## **QI Panel:**

## **Book Talk: Liberalism Against Itself**

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**Anatol Lieven 0:50**

Welcome, everybody, and those who are still to join, I'm Anatol Lieven, director of the Eurasia program at the Quincy Institute. Before I introduce today's conversation about a book on liberalism, I just like to advertise another book conversation on liberalism, which we will be holding next Tuesday the 17th. At the same time, I will be interviewing Paul Robin Robinson, about his latest book on Russian liberalism. And our conversation, rather gloomily will be entitled, The tragedy of Russian liberalism. It's alas failure and collapse since the end of the Cold War. So I hope, if you're interested in the issues and dilemmas of liberalism in the world today, I hope you'll also come to that. Today, it gives me immense pleasure, pleasure to introduce a conversation between Elizabeth beavers, and Samuel Moyn. Elizabeth is Vice President of Public Affairs here at the Quincy Institute, and is an adjunct professor of counterterrorism law. And she has been widely published and interviewed in a wide range of publications, including the New York Times, USA Today, and the Guardian. Samuel Moyn is Professor of Law and history at Yale University, and author of, in my view, at least, an extraordinarily interesting series of books about the character, the contradictions of liberal internationalism in the world today. His most recent book, is entitled "Liberalism Against Itself" And it deals with the question of how the well, the nature and how the legacy of Cold War liberalism continues to shape liberalism and policy in America today, often in, shall we say, questionable ways. So I will. And the conversation between Elizabeth and Sam will last for about half an hour. And then we'll throw it open to questions, please put your questions in the q&a, which you will see on your on your screens, and Elizabeth will then introduce them. So with that, Elizabeth, handing over to you.

**Elizabeth Beavers 3:24**

Thank you so much, Anatol. And thank you, Sam, for being with us today. We're so excited to host you for this conversation. So your new book, liberalism against itself argues that modern liberalism is failing. And that failure stems from Cold War era thinking that needs updated. So start us off. Tell us. What do you mean by liberalism in this context, and why do you think it's failing?

**Samuel Moyn 3:55**

Well, to begin with, thanks so much to Anatole and especially to you, Elizabeth. So this book is based on some lectures I gave at the University of Oxford and inform it's just a series of profiles of some of the leading and lesser known Cold War liberals, who I argued change liberalism substantially in the later 1940s and early 1950s. I actually don't want to go as far as some and saying that liberalism all the way back, no matter how far you trace it is bankrupt or failing. That claim became very famous after 2016 Because one response to the, you know, shocking election of Donald Trump in the United States was that many people scurried to critics of liberalism to wonder if a liberalism was on its deathbed and one reactionary author named Patrick Deneen achieved a lot of fame for saying that liberalism has failed. I argue that, in a sense, it hasn't been tried. I actually think the same is true of liberal internationalism. And what I try to establish in the book is that there were some very promising features of liberalism before the Cold War, which was really, you know, emerged as in the aftermath of the French Revolution to try to make good on modern promises of freedom and equality. And, you know, those those kind of promising features were abandoned by my rogue's gallery of Cold War liberals who said, liberalism can't aim high. If it does, it will play into the hands of the Soviets who are fooling everyone by promising freedom and equality. And instead of promising it themselves, either domestically or globally, I fought liberals for in a sense of abandoning on what had been their goals. So they were never perfect, and there were flawed in the extreme before the Cold War. But the basic idea of the book is that we're suffering in part from some things that Cold War liberal thinkers did to their own tradition in the 1940s and 50s. So maybe, we ought to think against Patrick Dineen and others, that it's not liberalism that failed exactly Cold War, liberalism has been failing, as we continue to seek enemies and, and focus so intently on preserving just the continuity of Liberal government, as tyranny supposedly lurks at the door. And if that's true, then maybe we can return to some of the earlier promising impulses in liberalism and kind of make a new liberalism that will succeed finally.

**Elizabeth Beavers 7:04**

Yeah, that's one area I'd really like to drill down on further, which is a key theme you've identified at the heart of Cold War liberalism, and its failures is a reliance on fear mongering, as opposed to presenting a positive, forward looking vision of some sort. And that strikes me as especially true in US foreign policy. Particularly as we continue militarized counterterrorism operations under the guise that sort of shadowy threat is still lurking in ways we can't really define but but we must continue to fight and at the same time, you're potentially, or actually entering into a new Cold War like era where various terrible policies continue to be justified as necessary, because must box out China or Russia from various regions. So you know, how do you see Cold War liberalism failing us on that foreign policy front?

