

Jenkins' scintillating writing continues.

*Katheryn Gallant, a graduate of California State University, Los*

*Angeles, is writing an alternative history novel that explores what might have happened had Asquith's letters to Venetia Stanley been published in 1915.*

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## Liberalism and illiberalism

Francis Fukuyama, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*

(Profile Books, 2022)

Review by **William Wallace**

I HAD UNDERESTIMATED FUKUYAMA. I thought his first book, *The End of History*, was superficial. This book, his ninth, is clear, easy to read, short, and well grounded in recent philosophical and political debates on liberalism and illiberalism, primarily in the USA but also taking into account parallel debates and developments across Europe and beyond.

In 154 pages, he ranges from the founding ideas of liberalism in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to contemporary intellectual and political conflicts. He notes the fault lines and hypocrisies in early expositions of liberalism, most strikingly in the Declaration of Independence's assertion that 'All men are created equal' while excluding women and slaves. 'The most fundamental principle of [classical] liberalism is one of tolerance' (p. 7). The most difficult values for classical liberalism to reconcile were liberty and equality. Limited government, the

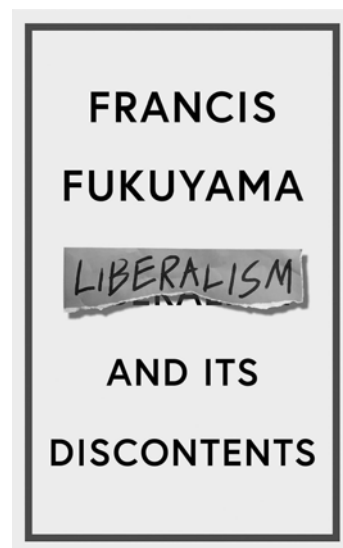
rule of law, respect for the scientific method and reasoned argument provided the foundations for liberal democracy and for liberal societies' long-term economic growth.

Most of the book is devoted to the attacks on classical liberalism since 1945, from both right and left. Von Mises and Hayek, and their followers in the Chicago School and elsewhere, 'denigrated the role of the state in the economy' (p. 19); neoliberalism prioritised economic and personal freedom to a point where it became hostile to state action. Reductionist assumptions about individual motivation resting entirely on self-interest excluded the importance of community and solidarity. Rawls' concern for 'the sovereign self' omitted the dimension of 'public-spiritedness', concern for others in shared communities.

If liberals on the right responded to the fascist state by going too far towards libertarian anarchism, critics on the left took the idea of the sovereign self into an

ideology of identity and social oppression which left reasoned argument and tolerance behind. His summary of critical theory and its illiberal tenets is clear and persuasive; the insistence that liberal societies cloak informal structures of oppression fails to establish that alternative systems of government can better resolve such tensions. Marcuse, Foucault, Derrida and their followers have provided critiques of rationality that have undermined democratic and scientific debate and allowed for the emergence of conspiratorial theories about underlying power structures.

The illiberal right has in turn followed this critique of rationality, developing alternative conspiratorial theories on liberalism as hostile to nation, faith and community. Technological innovation, above all new media, have allowed non-evidential approaches to spread. 'Progressives and white



## Reviews

nationalists come together in valuing raw feelings and emotion over cold empirical analysis' (p. 113) – though the progressive left has not followed the communitarian right in preferring authoritarian government to democracy.

'If liberalism is to be preserved as a system of government, we need to understand the sources of these discontents' (p. 141). Fukuyama stresses that liberalism and state intervention are not incompatible, and that state support for disadvantaged groups is a necessary aspect of democratic government. He acknowledges the delicacy of reconciling liberalism's inherent universalism with the limitations of nation states and national identity; he argues for a stronger emphasis on citizenship and the social contract between citizens and the state as a means of creating 'a positive liberal vision of national identity.' (p. 137) Above all, he argues for a reassertion of reason, moderation and tolerance as governing principles in defending the superiority of liberal democracy to its discontented alternatives.

Political ideas spill back and forth across the Atlantic. Fukuyama provides a pocket guide to current American ideological conflicts, with references to their links to comparable European debates. Both the American progressive left and the libertarian and communitarian versions of the illiberal American right have

close ties to groups within the UK and across the European continent, feeding political movements as they raise and fall. This book will help the defenders of liberalism, now embattled, to understand where their opponents are coming from – and hopefully therefore to defend liberal principles more vigorously.

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## Liberal women in Devon

J. Neville, M. Auchterlonie, P. Auchterlonie and A. Roberts (eds.), *Devon Women in Public and Professional Life 1900–1950: Votes, voices and vocations* (Exeter University Press, 2021)

### Review by Mark Egan

**T**HIS IS A well-written and impressively researched series of essays on eight women, prominent in civic life in Devon during the first half of the twentieth century. Each of the women was active in politics, medicine and teaching, the voluntary sector or rural life: some were active in more than one area. The authors' intention is to assess how the women contributed to public, professional and civic life in the county and to what degree a rural county, distant from London, reflected developments in the women's movement nationally. This aim is certainly achieved. As well as chapters on each of the women, there are engaging introductory and concluding

chapters which pull together the various themes from the essays to discuss what these stories can tell us about women in civic life after enfranchisement.

Some of the women covered in this book were active Liberals and their stories will be of particular interest to readers of this *Journal*. The first essay deals with Eleanor Acland (1878–1933). Acland should be a familiar name for anyone interested in Liberal history. Eleanor's husband was Francis Acland, a Liberal MP for most of the period from 1906 until his death in 1939, whose forebears included numerous politicians. Their son, Richard Acland, was also a Liberal, who went on to found the wartime Common