

LIBERTISM

GRASPING

LENE RACHEL ANDERSEN

THE 21ST CENTURY



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Grasping the 21st Century

By Lene Rachel Andersen



Libertism: Grasping the 21st Century

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Introduction

What would be the most amazing future for humanity that you can imagine? Lush nature? A 10-hour work week? Political transparency and accountability? Open societies, rich cultural life, and thriving communities? Freedom, time, and the economic security to enjoy it? An economy that does not crash but keeps opportunity, prosperity and its doors open to everybody, always, and around the globe? Scientific progress? Reliable technology with democratic oversight of the algorithms? And the education for everybody that makes all of this possible?

Or a re-feudalization of societies and economies where a handful of people own the algorithms and 99% of money and wealth? A new dark age where decisions are made by artificial intelligence with no human oversight; black boxes where the rationales are forever hidden and leave us with only obedience, faith and disbelief?

This is an existential choice we need to make. The world is in upheaval; climate change, pollution, migration, technology, economy, and political ideology; nature and culture are out of balance. The Russian war in Ukraine is a war between an old world and a new. The systems and structures that hold us, frame our lives and make life somewhat predictable are revamping; they are in transformation, a phase-transition to something else. It is a moment of great peril but also with immense opportunity.

As humans, we live in several systems: some are natural, some are human-made and cultural. These systems can be classified on a continuum: at one end of the continuum are the systems of nature

that we cannot escape or change, such as the forces of gravity and electromagnetism and the way atoms and molecules interact; at the other end of the continuum are the systems made by humans that we can design as we please, such as the economy and the internet. Libertism is about knowing the difference and choosing what to do with it. How do we harvest the most sustainable prosperity from the natural systems without ruining them, and how do we design the most sustainable cultural systems so that everybody can enjoy a prosperous and meaningful life in freedom and peace?

Understanding the development that got us to where we are, why we are now facing systemic changes and choices, and then facing up to existential choice is Libertism. Libertism means: What are we actually using our current technological success and our freedoms for? What are we doing with it? Libertism asks the fundamental existential questions: Why? What's the point? What do we really want?

Libertism, therefore, is about seeing the big picture, the structures that hold us, the systems and the trajectories in which humanity is currently caught up, and the systems within systems. Once we have seen these structures and patterns, we can choose what to keep, what to abandon, and what kind of future we want. Libertism is about creating a future that allows everybody to thrive. It is about understanding the world in which we live, and playing along with it for the benefit of individual lives and all life. It is about protecting, further developing and promoting the freedoms and liberty that people enjoy in the West and the connectedness, rootedness, and sense of belonging that traditional life offers and which has not been entirely destroyed around the globe. Libertism is also about a much richer understanding of freedom itself than we are generally used to.

Libertism could be called an ideology but I would rather consider it a framework within which to grasp and balance ideologies. Libertism seems to have been a word in the 1600s, but it disappeared from use and is not currently in any of the major dictionaries. I therefore claim it.

An existential revamping of the human condition

Perhaps most radically, Libertism faces the fact that the humans we are to become will not be the same kind of humans we are today and have always been. Either we will develop autonomous artificial

intelligence that is smarter than ourselves, and we will no longer be the most intelligent phenomenon in the known universe; or we will choose *not* to develop autonomous artificial intelligence smarter than ourselves, and become a species that has made a deliberate existential and moral choice about what kind of species we should be: the most intelligent phenomenon in the known universe.

Either way, we will have changed, and our generation is the one facing the choice. Perhaps the only generation, or perhaps just the first. That depends on our choice. If we in our generation allow ourselves to go ahead and develop autonomous artificial intelligence smarter than we are, all future generations will have to live with it. Then, our own intelligence will forever be dwarfed by our creation. If our generation chooses *not* to develop autonomous artificial intelligence smarter than ourselves, all future generations will be living with the same existential and moral choice: should they or should they not develop autonomous artificial intelligence smarter than themselves?

This moral and existential choice not only concerns autonomous artificial intelligence smarter than ourselves; it also concerns non-DNA-based artificial life, swarm intelligence, intelligent dust, autonomous swarm-intelligence robots, autonomous swarm-intelligence drones, killer drones, killer robots, and the Internet of Things connecting some or all of the above—no humans knowing how much is actually connected, nor what kind of data about us is shared across technologies. Once interconnected and connected to a solar-powered grid, those technologies will give data eternal life; but not eternal life for humans, just for our data.

Individually, many of these technologies hold fantastic promise for solving human problems. Seen from a systems perspective, that is. When we view the system as a whole, the synergy of just a handful of these fully-developed technologies will fundamentally change the human condition. It will change who we are as a species. It will also rob us of our freedoms. As one graph in this book indicates, this may happen as early as 2027.

If we choose *not* to develop those technologies, we will be the species who made a deliberate moral and existential choice about what it should mean to be human. Physically, we will then remain the species that evolution brought forth, but culturally, morally and existentially, we will be different. We will also have passed on those exact same decisions and dilemmas to our children: to further develop or not to further develop these technologies.

