

7 A STORY FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

For scholars to respond to the Age of Populism is a complicated business, because every academic discipline has its own principles, procedures, and goals, in which case to take into account a large and important set of new conditions and characters requires considerable professional adjustment. However, the American Political Science Association, with over 12,000 members, embraces more than sixty fields and sub-fields about people, institutions, issues, and research methods, and we share a signature concern for the exercise and impact of power relationships. Therefore, we are equipped to deal with this challenge if some of us will want to do that.

In these circumstances, I have proposed that appropriate responses to the Age of Populism should relate to a variety of factors. These include insights we inherit from great thinkers, procedural and substantive democracy, good citizenship, the shape of multiversities, a metaphorical Temple of Science, mainstream economics, indices of gross domestic product, needs and wants, economic growth, entrepreneurship, neoliberalism, *homo economicus*, *homo politicus*, free trade, shareholders, stakeholders, scarcity, public goods, the decline of the middle class, beleaguered truth, humanism, opposition to tyranny, problem-centered research, power studies, real people, and real markets.

The trends among these factors are fueled in large part by creative destruction, which generates dislocations in various realms of life to the point where many citizens resent the modern economy and distrust leaders and institutions – from politicians to journalists, from professors to bankers – who

have praised innovation but done little to mitigate its adverse consequences. Therefore, I have proposed that some political scientists will take a special interest in those consequences, contributing to the public conversation about neoliberalism by investigating and highlighting the costs of economic growth.

Lists and Stories

It remains for us to consider how political scientists might most effectively present their findings in the national debate over neoliberalism. To this end, several factors are worth adding to those I have described so far. One of these is what I have called elsewhere the “list syndrome,” which we should avoid.⁴¹⁴

The list syndrome is a matter of weak “framing.”⁴¹⁵ It shows up when liberal politicians such as John Kerry, Barack Obama, Charles Schumer, and Hillary Clinton propose a jumble of new government policies to deal with what they regard as social and economic problems.⁴¹⁶ It also appears when liberal social critics write about what strikes them as social and economic difficulties, each critic treating a particular problem – say global warming, nuclear proliferation, racism, pesticides, automation, misogyny, gun control, illegal immigration, and more – but not clearly relating it to others.⁴¹⁷ In other words, the list syndrome shows up when politicians and critics “string together one policy proposal after another (there are the lists) rather than organize those proposals around short and powerful statements, repeated endlessly, about what such proposals represent together and why they should be adopted.”⁴¹⁸

In *Politics Without Stories* (2016), I wrote about how, for historical and philosophical reasons, including Weberian disenchantment and Deweyan pragmatism, the list syndrome reflects a liberal lack of powerful political stories.⁴¹⁹ This absence is a serious rhetorical handicap, because political stories, told again and again, can relate to various policy proposals and may enlist for them public support to the extent that stories seem to link those proposals in a vision of large ends worthy of collective action.⁴²⁰

On that score, approximately speaking, Bernie Sanders promoted a dramatic story of inequality culminating in the “One Percent,” which gave shape to his campaign, and Donald Trump promoted a vivid story of the “swamp” in Washington, which invited resentful voters to support him as their champion against haughty elites. At the same time, Hillary Clinton, whose official campaign website offered solution after solution for a wide range of policy issues,⁴²¹ promoted a disjointed list of policy proposals and lost the election.⁴²²

Political scientists as such are not running for office. But avoiding the list syndrome is essential for the project I am proposing. Critics of the modern economy and its consequences – of capitalism and its bag of mixed blessings – have already written, and will continue to write, about what should be repaired or ameliorated in that economy. Their output fills libraries, bookstores, the internet, and social media. But, as Naomi Klein observed, saying “no [for example, saying no to oligarchic banking] is not enough ... What was too often missing [in recent protest movements] was a clear and captivating vision [story] of the world beyond that no.”⁴²³

In other words, although Klein did not say this, we may take our inspiration from Judith Shklar. As a matter of principle, Shklar pointed us toward opposing tyranny. That is her goal, as a matter of principle. But if, as a matter of practice, in order to pursue tyranny we will employ the sort of problem-driven research that Ian Shapiro recommends, we should rhetorically clothe our indignant findings in effective terms.

