

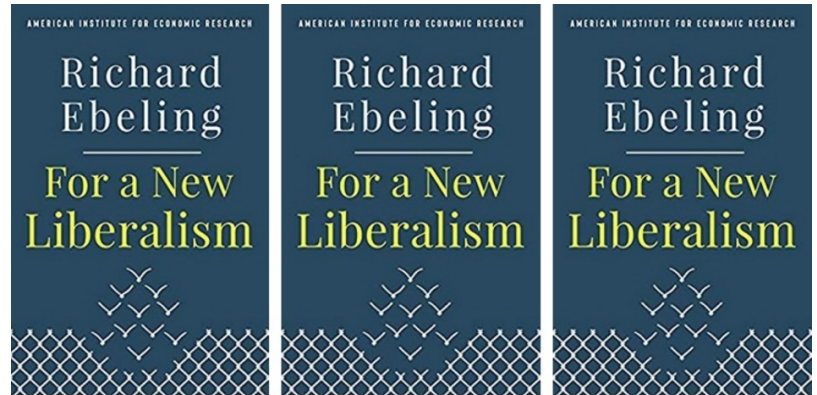


Written by [Laurence M. Vance](#) on December 23, 2019

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Review of “For a New Liberalism”

“Liberalism” used to emphasize the right of an individual to determine what pursuits he would follow and goals he would achieve. *For a New Liberalism* author Richard Ebeling would like a return to that meaning.



The words *liberal* and *liberalism* have lately fallen out of favor among those with left-of-center political views. Although some of them have embraced the label *socialist* and the term *socialism*, most still shy away from such language and instead use the expressions *progressive* and *progressivism*.

Richard Ebeling wants to rehabilitate the words *liberal* and *liberalism*, but in the classical sense. He contends in his introduction to [For a New Liberalism](#) that “what has been called ‘liberalism’ for a long time in the United States is a far cry from what liberalism used to mean at an earlier time, and has brought about numerous anti-liberal policies.” He explains the transformation thusly: “In the early decades of the 20th century, liberalism began to change its meaning and intent for a growing number of intellectuals and social and economic reformers. In the process, by the 1930s and 1940s, the premise and content of liberalism had a conception of man, society and government very different from its original ones in the 19th century.” Naturally, “this has created a noticeable confusion in thinking about what liberalism means, what type of social system it represents, and what is the role of government in a liberal society.”

Liberalism, which Ebeling sees as “the basis of a free and prosperous society,” is “founded on the idea of the distinct and unique individual human being.” The individual “owns and governs himself,” “decides on his own ends,” and “selects his own means to pursue his goals, and give meaning, value and purpose to his own life in all its aspects.” The liberal “respects the equal rights of all others, and therefore accepts and tries to live by the moral principle of mutual respect and peaceful association in all dealings with his fellow man.”

As far as the government is concerned, the liberal “has a healthy skepticism and concern for any and all unrestrained political power” and “insists upon clear and explicit constitutional limits on the delegated and enumerate functions assigned to any government.” The duties of government should be “confined to the protection of the individual rights of the citizenry, with fewest linguistic ambiguities through which power might be extended and expanded beyond the securing of people’s freedom.”

The author is not content to merely restore “the reality of 19th century liberalism.” He favors “a more consistent and principle-based, or free market, liberalism that is true to the ideas and ideals of



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individual liberty, freedom of association, trade and private enterprise, with equal individual rights to life, liberty, and honestly acquired property before an impartial rule of law, in a system of constitutionally limited government.”

Ebeling is eminently qualified to write such a work, and not just because he holds a Ph.D. in economics from Middlesex University in London and has authored several books besides *For a New Liberalism*. Ebeling is currently the “BB&T Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Free Enterprise Leadership” at The Citadel. He is also a senior fellow at the American Institute for Economic Research — “the first independent voice for economic research in the United States” — a non-profit organization that “educates Americans on the value of personal freedom, free enterprise, property rights, limited government and sound money.” Ebeling was formerly professor of economics at Northwood University, president of the Foundation for Economic Education, the Ludwig von Mises professor of economics at Hillsdale College, and the vice president of academic affairs for the Future of Freedom Foundation.

The 30 chapters of *For a New Liberalism* are divided into five parts, although this is only indicated in the introduction. Instead of section names, chapter titles, or chapter numbers, the right-hand page headers (including in the introduction and appendix) all contain just the author’s name (except in the index).

