BASIC VALUES OF PROGRESSIVE LIBERALISM:

A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Basic Values of Progressive Liberalism: A European Perspective

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FOREWORD

If the history of Europe teaches us anything, it is that political ideas do not develop in a vacuum. They are shaped by debate. By silent and not-so-silent revolutions. And by exchange between countries and cultures.

This is certainly true of progressive liberalism; a political philosophy characterised by its international orientation, both now and in the past. In the Netherlands this political philosophy mainly took shape in the political party D66. In its fifty-plus years of existence, the party has continued to debate the question of what its exact political compass should be. D66's progressive and non-dogmatic nature was (and is) ill-suited to immutable ideological principles. That is why, in 2006, the party chose to add a number of 'Basic Values' to its manifesto for the national parliamentary elections.

In the ensuing years these have been further developed into the essays featured in this book. They came about through the efforts of D66's Permanent Programme Committee, the Hans van Mierlo Foundation and various external parties.

Together, these essays form the basis of the political choices of the Dutch progressive liberals. But—beware!—these are points of departure, not policy positions. They are starting point for the debate, not its final destination.

At a time in which societies all over Europe face the same political questions—about migration, identity and social cohesion; about the welfare state and how we can afford it; about the democratic rule of law and how we can protect it—it is all the more important to make political ideas widely available.

And that is exactly why we are now publishing these Basic Values in English. To promote an exchange of ideas between like-minded individuals, across national borders. To continue a constructive discussion with those who are of a different opinion. In other words, as a starting point for the debate.

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We trust in people's own strength. That sounds good, but what is this strength exactly? Why do we trust in it? And how far does it go? What does it mean for our vision of the relationship between people among themselves and between people and the government? This essay explores the limits of these terms and questions. It is not an archive, or a library, or an encyclopedia of liberal principles; nor is it a box of ammunition for a campaign or a debate. This essay is principally meant to stimulate those who are interested in our philosophy and who wish to -in partnership with us- develop it further.

TRUST IN PEOPLE'S OWN STRENGTH

PERCEPTION OF MANKIND: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Trust in people's own strength is based on the notion that every individual has a will of their own and is capable of making up their own mind. Every person has the ability to judge and to act. In doing so, people shape their lives and the society of which they are a part. As a consequence, others cannot decide what is wrong or right, nor what someone else should do, not do, or want. No one has all the answers.

Personal development

People's personal development and the gaining of moral insights does not happen automatically. A person does not automatically have the capacity to make up his own mind and act accordingly; people are not born as knowledgeable, independent, intelligent beings. Those characteristics must be developed. We are not human beings; we (gradually) become human beings. People grow: learning to walk is impossible without falling down and getting back up every once in while. People grow wise by trial and error.

The development of people's own strength does not happen in a vacuum. The social environment and the government can influence the individual's development in a negative way, but they can also have a positive effect, for instance by facilitating education. Education is an essential precondition for the development of people's own strength. Of course, the role of parents is equally important in this process; food, clothing, and shelter are crucial preconditions, as is emotional support, for instance in the form of family and friends' active involvement. People's own strength does not emerge by itself, or in equal shares. In some periods or circumstances, individuals have more or less strength than usual. We bear

a shared responsibility for people who have less strength or fewer opportunities.

Trust

Trusting in people's own strength does not mean that we believe that all people are 'good' or do 'good'. Of course, people do irrational things, things that go against their own or others' interests. Human beings do not think and act in purely rational ways; they are also driven by passions and urges, and are always—usually out of self-interest—testing limits. The freedom of the individual does not necessarily mean that one feels connected to and involved with the community. Trust in people's own strength is, therefore, not a naïve trust.

> 'People's own strength does not emerge by itself, or in equal shares'.

Human beings are not inherently inclined towards 'good' or 'bad'. If the claim is made that they are inclined one way or the other, it only means that people decide for themselves whether or not they will use the resources that can make them either 'good' or 'bad'. How people develop, in a moral sense, is their own choice and their own responsibility; it is dependent on their own will. It is categorically impossible to imagine a single thing that is unequivocally good, except for good will. So, people are free in their moral actions, but they are also aware of the moral freedom of other people. A person can realise that choices also affect the common interest and do not only have specific or temporary consequences.

Open society

'People's own strength'—the will to do and be 'good' and people's ability to learn and choose their own (moral) actions—is essential to our thinking about the human condition. This personal power does not go well with an authoritarian or closed society. An open society, in which people are free to make up their own minds about 'truth, beauty, and goodness' should be defended tooth and nail.