To that end, neoliberalism’s critics need stories to step up their case’s appeal, and this is especially so because neoliberalism’s supporters use stories to powerfully defend it. Some of the pro-capitalist stories are implicit in the kind of mainstream economic thought that we explored in earlier chapters, which is about individualism, utility seeking, scarcity, and more-is-better, and which legitimizes the national enthusiasm for long-term economic growth punctuated by creative destruction. And some of these stories infuse political speech on the American right – which I have treated elsewhere⁴²⁴ – where

flagship conservatives like William Buckley, Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, George Will, Robert Bork, Charles Murray, Newt Gingrich, Rush Limbaugh, Grover Norquist, Paul Ryan, and Tucker Carlson, who helped to install neoliberalism in America before Donald Trump took center stage, already promoted a powerful rhetorical vision of personal freedom, free markets, small government, welfare queens, evil empires, reckless “elites,” robust patriotism, and divine sanction for American exceptionalism.

A Tale for Political Scientists

In sum, political scientists have the research tools needed to deal with our populist age. And some of us should move in that direction. And we should frame our messages in a story, or interlocking stories, about the target of our disaffections and what to do about it.

However, as I have explained elsewhere, no one knows for sure how to create long-term, popular, and inspiring political stories.⁴²⁵ Leave aside philosophical and historical debates on this matter. In plain terms, it is impossible to describe in words, amounting to clear guidelines, how to create gripping and unforgettable stories because what must somehow be generated are qualities as ethereal as a *beautiful* painting, a *melodious* sonata, a *spellbinding* potboiler, a *riveting* haiku, an *enthraling* anecdote, a *melancholy* requiem, an *entrancing* blouse, or a *harrowing* fairy tale. Furthermore, if a modern story-teller, such as Stephen King or J. K. Rowling, succeeds in generating any of those results, it may be that the intended effect will emerge for only some in the audience and not for others. Thus those of us who, say, fashion television commercials or political stump speeches, work hard at what we do but cannot guarantee success for our own creations.

So there is a difficulty on this score. Accordingly, without trying to create a durable, popular, inspiring, and explicit political story, I suggest that critics should place neoliberalism at the center of their messaging, where doing that repeatedly is

itself an implicit message.⁴²⁶ They should constantly pound home neoliberalism's name in association with descriptions of wretched outcomes for "losers" across the land, for energetic and decent neighbors who do not deserve to be judged solely by their economic "efficiency." They should write about responsible citizens who are in fact victims of forces over which they have no control, about people who might be small towners, suburbanites, slum dwellers, farmers, minority citizens, factory workers, college students, single parents, high-tech geeks, soccer moms, office clerks, homeschoolers, nurses, NRA members, feminists, mall-store "associates," devout congregants, gig economy temps, the *precariat*, click-bait journalists, and more, who could do better in life if they would see themselves all in the same boat and in politics act accordingly.

Neoliberalism, in this implicit tale of continual wronging, should be identified, and shamed, as a perpetuation of *contrived* markets - remember, there are no *natural* markets - which arise at least partly from unequal power relations,⁴²⁷ which value trinkets more than people, and which measure the dollar value of everything instead of the ethical value of anyone.⁴²⁸ We need not deny that neoliberalism is often creative, and we should agree that key parts of economic growth may contribute to prosperity. But insisting that some of neoliberalism's results are shameful, may over time generate an inclination to doubt the wisdom of letting economic events run their course as if an invisible hand will really produce most of the outcomes that society needs.⁴²⁹

An Immoral Index

In public talk, political scientists should leave preaching to others. We can count on some of those to warn against pursuing material wealth endlessly. For example, priests tell us about Luke insisting that "You cannot serve both God and money."⁴³⁰ And ministers remind us about Jesus warning that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than

for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.”⁴³¹ And rabbis and imams echo similar sentiments, citing the Torah or the Koran.

Still, as Judith Shklar might say, scholars can see, even without the benefit of clergy, scholars can see that some situations are extraordinarily disagreeable, and those we should move to condemn. Therefore, scholarly critics should insist, in impartial terms, that neoliberalism is guilty of measuring merit in modern times by immoral indices.

