

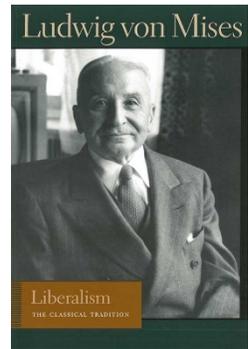


#EconlibReads



Liberalism

By Ludwig von Mises



Preface & Introduction

1. In the preface, Mises describes the evolution of the phrase "liberalism." Why do you think the term's meaning changed so, especially in the American context? To what extent do you agree with Mises that advocates of freedom and free markets should reclaim the term?
2. On page xxvii, Mises asserts, "Many of those who attach capitalism know very well that their situation under any other economic system will be less favorable. Nevertheless, with full knowledge of this fact, that advocate a reform, e.g., socialism, because they hope that the rich, whom they envy, will also suffer under it." To what extent do you agree???
3. In the Introduction, Mises describes what he calls "the socialist dream." What are the features he attributes to it? Does Mises over-emphasize the promises of socialism? Explain.

Chapter 1: The Foundations of Liberal Policy

4. Mises says, "The very name of liberalism is derived from freedom." (page 3) What does he mean by this? How does Mises describe freedom? Do you find his definition adequate? Why do you think he does not speak of liberty?
5. What role does Mises see for war in a liberal polity?
6. What is the difference in the meaning of equality between the older liberalism and neoliberalism, according to Mises? What sort of equality does Mises favor? How convincing do you find his case?
7. What is the difference between preference and privilege (page 11) to Mises? How does Mises's description of privilege accord with conversations about privilege today?
8. Mises defines morality as follows (page 14): "the regard for the necessary requirements of social existence that must be demanded of each individual member of society." Is this a good definition? Why, or why not?
9. Mises says on page 15, "Everything that serves to preserve the social order is moral; everything that is detrimental to it is immoral." To what extent can you agree with this statement? Are there any exceptions you can think of?
- 10.

11. What role does Mises see for luxury in the economy? How does luxury provide support for some level of inequality of wealth, according to Mises? To what extent do you agree?
12. Mises raises the question of coercion first in this chapter. He raises, on page 16, "...the question of whether people whose actions endanger the continued existence of society should be compelled to refrain from doing so." When do YOU think it's right to use such coercion? What form(s) should such coercion take? What would be the end goal of such coercion?
13. Why does Mises insist he is not an anarchist?
14. What is the "pseudodemocratic theory of the state" (page 20), according to Mises? What are the origins of this theory?
15. On page 22, Mises says, "...wherever democracy triumphed, and antidemocratic doctrine soon arose in fundamental opposition to it." Why? Are anti-democratic doctrines necessarily a consequence? And what are the fallacies of antidemocratic doctrine, according to Mises?
16. On page 33, Mises closes this section with the admonition that it requires "many long years of self-education" to become a good citizen. What do you think he means by this? What must one do/learn in such a process?
17. Is tolerance a virtue in a democratic society, according to Mises?

Chapter 2: Liberal Economic Policy

18. In chapter 2, Mises describes five possible systems of organizing an economy. What are they, and how do they compare to each other? Which is Mises the most concerned with, and why?
19. What are the main criticisms of private property Mises describes, and how does he answer to each of them? Which response, in your opinion, is the most compelling, and why?
20. What does Mises mean when he says, "A liberal government is ... a contradiction in terms." (page 44)
21. What is the PRIMARY reason socialism is impracticable, according to Mises? What other arguments does he list as secondary? Which do you think is the most persuasive today, and why?
22. What does Mises mean by "interventionism," and how does it compare to socialism?
23. What does Mises mean by the following: "...an attempt on the part of the government to interfere with the operation of the economic system based on private ownership of the means of production fails of the goal that its authors wished to achieve by means of it." (page 52)

24. "... in the capitalist system, with its rapid strides in improving human welfare, progress takes place too swiftly to spare individuals the necessity of adapting themselves to it." (p. 55) Is this a feature or a bug of a capitalist economy?
25. On page 56, Mises says, "no attempt is being made today to fix minimum wage rates by law on a large scale." Is this still true? Related, what do you think Mises would have to say about Universal Basic Income proposals?
26. Mises freely admits that capitalism isn't perfect. To buttress this point, he says, "In Nature too, much may exist that we do not like." (p. 61) Does this suggest that Mises thinks capitalism is "natural?"
27. Mises makes a seemingly off-handed remark about "labor exchanges" as a possible means of reducing unemployment (p. 57). What might such a system look like today? How effective do you think it would be?
28. Mises writes somewhat at length about the "capitalist mentality," starting around page 60. What IS this?
29. How do bureaucracies in government and in business differ, according to Mises? More specifically, how do the tools of each type of bureaucrat differ?
30. How do businesses determine who is the most competent and deserving of promotion or reward? How does this compare to civil service? Do you agree with Mises that, "Never yet has anyone of real worth risen to the top by way of a prescribed program of study and promotion?" (p. 72)

Chapter 3: Liberal Foreign Policy

31. Why is liberalism synonymous with humanism for Mises? To what extent do you find his reasoning compelling?
32. What does Mises mean by the "right of self-determination?" What role should it play in a liberal society? How feasible is this right on today's world?
33. On page 81, Mises calls for a "world order" that would keep nations from resorting to war. What IS this world order he speaks of?
34. Why does Mises object to (compulsory) education? What does this have to do with the maintenance of peace in a liberal society?
35. What are the roots of nationalism, according to Mises? How is nationalism distinct from imperialism?
36. Mises acknowledges the wrongs of colonialism, but is still concerned how to eliminate it in the least harmful way possible. What does he suggest?
37. Mises suggests that the conditions for free trade IMPROVED toward the 20th century, yet protectionism continued to rise. What was the REAL reason behind the increase in protective measures, according to Mises?
38. What two reasons does Mises offer for the increased restrictions on immigration in his time? To what extent do you believe these two factors to STILL be the driving force(s) behind immigration restrictions?

39. How are immigration restrictions like protective tariffs?
40. Mises writes a great deal about the role of language and national identity. Should Mises be considered in favor of multiculturalism, given his insistence on cosmopolitanism?
41. Should Mises's style of liberalism be more open to compromise in politics?

Chapter 4: Liberalism and the Political Parties

42. Mises says (p. 120) that the liberal's sole and most important task is the "work of enlightenment" of his fellows to the cause of liberalism. What do you think this means??? What exactly is it that we should be doing?
43. Mises describes the political parties of his day beginning on page 123. What characterizes them, and what makes them illiberal? What do you think Mises would say about political parties TODAY?
44. What is the "crisis of parliamentarism," according to Mises? How ought the liberal respond to this supposed crisis? How much about this crisis has changed since the 1920s, when Mises was writing?
45. Why did socialism have a special appeal to liberals in the early 20th century, according to Mises? To what extent does Mises's explanation help explain the resurgent appeal of socialism today?
46. What's the fundamental problem of the liberal candidate for political office? (Hint: we're looking at pp. 139-140.)
47. On page 144, Mises says, "...the popular idea that economists are divided along party lines is altogether mistaken." To what extent do you think this is still true today?
48. Read what Mises says about entrepreneurs in the first full paragraph on page 146. What does Mises think is the place of morality in entrepreneurship? What do YOU think?
49. Mises says on page 147 that, "modern civilization will not perish unless it does so by its own self-destruction." Written in 1927, how do you think Mises would react to his statement post WW2? Today?
50. Mises says on page 148, "It is true that all this straining and struggling to increase their standard of living does not make men any happier." What do you think happiness means to Mises?