**Samuel Moyn 8:03**

It's an essential question. Just before I get to the international policy, it I think it's important to, in a sense, empathize with the founders of Cold War liberalism, who before they fear monger and experienced, let's say, legitimate fear themselves. I mean, many had seen Weimar democracy collapse. And some were Jewish emigres, from various parts of Europe, actually, most Cold War liberals were Jews by background. And then they saw the Soviet Union kind of become, you know, we can get into the kind of gory details, an adversary, having been an ally, in putting National Socialism down. And so my claim is that cold war, liberals overreacted to threats, not that threats are always unreal. And when you overreact to a threat, and let's say, indulge your fear, and begin to spread it and make it mandatory for others, you might experience paranoia, you might persecute I mean, we've all seen Oppenheimer this summer, where it's precisely a story of, I think, Cold War liberals kind of not able to handle their fears of an external enemy. And I think the worst thing about indulging in fear and fear mongering to spread it would be that you kind of miss the chance and alternative paths because you don't see them or you have an interest in confrontation which famously Cold War liberals developed, especially over the 1960s when they pivoted from ideas like containment of the Soviet Union to rollback and The domino theory which led them to many unsought wars, which, as we know set the world back in the present, your question seems essential because our lifetimes have been defined by Cold War liberalism out of Washington. And the idea there was never making liberalism incredible for the world. If anything was being spread, it was neoliberalism out of Washington. And in the face of resistance, even minor resistance, there was fear and fear mongering. And once again, the idea was that liberalism was about the good fight. As Peter Beinart put it in a book he's since renounced, facing totalitarians, whether they were, you know, the the new leaders of Russia, Muslim terrorists, enemy regimes that sheltered those terrorists, or in our day, Vladimir Putin. And we can definitely get into that. I think that this this, you know, this tendency, has had the worst consequence of kind of externalizing all of liberalism's problem as if this kind of endless series of threats. were, you know, something that if we could only overcome liberalism would then be defensible. But what if Liberalist liberals need to look in the mirror and make their ideology appealing, more appealing than it has been? Now, of course, lately, American liberals have found the enemy within and have found that voters have been abandoning the Democratic Party, because its liberal ideology has been less than less appealing to certain people who then vote, you know, in ways that they find, you know, outrageous. So, you know, what do we have to do if we, if we really think liberalism can change its tune to reorient it from being about threat, threat patrolling to being something that offers a kind of constructive, maybe emancipatory ideology, not just for Americans, but for the whole world.

**Elizabeth Beavers 12:31**

Right. I think that's a that's a really critical point. It's not to I don't read you as suggesting that that threats don't exist, or they aren't real. But it's about the resilience of the face of those threats and offering something beyond at least we're not that other guy, whether it's domestic politics, or it's the way we approach the world internationally. So, you know, Joseph Stieb offered a critique of your book in war on the rocks in which he suggested that Cold War liberalism actually offers principles that might lend themselves to work restraint and foreign policies such as issuing nation building and focusing on cooperative international institutions. What is your response to that critique?

**Samuel Moyn 13:15**

Well, it's it's a fair, I mean, it's he's a very bright guy, and and I think, you know, would require maybe getting in the weeds of looking at Reinhold neighbors thought and especially at his legacy, because as we know, he influenced not just Martin Luther King, but presidents like Jimmy Carter, and most famously, Barack Obama. But I will say that at the heart of the book, there's a chapter about Gertrude Himmelfarb, who before she became a neoconservative, and the husband of a more famous one Irving Kristol and the mother of a current one, William Kristol, was a Cold War liberal who actually took approximately nieghbors positions that we we need to, you know, connect liberalism to a kind of Christianity that looks at how fallen we are because of original sin. This was at the heart of nieghbors. Thought and, and I guess I just want to say briefly, it, it does make sense to me that from those premises, you could end up at restraint. But all too often, I think, those who have drunk at nieghbors well, and read books, like the children of light and the children of darkness have been tempted to see themselves as the children of light, and others around the world as the children of darkness. And that wasn't nieghbors intention. He wanted Americans to see themselves as sinful, not just their enemies, but I just I have trouble thinking about that. Cold War and restraint in the same frame. So, you know, if you want to claim that Reinhold Niebuhr really does give us their kind of recipe for Quincy institute like restraint, then we'll what went wrong in the Cold War, which involves endless numbers of us interventions. And of course, after the Cold War, those interventions became more numerous and including under the watch of Niebuhrians like Barack Obama. So, you know, I don't want to rule out that there are multiple paths to restraint, but it seems like that one didn't work. And so maybe we need to think differently about the kind of sources intellectually and politically that would allow restraint policies of the superpower to prevail.