Thus, when pro-marketeters assume that everyone should behave like *homo economicus*, they are assigning some people to failure through no fault of their own. This is because in actual life, as opposed to what abstract economic theories describe, various amounts of economic talent, imagination, and energy are allocated in normal curves to real people. The result is that some people naturally receive more efficacy resources and others receive less, after which, in a job market where good jobs are constantly being automated out of existence or outsourced away, some workers will get the jobs that remain and others will trail in the economic race.⁴³²

The standard neoliberal response to this situation is to argue, with or without acting to budget the necessary funds, that America needs extensive job retraining programs. The assumption is that if there are not enough jobs to go around, unemployed workers can be retrained to do tasks that are not presently being performed or are being performed inadequately, after which entrepreneurs will find these workers and creatively hire them to upgrade existing projects or fashion new ones.

Well, yes. The country should welcome retraining programs. Certainly it is better to have some such programs than to have none. But retraining will not solve the problem of modern unemployment, because if idle workers will be upgraded by job training, good American jobs will still be automated away. Moreover, even if millions of new and lucrative jobs will be generated in America, there is no assurance that they will stay there, because countries like China and India have many millions of people at or near the top of their normal curves of

competence who are, relatively speaking, inexpensively available in the international job market for so long as mobile capital and free trade are cornerstones of neoliberalism. And if Thomas Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum, on behalf of the modern economy, really believe that the country can retrain workers to the point where the normal curve for American workers will rise – where, like the cherished children of Garrison Keillor’s Lake Webogon, they will all be “above average” in talents and skills – then neoliberals should consult with scholars in the Temple of Science’s psychology column about the limits of normal curves.⁴³³

In principle, Friedman and Mandelbaum deserve credit for insisting that what victims of economic growth and creative destruction need is thoughtful and community-wide action to help people who cannot keep up on the economic treadmill. Unfortunately, it is exactly this sort of shared mitigation, probably requiring political decisions, which most neoliberals will not promote because, having adopted the mainstream economic notion of incomes based on rational behavior, they view society as a collection of individuals who should take care of themselves.⁴³⁴

For example, neoliberals usually reject comprehensive proposals for deliberately sheltering a wide range of familiar American industries and enterprises.⁴³⁵ And they are unlikely to favor enacting statutes to forbid “venue shopping,” whereby corporations – like Amazon – play American cities and states off against one another to receive tax concessions that deprive local governments of adequate funding for education, roads, sewers, libraries, and other public services.⁴³⁶

Another Immoral Index

On this score, the fact that neoliberals praise nation-wide or “average” gains from globalization, as if life for all of us is getting better all the time, amounts to using a second immoral index to justify existing practices. The Ricardian notion of comparative advantage, which neoliberals endorse, says that two

countries engaging in free trade will both benefit.⁴³⁷ And we will know this is happening when GDP, at home and abroad, goes up.

In this view, free trade is a win-win situation. Now, that may sometimes be true for *countries*. But this piece of conventional wisdom tells us nothing about the *people* who live in those countries.⁴³⁸ For many of them, average is an irrelevant yardstick because, in truth, some of these people will prosper greatly and others will suffer from comparative inefficiency. For example, if workers in America need wages of fifteen dollars per hour to make even basic ends meet, some of them will surely not achieve that if globalization offers new jobs to poor, crowded, and corrupt countries where workers make no more than several dollars a day.

In social science terms, to regard average incomes as an index of well-being and prosperity is to ignore differences in the “distribution” of incomes. One way to do this is to speak of high incomes – such as the sometimes irritating billions collected by the One Percent – as if, for the most part, they flow justifiably from unusual efforts and initiative. To this end, the concept of entrepreneur is conveniently available, and famous examples – such as Sam Walton, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Bloomberg, and Mark Zuckerberg – come easily to mind.

Another way for neoliberals to avoid distribution issues, however, is to assume that lesser incomes depend on the routine marginal utility contributions of people who don't live in One Percent neighborhoods. That is, if mainstream marginal utility theory is valid, the market provides everyone who works with an income, however modest, which is exactly equivalent to that person's contribution to society's happiness.⁴³⁹ In which case, there is no need for public discussion of income distribution because it is already being done automatically and fairly by the private realm.⁴⁴⁰