Trust in people's own strength is based on the conviction that people ought to have the space and opportunities to develop themselves, and that—to greater or lesser degrees—they should be challenged, motivated, and offered help to do this. They are more able than the government to create a society that is open, dynamic, and sustainable for themselves and for others. The freedom that makes this development possible needs to be defended constantly. The limit (the point at which one person's freedom begins to encroach on someone else's) is not fixed, but is the result of what reasonable people decide together continuously.

PEOPLE AMONG THEMSELVES: PEOPLE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

An individual cannot be understood in isolation. They are a part of networks, groups, and relationships in society. Every person is different, but most people are always in contact with others. That is the basis for cohesion in society. In the public sphere, people are engaged in a constant dialogue, looking for an overlapping consensus that is acceptable to all.

Room for differences

Every individual is different and has their own ideas about what to do with their lives. Every person has the capacity to think creatively and devise solutions. This creative potential thrives when confronted with other views, thoughts, and actions. Such confrontation makes people aware of their own beliefs and choices. It is important to acknowledge diversity and to create space for people who are seen as 'different'. Human beings are not all the same, but they are equal. Diversity and room for development are inextricably linked. They provide society with dynamism and progress.

Diversity is not well-suited to philosophies that—because of some ideal—seek to limit individual freedom. It is important that others' divergent opinions are given space and protection. Not only for moral reasons, but also out of an enlightened self-interest. After all, everyone is part of a minority in some sense.

Tolerance

The appreciation for human variety and for the importance of diversity implies tolerance. Tolerance means 'putting up with', 'bearing', and 'abiding'. In a social, cultural, or religious context, this means that the seemingly aberrant behaviour of other members of society, or of other groups, is not limited, punished, or prohibited—not even when the majority considers the behaviour or opinion of the minority to be reprehensible. As such, it is not an easy virtue, and it can push a person's good will to the limit.

Tolerance is fundamentally different from indifference. Not punishing or prohibiting does not mean that deviant opinions should not be countered, or that deviant behaviour cannot be tackled. But 'deviance' also has value. 'Rebels' play a role in limit testing the consensus, the set of rules and values within which everyone can find their own way. In the past, the subversives and provocateurs were the ones who brought about great change—think of Copernicus or Galileo. It is essential that ideas and beliefs remain free. A society or a government that tries to eradicate 'being different', stagnates and gets bogged down. Heralds of times to come (in literature, the arts, or the media) are essential to progress, and by definition, contrarian.

Allowing all voices to be heard, especially those against the consensus, is vital to our philosophy. This also means that we have to be careful about prejudices and preconceived notions about the 'deviant' element, for instance, where race, religion, culture, or language are concerned. Prejudice impedes the development of a consensus which everyone can accept and can cause us to ascribe less or more personal strength to individuals than they actually have.

Acceptance of cultural and religious diversity sometimes requires the purposeful lowering of barriers, sometimes the purposeful setting of boundaries. Tolerance of differences ends where tolerance itself is made impossible, where the equality between people is violated, and where violence and force seek to take the place of freedom and justice. In the end, space for development and diversity is also limited by our working towards a harmonious and sustainable society, as described in the Basic Value of the same name.

The open society: dialogue

We believe that different groups that appreciate and respect diversity should, through dialogue, come to agreement on an open and sustainable way of life that enables everyone to find their own place in the world.

Dialogue is the best tool for connecting people. In such a dialogue, just as in a well-moderated debate, all parties have an equal voice. The goal is to find a collective plan, not to have one group's interests come out on top. The ability to have a dialogue is not a given. It deserves a prominent place in people's personal development, starting with education.

In the public sphere, different people and groups come into contact with each other. It is in the public sphere that people look for (as Rawls termed it) an 'overlapping consensus' on which everyone can agree. The size and limits of this consensus have to be re-examined continually. Should everyone be able to have their own opinion? Yes. Can a person kill another? No. Should people shake hands with everyone? Maybe. The demarcation of the overlapping consensus requires that people freely allow the ideas and convictions of others onto the marketplace of ideas. This is an essential precondition for the proper functioning of democracy.

This dialogue in the public sphere is an ongoing process and, like all social processes, works through trial and error. Tolerance means the acceptance of a certain level of uncertainty, as well as an awareness that society will never reach a stable equilibrium, that consensus is always temporary, and that the dialogue never ends.

Engagement

For the development of a social and sustainable society, mutual engagement and connections between people are necessary. Can this social engagement be forced? And if not, should we just hope that things will turn out well on their own?