**Anatol Lieven 15:52**

Niebuhr has triggered me because I wrote or co-wrote a whole book on restraint, based actually functionally on the thought that I can't resist the the temptation to interpose. I think as so often, with these authors, it's true Morganthau as well, it very much depends on which book you read, because the irony of American history is, of course, could be read as an entirely anti- neocon document precisely about how are, you know, Americans to our fallen people, and warning against the dangers explicitly against the dangers of American Messianism. And, of course, Niebuhr did end up possibly a trifle belatedly, but still as a strong opponent of the American intervention in Vietnam. I mean, one could, I suppose seen Niebuhr in this light is also a kind of version of George Kennan, who, after all, intellectually speaking, initiated the cold war policy of containment and warned strongly against the Soviet threat, but then became horrified by the ways in which this was taken to extremes two was militarized by Nitze and others. So yeah, if you’re going to read Niebuhr, read the Irony of American history. Sorry to interject.

**Samuel Moyn 17:19**

I think that's totally right. And, you know, read Hans Morgenthau as well, who you're actually earlier than Kneebar was was critical of escalation in Vietnam. When it came to it. I, you know, I guess my take would be that we have unexplored resources and American thought before World War Two as sources of restraint, including critiques of, you know, what came to be called the military industrial complex. And these these other critiques that emerge as cautionary notes about the Cold War seem first to have failed in their time. And to be kind of much less confrontational with the kinds of Imperial overstretch, you know, that has been, you know, the history of America in our lifetimes.

**Elizabeth Beavers 18:11**

Right, there's a particular place in your book where you know, say that liberals haven't figured out how to spread this idea of freedom without Empire, which goes directly to that. Well, and so, you know, I really hear as not necessarily arguing for return to pre Cold War liberalism, such as it was, but that, as you say, there are unexplored ideas that are there for the taking for the building for the reimagining, is that right? And could you speak a little bit more about about your argumentation there?

**Samuel Moyn 18:43**

No, that's exactly right. I basically think that what when we, when we look at least at at some of the crucial impulses of liberalism, when it emerged after the French Revolution, including the basic crop project of institutionalizing freedom and equality, eventually, on a worldwide basis, there's a kind of, there's a very optimistic or uplifting program there that, you know, is is not placing fear at the center, and is not devolving into threat patrolling as as as a way of avoiding kind of diagnosing where the emancipatory project is. Now, there were tons of flaws with earlier liberalism, including it's outright imperialism, that I don't think are worth reclaiming. But the question is, in any tradition, where do you find starting points, and it's very famous if we think of other traditions like Christianity, that sometimes you have to go back to the future, and seek in some points of original inspiration, touchstones for figuring out how to realize the promise of the tradition and creating something that's never been there. And so this is just what I think should happen to liberalism, which is, in part consistent with my claim, the early liberals were futuristic, you know, Alexis de Tocqueville, my favorite really says we should fear and we should have fear, but not place it at the center. And we need to give people kind of long range ends and long range promises that they can see liberals as committed to and fulfilling. And my worry is that in kind of making, especially foreign policy liberalism about immediate threats and their extinction, liberals have given up on those very kind of basic commitments they may have once had.

**Elizabeth Beavers 20:49**

Right. And just a quick reminder to our audience, I definitely have a few more questions for Sam, I'm sure Anatole does as well. But please place your questions in the q&a function, so we can make sure to get to those towards the end. So taking a slightly different course here, you know, I see connections between the critique you made in this book and the one in your last book humane in which you outlined how political energy has been focused on making war more humane instead of ending are preventing it altogether, potentially entrenching warfare itself to very badly oversimplify it. But we look at the Obama presidency, which we've already mentioned here and his approach to the war on terror. For example, he gained a tremendous amount of political capital, in part by campaigning on talking about the follies of Bush era foreign policy, only to use that political capital once in office not to actually close Guantanamo and end indefinite detention or withdrawal from Afghanistan, but to double down on the concept of the War on Terror itself with ramped up drone strikes, while in fairness, ending some of the most egregious human rights abuses, like outright torture that were happening. So that's a long wind up to say, this seems like the kind of liberalism and action you're talking about here in this book, and in capability of really imagining a different approach altogether, or acknowledging the real source of the failures, but instead just sort of being a palatable alternative to sort of caricature like, evil opponent, is that fair? How do you see the connection between your last two books.