Well, not really. Technically speaking, social science research shows that in existing markets many high incomes depend (1) on exploiting various kinds of “rents,” such as when patents prevent potential competitors from challenging a current

producer,⁴⁴¹ or (2) on creating what economists call “network effects,” as, for example, when so many people join a digital system that you feel you must join to be able to communicate with its members even if the system is technically second-rate.⁴⁴² Facebook is an obvious recent example of a network effect, because many people open accounts on Facebook in order not to be left out of its community. And that impulse enables Mark Zuckerberg and his co-investors to make inordinate profits from selling the personal information that Facebook collects on each of its users. Another network effect favors Bill Gates, whose engineers designed the word processing program called Microsoft Word. Many people choose to buy that program (thereby enhancing Gates’ income) and write with it because it is compatible with what many other people are using (which is also Microsoft Word).⁴⁴³

Social scientists know, then, that the unequal distribution of income is often unfair, and this is a large strike against neoliberalism. But inequality also leads to a situation we noted earlier, which is that when incomes are unequal, some people will be able to turn their surplus income (wealth) into political power (lobbying, funding electoral campaigns, underwriting think tanks, sponsoring referenda, hiring consultants, owning media outlets, etc.). As a result, economic inequality in America today is an enormous political problem.⁴⁴⁴

Neoliberals are largely indifferent to this problem, especially after, in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010) and *McCutcheon v. Federal Elections Commission* (2014), the Supreme Court decided that throwing heaps of money at politics, sometimes anonymously, is not an abuse of power but a legitimate exercise of free speech. This indifference to inequality invites a strong response among those who will investigate the Age of Populism’s human ecology. Here they will find many matters of fact that should be presented front and center, again and again, in a message about the downsides of creative destruction.

Among those downsides, for example, we should pay attention to how creativity in the invention of new commercial instruments – such as junk bonds, securitized mortgages,

credit swaps, and derivatives in companies led by entrepreneurs like Ivan Boesky, Sanford Weill, Michael Milkin, Jack Welch, Kenneth Lay, Angelo Mozilo, and Richard Fuld⁴⁴⁵ – generated the growth of financial institutions that caused the Crash of 2008 but were “too big to fail” and now account for 20 percent of the country’s GDP even though mostly they make profits rather than things.⁴⁴⁶ In other words, contrary to the way neoliberals usually tell their story, it turns out that gainful creativity is not always a matter of inventing patently useful goods like transistors, Corningware, standardized shipping containers, and Ibuprofen.⁴⁴⁷

In sum, there are principles and practices in our special times that should be analyzed and criticized by some political scientists. In order to avoid activating the list syndrome, however, which might reduce the public impact of their findings, they should frame those findings in a relentless message, shared among scholars, about the downsides of neoliberalism as it is driven by creative destruction. As I noted, no one knows exactly how to create large-scale stories that will surely be popular, therefore such a story critical of dangerous current trends need not be specified explicitly, like in a religious catechism. But we are entitled to hope that it might grow over time out of repeatedly underlining undesirable, market-based, neoliberal outcomes in American life.

Hartz's Story

Even more hopefully, a shortcut may be available to this end, because there already exists a simple but powerful story of American exceptionalism that scholars could promote, at least in part, as applicable to the nation’s situation today. That is the story about centrist, moderate, and democratic political values and institutions told by Louis Hartz in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955).

Very briefly, as Hartz put it, his book “contains ... what might be called the storybook truth about American history: that

America was settled by men who fled from the feudal and clerical oppressions of the Old World.”⁴⁴⁸ We may leave aside the gender problem in that sentence and take it for what Hartz intended, which was that ordinary men and women came to America’s Atlantic coast and made a forward-looking Revolution even while, by and large, the class structure and moral orthodoxies of Britain did not follow them. That is, the British did not export to the colonies a small but powerful aristocracy and a mass of credulous workers, peasants, and tenant farmers. As a result, Americans were able to espouse and promote political values belonging to European Liberals, who thrived as a sector of society between the wealthy above and the poor below.⁴⁴⁹

Most importantly for Hartz in this tale, the late-stage feudalism of the Old Order (*ancien regime*) of Europe, including large and powerful established churches, was not much present in the American colonies.⁴⁵⁰ Consequently, there were few defenders of that Order who could try, during and after the Revolution, to violently overthrow what was basically a Liberal American society. Consequently, that society eventually (but not immediately) produced a polity marked by balances of power, separation of religion and state, widespread civil rights, and many middle-class citizens. In these circumstances, the absence of a European-style Reaction, led by philosophers like Joseph de Maistre and statesmen like Prince Klemens von Metternich, according to Hartz helped the American Liberal regime to survive and prosper, even while Europe for a century-and-a-half endured terrible conflicts fueled by ethnic and class distinctions that animated competing ideologies of monarchy, empire, nationalism, fascism, and communism.

