous farmers. Where links get stronger, as within families, between friends, within tribes, or in cities, this logic is less applicable. It's biggest failing theoretically as well as a guide to policy is that it is based on a model of individuality that does not exist in the world.

Looking at individuals as impenetrable right holders also undermined the most important discovery rooted in the evolutionary tradition: the concept of spontaneous order.

## XVI: IMPOVERISHING SPONTANEOUS ORDER THEORY

Building on insights traceable back to Hume and Smith, the idea of spontaneous order was first developed by F. A. Hayek and Michael Polanyi. There were differences between how Hayek and Polanyi initially used the term, as both were struggling to clarify Adam Smith's invisible hand metaphor and contrast it to deliberate planning (Jacobs 1999). However, both agreed the market and science were spontaneous orders and, as spontaneous orders, constitute autonomous emergent social orders shaped by rules promoting mutual adjustment among people pursuing plans of their choosing. Content in the market and science was always changing but the overarching patterns remained, brought about by systemically generated feedback signals recognized by participants (diZerega 2021, p. 9).

There are two dimensions to this impoverishment.

First, their one-sided focus on the market led them to equate the patterns markets created with the collective impact of individual choices. Different orders privilege different systemic values independent of the personal values of those acting within them, creating an extraordinarily complex social ecology. Individualist liberals generally ignore this issue and focus overwhelmingly on the market order (diZerega 1997, 2004, 2020).

Treating the market as reflecting preferences seemed enough (diZerega 2010).

David Andersson observes "system constraints are often loose, and . . . different spontaneous orders feature different types of feedback, which imply different behavioral dispositions." In addition, he observes

that, even within economics, the dominant imperialist model, as we saw above with Gary Becker, treats action as instrumental as well as rational. This model does not work in other spontaneous orders and by no means always strong in economies (Andersson 2022).

Due I think to their overwhelming focus on the market as a spontaneous order, individualist liberals paid little attention to other such orders, leading to misleading statements such as Boettke's that Hayek's approach "extends the spontaneous order approach beyond the realm of economic explanation to all realms of social interaction, including science, law, and history" (Boettke 2019, p. 185). Hayek mentioned science and law, but "history?" History is *not* a spontaneous order. At the same time Boettke omits liberal democracy, a spontaneous order directly linked to liberalism both logically and historically.

Boettke is not alone. In her often excellent study of liberalism, Dierdre McCloskey endorses Robert Higgs' description of government as "a monopoly operating ultimately by threat or actual use of violence, making rules and exacting tribute from the territory it controls" (McCloskey 2016, p. 144). That statement is accurate for undemocratic governments. It is false for democratic ones which, like science and the market, are spontaneous orders (diZerega 2000).

A democracy is a coordination process for discovering, refining, and implementing public values. The more complexly entwined the links between citizens, the more important defining and enforcing public values becomes. Only in cases of crisis obvious to nearly all can it be said to engage in anything like majority rule, *because in such cases there is little to discover beyond organizing a response*. Significantly, it is also at such times that democracies act most undemocratically and illiberally.

Democracies are also distinguished by what is called the "democratic peace," apparently an emergent feature that manifests when a political system shifts from being organized as a state to becoming a spontaneous order. That no liberal democracy has ever fought a war with another is one of the most significant (and ignored) developments in human history (diZerega 1995; Rummel 2002).

Second, many organizations depend on immersion within more than one spontaneous order to flourish. For example, scientific journals are essential to the coherence of science as a whole, and to optimally perform this role need to be readily available to anyone interested in their content. Today most journals are also treated as profit centers by the companies that own them. Their interest is limiting access to those who pay. To the degree they succeed, science is the loser (diZerega 2006). Open-source journals are an effort to minimize the damage market incentives do to scientific communication.

We see a similar disconnect between the political role of a free press informing citizens in a democracy and a profit-oriented press seeking to maximize income (diZerega 2004). The constitution guarantees freedom of the press due to its necessity in serving public values, not private ones. The tension between these two roles has been exposed for all to see in FOX's treatment of the 2020 presidential election, at great cost to the legitimacy of the electoral system. People died as a result.

A competent social science requires much more than market reductionism or rational choice theory. But a complex liberal society needs a system of rights.

## XVII: RE-ENVISIONING RIGHTS

This paper has argued a pre-moral perception, sympathy, is a natural outgrowth of evolutionary selection among social species, and ultimately undergirds morality among human beings. The morality arising from extending sympathy's implications to humanity as a whole supports liberalism, which ranks all individuals as morally equal, whatever other inequalities might exist among them. To the degree these values have been realized, the result has been an enormous increase in peaceful cooperation among human beings.

If there is one value that underlies cooperation among equals, it is mutual respect. However, the forms respect takes vary with changing contexts. *From this perspective, liberal rights are the form respect takes among an impersonal community of social and political equals who are relative strangers* (Macedo 1991, p. 56; diZerega 1996). When we do not know the details of a person's situation, or the reasons for it, it is fairer to apply the same standards to all, than apply generalizations based upon less than universal criteria. When



decisions must be made for a community, for respect to exist, all adult citizens must have equal legal standing. Liberal civil and political rights facilitate cooperation among strangers often pursuing mutually unknown ends. This is why rights are necessarily abstract.

Rather than serving as fundamental moral principles, individual rights apply in some contexts and not others. When people are not strangers, the logic of abstract rights becomes less appropriate, and sometimes, as with my inebriated friend discussed earlier, potentially destructive of friendship and even life. In addition, as links proliferate and tighten in impersonal contexts, arguments for *absolute* rights weaken, as my examples of TB and vaccines should make clear.

## XVIII: CONCLUSION

Liberalism's core insight, that the individual is society's fundamental moral unit and all are equally so, is rooted in science, not philosophy or theology. Cooperation is more fundamental to life on earth than is competition, which arises out of alternative cooperative possibilities that cannot jointly be realized. We see this truth displayed from the cells comprising our bodies to life's broad patterns manifesting at increasingly complex levels to the social spontaneous orders that make the modern world possible. It is our immersion within our social and linguistic ecosystems that enable us to cooperate together on a scale dwarfing any other vertebrate. But this very richness of relationships leads to vexing problems about how to harmonize them as these relational links grow in intensity and number. Evolutionary liberalism provides the intellectual and ethical insights to facilitate this harmonization, whereas individualist liberalism does not.<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Some belittle this achievement. They are completely wrong. Discussing this issue takes us away from the paper's focus but for a quick dose of historical reality, see Wilentz 2022.
- 2 I am very grateful to William Ramey, Prof. Emeritus of Microbiology for his careful examination of my biological arguments in particular, helping me avoid at least the worst of the over-simplifications and errors of interpretation threatening people in one field seeking to communicate about another.

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