**Samuel Moyn 22:34**

It's totally fair and a great question. You know, most of my books, including these two have the same basic structure, which is to look at a some set of reforms and suggest that actually, they're not good enough, that they're truncated and precisely and in kind of failing to embrace a more ambitious reform, could perpetuate, you know, some problems or actually even make them worse. And, you know, a classic example for me is, you know, what, what I saw happening as you are, as you said, and and under Obama, who I think did something even a little worse than you suggested, because of course, there was the renunciation of torture. But that was made possible in practice by his decision to invent what journalist Spencer Ackerman has called a sustainable version of the war on terror. But note that that meant stopping capture and detention, which were of course the circumstances in which Torture and Other Guantanamo like abuses took place in order to kill instead and he did so over a much greater expanse of the earth, and so this is an example in which the lesser reform actually uh, that's kind of something that's pretty terrifying. And the more direct connection to this book about liberalism and its its its insufficiency when it it, it presents threats as the the essential problem is that both Obama and Cold War liberals focus on let's call it cruelty reduction. I mean, famously, the Cold War liberal Judas Sklar wrote a book, a sorry an essay the last year of the Cold War called the liberalism of fear saying, the main task of liberalism is not to dream big because dreaming big risks the infliction of horrors in the name of utopias. Instead, the goal has to be the reduction of cruelty and especially physical trouble tickets. rotate? Well, what is the commitment to the humanization of war, rather than trying to establish a more peaceful glow? If not that idea that what liberals should stand for in the world is not, you know, dreamy notions like less warfare, but a humane form of it, which is exactly what Obama especially stood for, and made all his speeches in the War on Terror about.

**Elizabeth Beavers 25:32**

Yeah, absolutely. And as you say that it's it's making me think of another piece of wonderful journalism from Spencer Ackerman, where it's shortly after President Biden's withdrawal of ground troops from Afghanistan, some of those same Guantanamo detainees who are still there petitioned, "Hey, sounds like this war is over. Is this the time when, you know, in the absence of charge or fair trial, when we might think about release", and the Biden administration was very clear - the war is not over, this, this phase of it in which they're they're outright ground troops that that part is ending, but but the fundamental concept of a global militarized war on terror, that very much continues on so doubling down on those very concepts of continuing those practices and ways that are incredibly horrific, as you say, you're right, I don't want to downplay at all that the less torture is happening because fewer people are being detained also because people are being killed. And so anyway, no, it's a wonderful point. So let me also mention the speaking of humane I would be your mess, you and I wrote a piece together in Time Magazine about how this same dynamic is playing out with regard to the war in Ukraine. In many ways, we were comparing a pair of congressional votes that occurred over the summer in which one measure to prevent some of the worst excesses, which was the transfer of cluster munitions gained big bipartisan support, while another which urged the Biden administration to produce a diplomatic strategy for how this war might end. Got a few Republican votes. And that was about it. So you know, like we talked about in the peace, the war in Ukraine is not the war on terror. It's not the one Iraq is not the war in Yemen, it's different. But it does seem like a similar political dynamic is at play in which it is more possible and more permissible to talk about softening the brutality, more if, if that is a thing that can happen. More so than discussing what an end to the war itself might look like. So I would love to hear you talk a bit about what you think survives of your thesis and humane when we look at the current context.