In 1957, the APSA awarded Louis Hartz the Woodrow Wilson Prize for best book in political science, and in 1977, the APSA added to that prize its prestigious Lippincott Prize for a political theory book of enduring importance. Nevertheless, as years passed and social attitudes in America evolved, scholars fiercely debated whether Hartz had been right about America and even what he meant. For example, Ira Katznelson accepted

Hartz's thesis that Liberalism has long been the central current in American life. But he insisted that that current has been challenged repeatedly by complex alternatives, variations, and illiberal legacies in relations between groups such as workers and employers, whites and blacks, men and women, Jews and Gentiles.⁴⁵¹ Somewhat similarly, James Kloppenberg and Rogers Smith argued that Hartz's story was unrealistic because, perhaps in keeping with his time, he overestimated the nation's commitment to Liberalism by not sufficiently accounting for anti-democratic American expressions of racism and misogyny.⁴⁵² Additional scholars, like Corey Robins and Michael C. Desch, focused more on foreign affairs and rebuked Hartz for, in their opinion, mainly overlooking Liberalism's penchant for fueling American imperialism and brutality on the world stage.⁴⁵³

Alan Wolfe, however, decided in 2005 that "Hartz got the large picture astonishingly right."⁴⁵⁴ And there is the evaluation on which we can build today.⁴⁵⁵

Where Hartz was Right

For our purposes, Hartz was right in two important respects. On the one hand, he argued that most Americans believe strongly in Liberal values. In Hartz's terms, and especially by comparison with the full mosaic of European political thinking, Liberal sentiments in America added up to a fairly homogeneous notion of American exceptionalism.⁴⁵⁶ It was as if, generation after generation, Americans believed that the country, dedicated to democracy (as Lincoln defined it in his Gettysburg Address, "government of the people, by the people, and for the people"), was morally outstanding – that is, a "light unto the nations"⁴⁵⁷ or "a city on a hill"⁴⁵⁸ – in which case all Americans should pledge their allegiance to that inspiring vision.

Of course, many of the people who Hartz regarded as "Liberals" supported segregation, scorned immigrants, oppressed Native Americans, ignored feminism, and condemned unconventional genders. Nevertheless, whatever generosity may have

been lacking at one time or another in Liberal politics, Hartz focused less on what was missing than on what was present. Therefore he described most Americans in 1955, deep into the Cold War, as confidently believing that, apart from some awkward deviations, they shared a democratic, constitutional, and pluralistic political tradition that they should defend against all detractors.

There was, however, a problem with this American solidarity that entails, in a way, orthodox thinking. As Hartz pointed out, when they feel threatened, some of America's like-minded may become hostile to unusual views or unconventional people. When that happened in the past, as in the Red Scare in 1919–1920 and during McCarthyism after World War II, some Liberals came together to call for, in effect, government committed to “America First” policies. Thus, at that point, those true-believers recommended a government devoted to excluding or marginalizing people in their country who they (the true believers) regarded as different, as not sufficiently American or even, perhaps, un-American. And that is where, obviously, Hartz's story of American exceptionalism may be at least somewhat relevant to populism and its manifestations, such as the election of President Donald Trump, a contemporary champion of America First,⁴⁵⁹ of border walls, and of inviting progressive congresswomen to leave America, that is, to “go back” to the “places from which they came.”⁴⁶⁰

Hartz was also right on a second point, which relates to how he described America as fortunate because, in the absence of late-stage feudalism in America, the country could acclaim its Liberal sentiments and, for generations, with little opposition, maintain Liberal institutions. Hartz may have praised early Liberalism too highly. On that score, we can be thankful, and he was, too,⁴⁶¹ that there is room in America for living up more fully than originally to the great principles that were enshrined in the Declaration of Independence even though some of the men who signed it enslaved black Africans, devastated Native Americans, and demeaned women.⁴⁶² Thus, the country has

over time, and at considerable cost, significantly adjusted its practices in realms involving race, difference, and identity. More needs doing, but progress has been made.⁴⁶³