Chapters 1-5 “focus on the underlying principles, ideas and some of the historical accomplishments of liberalism” and “how, perversely, this older classical liberalism was undermined and preempted by ‘progressive’ social liberalism.” Chapters 6-13 “explain the nature and workings of the competitive free market economy in a system of liberty.” Chapters 14-16 show that it “is the liberal society that offers the greatest avenues for diversity and inclusion, compared to the rigid and artificial ones of government involvement.” Chapters 17-27 “turn to a critical analysis of the recent rebirth of ‘democratic’ socialism and the call for ‘identity politics’ based on race and gender.” Chapters 28-30 “explain why it is that liberalism in its true meaning and application is needed very much in our own time so freedom may be regained in wider areas of each of our lives, and market-based prosperity can continue to offer humanity a growing standard of living that improves the circumstances of all.” Additionally, in the last chapter, Ebeling explains the importance of everyone who believes in liberty defending it “in the most uncompromising and principled ways” by first becoming “informed and educated about the meaning and nature of the free society.”

Each chapter of *For a New Liberalism* is actually an independent essay. Ebeling states in his acknowledgments that “a majority” and “a number” of the essays in the book are based on or “developed out of” essays originally written for the American Institute for Economic Research or the Future of Freedom Foundation. Nevertheless, the book still “flows” as if everything in it was originally written for it, and is not marred by the curse of repetition that collections of essays of this size are prone to. And speaking of size, the book is actually shorter than its 434 pages indicate, owing to its large font and overly generous space between lines (“leading”). The essays in the book are generally timeless. There are only two references in the index to Donald Trump, and one each to Barack Obama and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Only a few of the chapters appear to be responses to recent articles critical of free markets or a free society. Due to the nature of the book, there are no footnotes — other than one trivial note referring the reader to another chapter.

The topics covered by Ebeling in the essays in *For a New Liberalism* include competition, free markets, entrepreneurships, monopoly, the price system, public goods, private property, the free rider problem,



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central planning, government services, capitalism and anti-capitalism, public education, “the tragedy of the commons,” natural rights, the profit-and-loss system, individualism, slavery, central banking, and the Federal Reserve. The essays in the third section of the book are especially relevant because they combat various points of socialism. Ebeling views “the newly fashionable idea of democratic socialism” as “nothing less than the same tyranny of all the earlier forms of socialism experienced over the last 100 years in more explicitly brutal forms.”

Ebeling advocates “the full and complete privatization of schooling from kindergarten through graduate education.” There should be no federal or state funding of education. Interest rates “should be left free and competitive to do their job as the network of intertemporal prices connecting and coordinating the saving decisions of lenders with the investment choices of borrowers.” When the government bestows “privileges or favors, anti-competitive protections, licensing and regulatory restrictions, subsidies and bounties paid for with other people’s money for the benefit of some in society at the expense of the rest of the citizenry,” it perverts “the fairness and justice of the free market process.”

Ebeling refers in the book to well-known classic works by John Locke, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill, but also introduces the reader to the political and economic thought of long-forgotten and neglected classical liberals and economists such as Michel Chevalier, John R. McCulloch, Benjamin Constant, Simon Newcomb, and William Rappard. It comes as no surprise that of more recent authors, Ebeling is indebted the most to Ludwig von Mises. Not only is he an “Austrian economist” in the tradition of Mises, Ebeling is the one who recovered the “lost papers” of Mises from a formerly secret KGB archive in Moscow in 1996. Other modern authors whom he refers to several times are Friedrich Hayek and Leonard Read. Although Ebeling himself is a libertarian, the term is scarcely mentioned in the book — a wise decision, no doubt, in keeping with the premise of the book.

On a negative note, in addition to issues with formatting, the book contains too many typos, including entries in the appendix on “suggested reading” that are out of order. These issues aside, *For a New Liberalism* is a needed antidote to socialism, collectivism, paternalism, progressivism, interventionism, and authoritarianism.

The reviewer, Laurence M. Vance, is an associated scholar of the Mises Institute and a policy advisor at the Future of Freedom Foundation.

For a New Liberalism, by Richard Ebeling, Great Barrington, Mass.: American Institute for Economic Research, 2019, 434 pages, paperback.

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