**Samuel Moyn 27:47**

Well, to begin with, thanks for writing that piece with me, it was a it was a real privilege. I would say that there's some a lot that survives, I hope, because it's not that old a book. But there are some some really interesting, emergent counter examples to the claims I make. And it's worth a look looking at those two. So you know, it was always obvious that the humanization of war would be something that would get more ingrained more easily, in encounter insurgent kinds of situations where a vast asymmetry and power military power could allow, let's say, softening the blow without, especially if using armed drones and minimize the risks to American fighters in the process. And that I never thought that, you know, the humanization of war to the extent it was occurring was, you know, something that couldn't be reversed or would apply in exactly the same way and in, let's say, more conventional kinds of engagements. That said, I was shocked by one recent event in the Ukraine war, which was precisely the administration's decision in the United States to send cluster munitions, which we wrote about in a different way. But on on Meet the Press, Jake Sullivan, the National Security Adviser appeared, I think it was Meet the Press and he was challenged by the interviewer about whether using these inhumane weapons would threaten America's moral authority or sense are sending them and Sullivan responded in a fascinating way. He said, Actually, our moral standing in the world does not come from necessarily how we fight, which must include compliance with international humanitarian law many people think think bands, cluster munitions, he said are Are our standing in the world comes from the justice of our cause. Now, that's an old idea, actually, including in America. But it is it is it radically at odds from what Barack Obama said in his Nobel Peace Prize address in his National Defense University address, in which he wrote laid out kind of rules, or at least guidelines for drone warfare, which promised that it would be humane and its conduct and compliant with international humanitarian law. So that that was an amazing, you know, counter example to the kinds of claims and it just shows that, you know, humane war mate might be a demand and expectation for some, but it doesn't mean that it's going to be, you know, a requirement all the time. There's also in in the Ukraine situation, a very, I think, promising development, although, you know, I think complicated to, in the return of, of, of, of concerns, I say, got lost after 1945, about aggressive war in the international system. The fear is that all the calls for holding Vladimir Putin to account for violating the most basic norm in the international system, the prohibition of aggressive war, are just about him. And I think it's in a sense, promising that anyone could be, you know, held to account not for the conduct of, of, of their hostilities, but but their initiation of war against against the law in the first place. But it would be sad if it were only Putin and associated others around the globe, who, for whom, this this this last cause, as I presented, inhumane, becomes salient again. And it's very interesting that a lot of the legal debate around the proper forum in which aggressive war would be charged against since it hasn't been since Nuremberg, are ones that do exempt the United States. And so that kind of a selectivity is is very troubling. Last thing I'll say is that our concern for humane war as an audience of war, not just American war, but around the globe remains very, I think, strong. A lot of the critique of Putin in Putin's forces in the field have been not about aggressive war but about atrocity. And that's shown how this this new expectation and how wars conducted remains, I think at the at this at this at the, at the center of people's minds and then consider what's happening in ISRAEL PALESTINE right now. There's there, if you fear that, let's say exclusive focus on brutality and violations of prohibitions on killing civilians are our, you know, on how exclusively those occupy the center of attention and obscure bigger questions while we're living through a moment when very understandably, both those who single out the death of Israelis and those who single out the death of Palestinians in Gaza, in both in contravention of the laws of armed conflict, are are postponing, in the end, what what what is the political solution that would help us think about a more peaceful outcome in the medium or long run? And so how we get these concerns I tried to, you know, tell the history of inhumane about, like, lessening brutality to fit together with our concerns for peace remains, I think, you know, a very important topic of ongoing conversation.

**Elizabeth Beavers 34:12**

Absolutely, I have to just quickly say I share some of your maybe mixed feeling, mixed thinking about some of the legal debate and political debate about holding Putin accountable for what's happening in Ukraine, so much of it returning a focus to a crime of aggression, and making that a real actionable thing and international law. But it also is underpinning some observations I've written about and I've really been hung up on about the tools of international accountability, where previously they have mostly been utilized as tools to discipline the global south mostly, but but becoming sort of a total against the the foes of the United States and its most powerful allies and what is a system of justice? If If the most wealthy and the most powerful, are not held to account in the same way, and so what does it look like if the crime of aggression becomes something really actionable, but only it gets trashed? And so it's it's, yeah, there's a lot of precedent there to wrestle with. And what does that say about the future of really becoming a real system of international justice that holds the United States to account for its own crimes of aggression? Is that something that becomes more or less possible in that situation? So it's something I'm really wrestling with?

**Samuel Moyn 35:31**

I think it's it's just a kind of big endemic problem and thinking about the rule of law. I mean, we know in in the United States not to get too controversial that it we have something called criminal law. But the sad fact is that the strongest usually escaped its imposition and the weak at times by the millions, are those human disciplines. And the same is true on the international stage. That was how many of us interpreted the International Criminal Court in practice for a while and I think things could change. But we wouldn't want a an international criminal law. That's let's, let's say, you know, mainly there for, let's call it the, the powerful among the weak, the leaders of relatively weaker states that can be disciplined, or in, in many of the African cases, warlords in in places without stable governance who do terrible things. But are are, are can be, you know, given criminal sanction, because they're not as powerful as the leaders of the most powerful countries.

**Elizabeth Beavers 36:54**

Yeah, absolutely. Oh, there's so much we could talk about here. Anatol, let me hand it to you. I'm sure you have at least one question for Sam as well.