We should note, however, apart from the details, that Hartz's second point, about America's good fortune for lacking a reactionary opposition, is now directly relevant to politics in our time. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Hartz observed, Americans did not bring into the country, from outside, feudal classes and institutions that, in Europe, opposed Liberal ideas and practices. But in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a troublesome new force appeared in America itself, a force that was not imported but arose at home, and that, like the remnants of feudalism once did in Europe, now challenges Liberal principles and projects.⁴⁶⁴

The new and anti-Liberal force is neoliberalism,⁴⁶⁵ which critics named after Hartz wrote,⁴⁶⁶ but which insists that Liberals should not try to work through government in a humanistic way to provide happiness and well-being for all Americans. In the neoliberal view, Liberals must, instead, permit markets to make large decisions about such matters, on the grounds that markets can do that efficiently whereas voters and elected officials will necessarily err.⁴⁶⁷ And if the result in America today is large disparities of income, respect, and health, like in historically feudal societies, we are admonished to leave those alone because they flow, justifiably, from an invisible hand exercising a special sort of moral competence.

In other words, Hartz's thesis from 1955 implies, in a way, that the convictions and demands of neoliberalism after he wrote can be regarded as analogous to historical elements of the European Reaction.⁴⁶⁸ Yet what that means is that political scientists can use Hartz's story to argue that neoliberalism, as a local amalgam of ideas, disciples, interest groups, donors, spokespeople, and policy proposals, should be criticized now because, in some respects, it holds back the positive side of the Liberal Tradition in America, which might otherwise be capable of mitigating or preventing damages caused by neoliberalism's central project of creative destruction.⁴⁶⁹

It is as if, to borrow from other stories, the country waited, for generations, for barbarians to arrive at the city's gate. Fortunately, the ones that Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Madison, and their colleagues feared never came. Today, though, it is as if Americans must repel new, modern barbarians, soft-spoken and well-dressed, acclaimed by articulate surrogates and steered by efficient strategists, who are already inside the city and must be confronted there.⁴⁷⁰

Politics

I have said all along that some political scientists should deal directly with the Age of Populism. To the matrix of factors that I proposed taking into account to that end, let us add two final elements, which are (1) a willingness to seriously consider promoting *redistribution* of income and wealth, and (2) an understanding that to do this would probably require substantial *political action*.

Years ago, these sentiments frequently went hand in hand, as in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Second Inaugural Address, during the Great Depression, when he declared that "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."⁴⁷¹ Some rearrangement of incomes, then, was clearly on the New Deal agenda. More recently, however, American politicians, pundits, scholars, and activists have focused mainly on issues of race, identity, and gender. The problem there, as Walter Benn Michaels explained, is that such cultural issues, important though they are, draw attention away from broad elements of material inequality, from diverse economic outcomes that can fuel some of the intense resentment that underlies our era.⁴⁷²

Redistribution

With regard to inequality, then, the case for political action comes after that for redistribution.⁴⁷³ Neoliberals argue that

political action is biased and fallible whereas markets are just and effective, in which case government should be small and markets should encourage creative destruction. But in reality, markets create uneven distribution – what I have called winners and losers – which generates inequality, which breeds resentment, which fuels populism, which brings us squarely to the Age of Populism and its downsides.⁴⁷⁴ And those downsides are, after all, what political scientists should investigate and whose parameters they should publicize to encourage voters and politicians to reduce some of the inequalities that, inevitably, flow from economic growth. Therefore, at least *some* redistribution is a necessary step for our times, although there will be intense arguments about how much of it should be fostered.

Political Action

Once the need for redistribution becomes clear, the need for *political action* must also be recognized, because to the extent that social science findings about creative dislocations and destructions will emerge, achieving more equitable conditions will flow mainly from taking political action to adjust the neo-liberal system from without, from beyond the marketplace and its uneven allocations. In plain language, our living rooms are occupied by an 800-pound gorilla.⁴⁷⁵ And this gorilla will not restrain itself.⁴⁷⁶ Therefore, ordinary men and women must together curb him by exercising their sovereign power as democratic citizens.⁴⁷⁷

In which case, if scholars will draw public attention to the downsides of America's economy – to the massive use of fossil fuels, to the decline of Main Street, to the growth of temporary work, to the corrosion of character,⁴⁷⁸ to losses of status and self-esteem, to disdain for traditional virtues, to the rise of digital dependence, to the inordinate power of financial institutions, and more – they must be prepared to accept, and even recommend, along with other citizens, that government will make some or many of the adjustments necessary for

spreading happiness and well-being throughout society more evenly than they exist there today.