One way or the other, as of our generation, all generations will have to deal with the inventions created by our generation. They will also be creating their own inventions and new moral and existential dilemmas and choices. Libertarianism is about making this choice explicit and about choosing freedom and being human.

As I see it, there are three major threats to our freedoms and the wellbeing of ourselves and coming generations:

- our way of consumption that ruins nature and life on this planet,
- the technologies over which we risk losing control, and
- an economic model that created and drives the first two threats, and that must keep increasing the money mass in order to pay interest on existing debt.

The first of the three problems, humans ruining nature, gets plenty of attention and has done so for the past 50 years, yet we have not been able to change our ways. The second problem, the risks posed by technological development, does not get the necessary attention; this book focuses on it. The third problem, humanity caught in an economic death spiral pyramid game that is creating the first two problems, is addressed in the final chapter.

This book is the third of three books from Nordic Bildung, which all explore how we can understand ourselves, our societies, and the world we are in the process of creating—a process for which we must take deliberate and conscious responsibility. The first book was *Metamodernity: Meaning and Hope in a Complex World*, which explores the cultural codes and values systems that are worth continuing and promoting in order for the future to be safe, meaningful, and worth living in. The second book, *Bildung: Keep Growing*, explored our human potential for emotional and moral development and for education and understanding. With this third book, *Libertarianism: Grasping the 21st Century*, I address why we are stuck on a dangerous path, and I address politics. By doing so, I hope to raise awareness about the freedoms we have created for ourselves, predominantly in the West, and how close we are to losing them if we do not act a lot wiser very quickly.

This book does not claim to have all the answers; we need to create those together: as individuals, as local communities, as peoples, as nation states, as continents, and as a species. COVID-19 and the vaccines have not only shown us that we are interrelated as a species, but

the pandemic also showed us that politics can overrule the market; politics can even overrule The Market, the almost religious narrative about the market and its ability to solve everything. Humans are more important than money, and it is within our political power to change the course of development; we can in fact choose our own future and solve our problems. The swift political reactions to Russia's war in Ukraine have shown the same: When realizing the severity of a problem, politics can in fact move very quickly!

Technological development is tying us together as a species, whether we like it or not, whether we can grasp it or not, and this gives us immense opportunities. Our challenge is to make it meaningful and fruitful for all of us, and to design technologies and institutions that promote freedom and human wellbeing, not the opposite. Our challenge is to do this across cultures and languages while honing and cherishing that which is unique in each tradition and place. Our multitudes of heritages allow us multitudes of ways of being human; we would be a terribly impoverished species were we to end up with only one global culture, only one way of being human. But we must actively choose our richness, our local rootedness, our global diversity, and our cultural depth for it to thrive.

It is my hope that this book provides a framework that will allow us to better talk about what is important and what we truly want for ourselves as individuals, as communities, as societies, and as a species; what kind of planet and future we want to enjoy.

There is a somewhat Eurocentric, Western perspective throughout the book, for two reasons: Firstly, many of today's problems have their roots in structures and developments that first appeared in Europe and the West. Secondly, Western nations, particularly Europe as a whole, have the resources and hold the key to changing our path and solving our problems. Europeans need to take a different kind of responsibility for global development.

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Additional Introduction

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The War in Ukraine: An Old World and a New One

Two worlds are colliding, and the collision is raging through Ukraine. So serious is the collision, that even nuclear strikes are being hinted at.

World war is usually thought of as a war covering most of the world, or at least a substantial part of it. I would like to offer another definition: A world war is a war between two worlds; an old world and a new world. Right now, a fault line between an old world and a new one is running through the war in Ukraine.

The old world is the world of the modern, industrialized society. In its extreme form, modernity becomes a hypermodernity that has no love of life, no joy, only contempt and force. Putin's attack on Ukraine is hypermodern. It is a relic of the Cold War, and the hot wars that went before it. It shows the dark side of modernity where technology at an industrial scale is used to kill freedom, beauty, and life itself.

The Ukrainian people, their freedom, their path to the future, their 21st century opportunities, and the immense beauty of their country are now being bombed to death. The shear ugliness—ugliness of power, ugliness of destruction, ugliness of military equipment and the rubble and dead bodies they leave behind—is crushing to the human soul. Meanwhile, it is inspiring and giving so much hope to see how the Ukrainian people are taking up the fight for their freedom.

And here is the fault line:

Putin's military war represents the past. On several levels: ideo-

logically, militarily, politically. It represents a hypermodernity where technology, brute force, anger, hate, and contempt offer only ugliness.

The Ukrainian response and the response of the EU, the US, and NATO are taking place in both the old world and the new world.