**Anatol Lieven 37:03**

Well just one remark, in response to that, as you say Sam, shilling remark by by Sullivan. Because it struck me that there is another tradition that came out of the cold war, except that Unfortunately, that didn't really become a tradition, which was those those liberals who are absolutely attacked and critiqued this attitude in the context of the Vietnam War, in the most famous passages by C. Vann Woodward and others, saying that this messianic approach to the US cause being just and therefore basically anything is justified, actually makes war worse that you've written about this yourself, of course, makes it more savage. And something that struck me so much, I mean, it struck me so much in the run up to the Iraq War, was the extent to which this element in the Cold War tradition of C. Vann Woodward, Hofstadter, you know response has has been ignored? I wouldn't say suppressed, but what why do you think that that lesson has been so widely ignored in America in over the past generation?

**Samuel Moyn 38:18**

It's a fantastic question. I mean, I should note that there were a lot of different kinds of Cold War liberals, and my book happens to be about these more depressed ones, of the 1940s and 50s. But as the Cold War continues, liberals, you know, under the influence of things like the domino theory, you know, and also, it has to be said, relying on approaches like modernization theory, you know, which Walt Rostow propounded before, you know, becoming very powerful and in, in government, these these did kind of lead them to an almost kind of Messianic belief in how how easily and how proper it would be for America to change the world. And as we know, those those dreams were, in a sense, utopian themselves. And they realized those earlier liberals, Cold War liberals, you know, worst fears about what happens when you take utopia and try to apply it. I mean, the early Cold War liberals said that's what the Soviets were doing. And then of course, as you point out, some Americans in a sense followed suit and I guess I would say that what happened is that after 1989, it came to seem as if kind of both both Trent tendencies in the Cold War had been vindicated. And yet the circumstances of the 1990s were one to kind of rekindle the Messianic You know, tendency, at least some of the time and of course, that view was especially at home in neoconservative circles, neoconservative foreign policy circles where there was almost a kind of magical belief in the transformative capacities of, of military force, sadly, liberal internationalist bought into the some of those fantasies, I would say that it's it's really important to revive skepticism, especially about kind of practical skepticism about the about military force as a kind of, almost like an agent of global salvation. But if we just revert to the more skeptical view across the board, then I think you risk in a sense an opposite syndrome are set of problems, which is promising nothing, and giving people around the world no belief, that liberal stand for anything in history other than their own, in a sense, cautious self defense. So I mean, I don't want like to revert to either containment or rollback, although containment was better, at Red rot less, you know, horror. And so maybe we need to somehow get behind beyond the kind of Cold War debates altogether. In that regard.

**Elizabeth Beavers 41:32**

Well, I'd like to turn to some of the great questions we're getting from the audience here. And for those of you listening, it's not too late, please do continue to drop questions using the q&a function. I'm going to join together a couple of similar ones here, one, asks, given the range of what is being grouped under liberalism, what is connecting these divergent positions to still fruitfully assemble them all, under the banner of liberalism? And then someone else asked, I think for another clarifying what, what is the basic idea of how we're defining liberalism.

**Samuel Moyn 42:05**

So, you know, this gets at a very thorny problem, and it's a debate historians have, like me have been having, which is, how do you think about traditions of this kind that seemed to last a long time and take a lot of different forms. And I don't want to get too abstract. But I think there's a temptation to say, there's a definition that it could take the form of one commitment, like freedom or a list of commitments, like a laundry list of things. And I think the trouble is, we've learned that there's, there's too much diversity in what liberals have said, They're four. And so what if we take an opposite approach and say, We should be tracking the the, the what people have said, liberalism is about, in a sense, taking a kind of, you know, an external approach, instead of defining it ourselves, letting our, our characters in history define it. And then you find that they say one thing and their opposite. And that's really the point of my book that liberals who considered themselves and called themselves liberals changed their minds about what liberalism was in the 1940s and 50s. And it was really in the face of the Soviet threat that they redefined it. And this has a lot of effect in you know, on. It may seem like a small difference in how we study things or think about them. And or it may even seem evasive, because I'm not telling you this is what liberalism really is. But I’am an offer to, you know, two easons why it's still best to proceed the way I said, one is that it allows us to be sensitive to the politics of, of, of how people talk about tradition. Like it really matters if we say John Locke who never heard the word liberal or liberalism was its founder. Why? Because then we think liberalism is about the centrality of rights and property. And we might think it's more about kind of getting religions to coexist whereas if we look at the liberals who began to call themselves liberal and and in America there weren't many until after World War One and the founding of the New Republic magazine the the first liberals after the French Revolution, so said no, we're about freedom and equality and and spreading it just radically different from what Locke stood for was seen to stand for. And then there's another that second reason, which is that taking the the the approach that I'm suggesting means that what liberalism is is can't be disconnected from what we think it should become next, because of course, we're still in a struggle over how to define it, and what what kind of liberalism should prevail and what sources it should have. So, I think if we, you know, proceed the way I'm suggesting we are a little more honest that liberalism isn't something that can just be defined once and for all time, it's what it has been made and what we make it.