Just Say No?

Arguments about exactly how far government should intervene in markets, if at all, are endless and cannot be resolved here.⁴⁷⁹ We should consider one approach to this issue, though, which suggests that a substantial amount of governmental activism could be helpful to Americans across the board, from various groups, from various regions, from various identity sectors, and from various political persuasions.

Here is what happened. As neoliberalism gathered strength, Nancy Reagan argued that America did not need to fashion legislative solutions to the destruction caused by narcotic drugs. In a classic illustration of the neoliberal tendency to regard society mainly as a collection of individuals, President Ronald Reagan's wife declared in 1986 that the national drug problem could be solved if only children would personally resist the temptations of heroin and crack cocaine dealers and "just say no" to drugs.⁴⁸⁰ The First Lady campaigned earnestly and wholeheartedly, but the drug epidemic continued.

The moral of this story is, I think, that formal rules and collective strategies should not be rejected in principle, as Mrs. Reagan apparently did. Rather, in some cases, they may be necessary if a society wants to move closer to shared well-being.⁴⁸¹ And this is certainly so in modern America, where economic competition and constant change sometimes compel individuals to choose between manifest decency and economic success or even survival.

Thus, again and again, a lack of overall rules forces many Americans to deal personally with stark moral dilemmas. For example, within the framework of free trade, should I continue to operate my cookie factory in Chicago, or should I discharge my Chicago employees, move the factory to a poor country such as Mexico, and utilize cheap labor there?⁴⁸² Or, if it is my business to make 3D printers, should I stop producing

them because I know that, somewhere down the road, those printers will throw millions of people out of work? Or if, along with companies like Monsanto and Dupont, I can develop genetically modified seeds and crops, should I do that even if my selling them profitably locks growers into a system of highly capitalized agribusiness that ruins traditional farming and farm families?⁴⁸³

Furthermore, if I earn or inherit a great deal of money, should I donate to an Ivy League university some of that money for new laboratories so that that school will admit my child rather than a more energetic and talented youngster from East St. Louis? Or, if I am managing part of the American aerospace industry, should I, on behalf of American workers in companies like Boeing, Lockheed-Martin, and Raytheon, favor selling precision-guided missiles and advanced fighter planes to Saudi Arabia, whose violent ruling family oppresses its citizens, exports religious fanaticism, and bombs its neighbors in Yemen?⁴⁸⁴

Such dilemmas demonstrate that if a society wants to enable its citizens to behave virtuously, so that they may live together effectively in the pursuit of happiness, it must sometimes create rules – that is, governmental guidelines and injunctions – which constrain everyone (although not in everything), to the point where all people can afford to follow their best instincts because they will know that others must refrain from following their worst. Among great thinkers, George Bernard Shaw made this point years ago, in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (1928), and with his insight, we can conclude.

George Bernard Shaw

Choices to make are everywhere. For most of them, we need no guidelines from government. Will I open a business or work for someone else? Will I teach children or sell life insurance? Will I prefer country music by Dolly Parton or twelve-tone symphonies by Arnold Schoenberg? Will I spend my time on Twitter or reading great novels? Will I live in a big city or a small town? Will I marry? Will I, or my partner, decide to have children?

These are personal matters, which most people address by themselves and then hope for the best. However, some of our personal decisions add up to collective difficulties that now afflict an entire generation, which is reeling from *neoliberalism*, which demands *economic growth*, which is rooted in *creative destruction*, which perpetuates *change*, and which thereby breeds *resentment*, to a point which generates *populism*.⁴⁸⁵

In these circumstances, said Shaw, experience shows “that social problems cannot be solved by personal righteousness, and that under capitalism not only must men [and women] be made moral by an Act of Parliament [or Congress], but they cannot be made moral any other way, no matter how benevolent their dispositions may be.”⁴⁸⁶