People want to connect with others. Human behaviour is not only driven by rationality and emotion, but also by the pursuit of acknowledgement, or validation—perhaps one of the most important motivators in society. This acknowledgement can take many forms: love, status, money, beauty, or strength. The desire for recognition and the longing to reach a higher place in the social pecking order is fought over physically, if need be. At the same time, the observation that people are driven by a desire for

acknowledgement also shows that people cannot be understood in isolation. After all, acknowledgement comes from others.

'People do not always have to agree in order to feel involved in society'.

The emancipation of the citizen in the 1960s and '70s led to more freedom and development opportunities, and also contributed to an unprecedented standard of living in our country. The claim that this caused a decline in civic engagement is not supported by the facts. Similarly, on the basic rules of behaviour in our society, people do not disagree as much as is sometimes believed. People do not always have to agree in order to feel involved in society.

The government is not responsible for the emergence of social cohesion. The government is a product of social cohesion, not its originator or organiser. The government should not hold a moral position. By facilitating and making provisions, the government can stimulate connections between people that would not have existed otherwise. This can happen through education, employment, volunteer work, in countless varieties. However, the key to connectedness—often the precondition for the love and happiness of the individual—lies with people themselves. This is why it is the absence of government interference in the community that causes self-organisation, vibrancy, and activity.

Self-organisation and trust

Often, people among themselves are able to come up with better, more efficient, and fairer solutions to social issues than the government. This mutual cooperation on the basis of equality stands in sharp contrast to the hierarchy, nannying, and control that certain political ideologies preach. Many social processes run smoothly without any kind of central guidance. Forms of self-organisation—an intelligent order without a boss or government—produce good solutions in all kinds of areas, such as health care, traffic, education, and sports.

These forms of self-organisation contain another potential source of major social progress. Together, entrepreneurial individuals form an open, vital society in which people are engaged and involved, and in which there is room for entrepreneurship and economic growth. Progressive liberalism does not glorify entrepreneurship (or more generally: the market), but it does have a trust in the personal strength that the freedom to start a business can unlock. Restrictions imposed by a market regulator are not incompatible with that position, and are, in fact, often indispensable. Countervailing powers are necessary, because the free entrepreneurship of one person cannot be allowed to turn into a monopoly or market domination, which comes at the cost of another's freedom, and thus, in the end, of the prosperity of society as a whole. The Basic Value 'reward achievement' is purposefully followed by 'share the wealth'. Progressive liberals always look for the balance between rewarding accomplishment and effort, and sharing the wealth.

Self-organisation is based on trust. The progressive-liberal society works on the basis of 'trust, unless'. A society in which people trust one another works more efficiently than one in which they do not. Even if that rule does not always apply, trusting in self-organisation is often preferable to the alternative of a government that seeks to eliminate all human error and risk. Such all-encompassing control (and far-reaching constraint on the individual freedom to make personal choices) can never be justified, including by a utopian worldview. In the preceding centuries, mankind has repeatedly discovered what the consequences of pursuing a utopia can be, both in terms of human lives, sorrow, and in terms of waste. In that sense, society cannot be 'created'. The cure is worse than the disease. 'Organised distrust' inevitably leads to a creeping curtailment of fundamental freedoms.

PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT: CITIZENS AND THE POLITICAL SPHERE

We trust in people's own strength and in their ability to find their own solutions. People's capacity to get things done among themselves only goes so far, and that is where the responsibility of the state begins. The government's power is determined by the democratic rule of law. Sovereignty resides with the people; in the context of the state, we speak of citizens. In the political sphere, citizens decide the limits of the state's power.

Government: role and responsibility

It is often incorrectly believed that liberalism has always been the philosophy of limited government and of the 'night-watchman state': the idea in which a state has almost no involvement with its citizens and leaves things like education and health care entirely up to private initiatives. In the Netherlands almost the opposite is the case. All important political philosophies worked together in creating the welfare state in the Netherlands, including those that called themselves 'economically liberal', 'progressive-democratic', or 'social-liberal'. In fact, liberalism had the explicit goal of shaping the state in such a way that it would optimally serve the will and interests of its citizens.

Government is needed to create the parameters for certain social developments and relations. It performs important social tasks that cannot be organised through other arrangements, for instance due to a lack of democratic accountability or an impending monopoly by a private party. As such, the government is responsible for education for all, national defence, the prevention of vigilantism by individuals, affordable health care, and guaranteeing a minimum income level. Not everyone is equally capable of taking care of themselves. Especially when a citizen is confronted

by multiple, often personal problems (like bad health or an addiction, or no housing, work, or personal relationships), their self-sufficiency can be compromised. In these circumstances, a social safety net is the hallmark of a civilised society.