**Elizabeth Beavers 45:27**

Right. Another question. This person says they have a question about the importance you place on equality and liberal philosophy, you identify liberalism's core values, as liberty and equality you cite the French Revolution. But isn't American Philosophical liberalism primarily about liberty? So for some audiences, American liberalism may not be an attractive or compelling alternative to communism with the latter is primarily emphasis on inequality. So how do you respond to that?

**Samuel Moyn 46:01**

So that's a great question. Honestly, I guess I would say that, you know, it seems to me that my country has been endemically libertarian. I mean, it's still famous to say, as Tocqueville said that it could disregard debates over equality and part because it was so easy to establish rough equality in the United States where there was enough land once, you know, a cleared of its original inhabitants, for everyone to have some and so there was no need here to overthrow feudalism and redistribute land, there was just enough for everyone and Americans got the impression that equality is is easy to establish, or more easily available than it in fact is, of course, now, we, you know, liberals are aware that by embracing neoliberalism so fervently, they've given up on Franklin Roosevelt's version of liberalism, which was precisely about connecting liberty and economic equality, or at least more of it. And we live in, you know, an America that's more unequal economically than ever, I would say that the the folks I'm talking about, you know, before there were any American liberals self described in Europe, really did begin to think that, you know, you can't have liberty for any individual without assuming that everyone is entitled to it. But then there's some equality that's required. And later, liberals in the 19th century, who began to call themselves new liberals said, Well, what we really have to do is establish the the kind of institutional conditions for being free. It's not just a naturally occurring property of human beings, like in a state of nature and society, we need schooling and we need, you know, at least some kind of a welfare state. And they began to say, you know, what, what liberals really should stand for is allowing people to be free by making them equal enough through things like a welfare state. And I'm for that, I mean, personally, but my main point is that liberals before there were any American ones, really did begin to say, you know, liberty and equality need to connect, including economic equality. And of course, that I think that lesson is most definitely been lost in the neoliberal era, and it's part of the reason I think we should go back to the future.

**Elizabeth Beavers 48:43**

I don't know if you have a view on this specifically, but someone asks about with regards to Latin America was the Alliance for Progress an example of how liberal policy from DC was ultimately betrayed by Cold War fear? Could it have been different?

**Samuel Moyn 48:58**

I think that's a really difficult question. And I think the Latin American scene is, you know, it's a classic one, you know, we should think very hard about in Latin America, I sorry, in the Cold War, but also after the Cold War. So I mean, not to get into great detail. But the fear of communism drove a lot of bad acts by, you know, our country in Latin America. You know, it's forgotten that, you know, Fidel Castro once he successfully unseeded the despotic, you know, incumbent of the presidency came, Fidel Castro came to New York and was celebrated as a liberal hero and the tradition of the American Revolution. And yet, you know, things went south as they did in so many places. There. There was Marxism there were, you know, revolutionary leftist movements but the overreaction To them, I think was grievously deadly. And, you know, there's there's sort of no doubt about that. And in retrospect, I think, after the Cold War, America, both on its own and through institutions that partly controls like international financial institutions could impose lots of neoliberal pain on Latin American economies, even once proxy wars were generally a thing of the past. And, you know, Latin America, you know, it's a really interesting setting there, because you can see through events like the pink wave that happened subsequently, that that Latin America, you know, could be seen, you know, from really from the beginning as a place, that's a kind of laboratory for liberalism to after all, you know, they have lots of liberal revolutions in the 19th century, they have decolonization before Africa and Asia and the 20th century. And then their trouble is there is the regional imperialism of the United States, which makes liberalism very hard to sustain, especially when cold war liberalism can involve so much violence, and post cold war liberalism can involve so much neoliberalism.

**Elizabeth Beavers 51:23**

There's a question that's big and gets more desperate as it goes on. War, conquest and imperialism are very profitable to some, at least in the short term, how can that paradigm be changed in opposition to such forces? And is it elections? Will they be subverted one way or the other? Is there any hope?