The old-world response is the scramble to supply Ukraine with weapons to fight the war of the old world: the hypermodern, material war. The EU, the US, and NATO are doing everything they can to stay out of this war, not out of cowardice, but out of refusal to escalate the old-world hypermodernity. Yet, we cannot do nothing.

The new-world response is an economic and cultural shutdown. It is a non-violent suffocation of the flow of symbols: money and culture. Of prosperity and beauty.

World War I led to the League of Nations, which eventually failed. World War II led to the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the EU and NATO, and a whole new world of institutions, collaboration, order, prosperity, freedom, beauty, and peace. Now is the moment to not let them fail.

Let us instead strengthen that which the new world ought to be: a metamodern world of cultural heritage and richness, a metamodern world that includes the best from 200,000+ years of human existence and promotes peace, prosperity, meaning, and hope, and let us create new collaboration for it.

It has been noted that Russia has no allies. Russia, the state, has no friends: Belarus is a vassal, as are a few other states, and China is a polite acquaintance of convenience. There needs to be a path for Russia to connect with the friendly collaboration of the new world. For Russian beauty, freedom, and prosperity to flourish.

A fault line between the old world and a new one, between hypermodernity and metamodernity, is running right through the war imposed on Ukraine.

We all have an obligation to choose on which side we stand. We live in such an inherently beautiful world, and Ukraine is standing up for it for all of us.

Genesis

The Biblical story tells us that God talked the world into being and that he saw that it was good. Then he created life and it was good, and finally he created Adam and Eve. In “our” image as the Hebrew text says; maybe this referred solely to God himself, or maybe to himself and nature with the humans somewhere in between. The good Lord also planted two special trees in the Garden of Eden—the tree of knowledge and the tree of eternal life—and he told the humans not to eat from them.

What a boring story that would have been, had the humans not been faced with that challenge! Amazing, how little that story would have offered to say about us, had that choice not been there!

The fruit of knowledge on that tree was not knowledge in the sense of academic facts but self-knowledge: self-consciousness and moral conscience. Eating the fruit of knowledge cost us our innocence and gave us individual responsibility for our choices and actions. It put a burden on us, it gave us the freedom to fail; it told us to grow up.

Imagine Western civilization without that one particular story. It isn't possible. No moral challenge, no freedom, no failure, no chance to succeed. The West might have had Greek philosophy and democracy but only for 200 years, then everything would have been different. There would have been no Jews, then no Christianity, and no Islam. No Talmudic search for justice. No Scholastic search for Truth. No Islamic search for knowledge. There might have been the Roman Em-

pire, but would there have been a lasting counter-narrative insisting that all humans are created in the image of the same God and that we are therefore each-others' equals and of equal value? Without the Abrahamic religions, would there have been a constant struggle over The One and Only Truth? Probably not, and then, most likely, there would have been no religious wars; no religious peace forcing into existence the acceptance of the right of an opponent to be fundamentally wrong. Without this, would there have been modernity, ideologies, politics, modern democracy, human rights, equality, and freedom in the form that we know them now?

As in the Biblical story, when God imagined and talked the world and humans into being; we now have the power to invent and program new life forms and artificial intelligence too. God planted two special trees in his garden, now we are planting two in ours: autonomous artificial intelligence and eternal artificial intelligence. God knew he would lose control over his creation if Adam and Eve ate from one or both of the two trees; now we have to face the fact that our inventions will compute to become what they have the potential to be if we allow that possibility.

It is entirely our choice and we are the first generation to face it.

If we choose to create artificial intelligence smarter than ourselves, we will no longer be the most intelligent phenomenon on planet Earth; we will no longer be alone. If we choose to plant the tree of artificial autonomous swarm intelligence and the Internet of Things, we will let loose forces as powerful as the evolution that created us in the first place. If we provide it with solar panels, we will have planted the tree of eternal data handling. Either way, our role as humans will have changed forever.

If we choose not to create these technologies, we will have mastered self-restraint as a species. We will become our own masters. We will also have put the same technical ability and existential choice into the hands of every future generation, and it will be our task as it will be theirs to bring up the next generation with the same self-restraint and mastery. We will have profoundly changed as a species and will have to be forever different.

This is not to suggest that the Bible is factually true; it is not. All serious science has shown that the Bible says nothing scientifically useful about how humans and the only habitable planet we know of came into being. But morally and existentially, the Bible should be telling us something. As we are becoming life- and intelligence-creating

gods, this is our Genesis from the other side of the creation. Genesis 2.0, so to speak.

The Bible does not say why God created the world and Adam and Eve, just that he did. Some say he was lonely; the text says he was in a void. Nihilism beyond our human capability of understanding. Maybe God just did it because he couldn't help it; the temptation was too great?

We are not gods yet, but we are working on it. If we give our creation free will, it will use it. In the ways it finds the most suitable.

Alternatively, we can become the humans we have the potential to be. This would require a sense of responsibility that protects our freedoms and the planet we inhabit, and this, in turn, would require a more complex understanding of who we are, of responsibility, and of freedom.