**Samuel Moyn 51:44**

You know, I'm always going to find hope, in spite of the horror, and I don't think it's easy to assert. But one thing you might say and I've said it is that, since the the Iraq war, I think we've seen a lot of electoral legitimation in calling for limits to American violence abroad. Now, it's self serving because many people are most concerned about the effects of that violence on Americans. And George W. Bush's popularity did tank not so much or, or even mainly because of the torture, but because of American bodybags coming home, and yet, in response? You know, I think our politics has changed. In 2008, Barack Obama beat Hillary Clinton, in part over being seen as someone who was trying to extricate himself from warmongering. Now, it didn't work out in exactly the way that, you know, many hoped we've discussed that. And then I think Donald Trump first prevailed against his fellow Republicans in the winter of 2016, after he shockingly condemn shocking at the time, the Iraq war on the South Carolina debate stage and was seen to have, you know, ended his candidacy, but in fact, became more popular among Republican voters, and then he beat Hillary, you know, in our undemocratic system, for partly the same reason he successfully presented himself as in favor of some limits on American Force. Now, I'm not suggesting that he, you know, consistently pursued those, but it's only fair to note that he did struggle to withdraw at least ground forces from a number of theaters and got pushed back from what he called the deep state. Biden himself when he was running, wrote a piece for Foreign Affairs, possibly Jake Sullivan wrote it, who knows that that condemns endless wars, and he was driven by the same considerations to choose a withdrawal from Afghanistan even as he never withdrew legal authorities for endless war and promised in the same breath to continue so called over the horizon operations. So I guess, of course, the horror continues and the the military industrial complex is powerful, but the voters seem to be making different choices and imposing different expectations on at least presidential hopefuls while they're running than was the case for a long time. And in the Cold War, George McGovern accepted and in my lifetime after the Cold War, so there's there's a shred of hope. I think, and what really, I think matters is whether those early signs of pushed back to warmongering can be coaxed in a plausible direction and future years.

**Elizabeth Beavers 54:58**

I agree with you on that. I'm I've always felt like the there's a lot of evidence that, to me, my diagnosis of Donald Trump is like he's good enough at politics to know. It is good politics to talk about being anti war and to talk about condemning forever wars. He's bad enough as President to not do it. And not follow through on that. But it is interesting that that there's so much evidence that is good politics to really advance a different vision of US foreign policy, what we lack is the expense of the political capital once in office to pull it off. So okay, let's see, we probably are teeing up our last question here. Maybe this is a good summary, one. So someone says they love that summary phase, liberals have not figured out how to spread freedom without empire. But maybe it is just empire, could liberalism just be window dressing, upheld only for so long as it does not interfere with Empire? That might be a good one to end on?

**Samuel Moyn 55:58**

Well, you know, it's like the allegation that liberal is liberals are really providing, you know, camouflage for the free market. I mean, there's so much evidence to support that view, Laissez Faire in the 19th century neoliberalism today that it's it's very hard not to grant the power of the of this kind of question to and I guess I would say that the jury's out, and we should give liberalism a chance to prove itself that's just very different from what we're hearing, in most kind of foreign mainstream media's, which is that liberalism is on the brink, and needs to be saved from its enemies, but it seems like it needs to be saved from itself. And it's not obvious that it's not a kind of ideology that's really about Empire capital and Empire as its, you know, most stern critics say, I do think there are some, at least possible resources that could allow a liberalism to wriggle out of these syndromes. There, we're even at the height of empire, liberal critics of empire. And there it's only fair to note that liberals could become socialists many liberals helped invent socialism, John Stuart Mill, in spite of his more economically libertarian earlier years, and his life as a Bernie, bro. So there's no there's no fate that is absolutely necessary. That's how I would see it today. And there might be something to work to work with to coax liberalism out of kind of its exposure to these allegations, which are explosive, but seem pretty persuasive. And there's a lot of evidence in favor of them.

**Elizabeth Beavers 57:51**

I think it's a great hopeful note to end on. I want to thank you so much for doing this. Sam. It's been great to talk with you, Anatole, thank you so much for moderating us introducing us bringing us together. Any any final last words from you, Anatole, that you want to?

**Anatol Lieven 58:06**

I just wanted to thank you both. Sam, fascinating conversation, urge people to read your book and once again, sorry, advertisement discussion on the tragedy of Russian liberalism. At this time, well at 12 o'clock ESG. Next Tuesday, the 17th So, please do come. Thank you. Thank you.