Government intervention: limits

The government's duty to actively intervene must start somewhere, but where? And where does it end? The political sphere has the unusual characteristic of being able to decide for itself how far it will encroach into the other spheres (private and public). There is no blueprint for this intervention. For a progressive liberal, government intervention must always be debated and justified. We have to continually define to what extent government interventions can be about realising political ambitions. Having this discussion is, in effect, one of the primary functions of a political association, in which people among themselves organise as citizens.

> 'Government intervention must always be debated and justified'.

We cannot do without the government, but the size and power of the government must always be assessed in light of the current circumstance. Sometimes, a government becomes too dominant, and pruning is in order. At other times, the government is needed to calm the market, support those left behind in society, or defend the common interest. The government should really only intervene when the development of an open, sustainable, and harmonious society is at risk. For instance, we do not want solidarity to only be organised along religious lines, or for it to be dependent on incidental individual choices.

The government has to also protect and defend individual freedom. For the government, individual freedom and fundamental rights are often a matter of non-intervention. By not intervening, the government enables its citizens to freely form and express an opinion. However, other freedoms only emerge when the government does intervene, for instance by guaranteeing education for all. People's own strength can only be wielded

if people actually have it. The citizen's freedom is often limited by strong social forces that they cannot control. Think of discrimination, closed elites, or the (lobbying) power of big corporations. Countervailing powers like the government are needed to restrain those social forces and make sure all citizens are actually able to act freely.

Towards a personal development state

Progressive liberals want a state in which everyone can reach their fullest potential. It is this personal development state for which we aspire, not the welfare state. Here, we make a conscious distinction between the state and society. After all, besides the government (the political sphere), society also consists of individuals (the private sphere) and people among themselves (the public sphere).

Trusting in people's own strength means that we continually have to devise a role for the government that is based on what people can do, rather than what they cannot do. This government role is focused on equality of opportunity to improve one's own fate. People can use this equality of opportunity to get the best out of life. Where a conservative liberal is averse to any form of government intervention, the progressive liberal will consider it necessary if it leads to as many people as possible being empowered to reach their fullest individual potential.

Democratic rule of law

We view the democratic rule of law as a fundamental precondition for the personal development of people. The essence of the rule of law is guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the individual. Among others, these are the freedom of religion or belief, the right to political organisation, the right to do uncensored science and create uncensored art, the freedom of speech, the right to equal treatment, and the protection of bodily integrity. These fundamental rights are laid down in the Dutch Constitution. The values they are based on are universal—set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Under the rule of law, individual rights are guaranteed and the power of the state is limited by the law, not to mention that the government is subjected to democratic scrutiny. This is an essential precondition for trusting in people's own strength. After all, fundamental rights offer individuals a chance to develop. At the same time, the rule of law creates a framework within which interactions between people can take place and the individual can reach their fullest potential.

Democracy

Sovereignty resides with the citizens, not with the government, God, king, or parliament. The government's power is always delegated by the citizen. Furthermore, that power is never a given. Questioning 'assumed power' plays an important role in progressive liberalism. In the citizen's delegation of powers to the government, as a representative of the common interest, democratic scrutiny by the citizen is essential.

The concept of democracy is central to our thinking and represents more than a political ideology or worldview. First and foremost, democracy is a mindset, a form of governing that includes respect for the minority. In order to come to good solutions that have a broad support base, all 'votes' must count. This is not only true in the political sphere. For instance, in the economic sector, in a plethora of organisations (such as corporations, unions, pension funds, the World Trade Organisation, etc), respecting the minority's interests would lead to more sustainable development and to more prosperity in the world.

Democracy is a system of the establishment, exercise, and monitoring of power. These powers are separated. There are checks and balances, and there is the forming of countervailing powers. A constant in our philosophy is the desire to give the citizen as much influence as possible within this system.

Democracy functions best at the lowest level, De Tocqueville wrote. Citizen participation in all sorts of civic organisations—like businesses, clubs, schools, pension funds, hospitals, and political associations—is a good thing. But it does require free and equal access to knowledge and information for everyone. People are not born as independent, assertive, and

socially active citizens. People develop into citizens, with shared responsibilities, rights, and duties. Also important in this is practice with the democratic process and the development of insight into moral behaviour. The government can play an active role in this by providing good education, but it also requires a constant effort by parents, schools, clubs, media, family, neighbours, opinion leaders, and online networks.

Direct democracy

More direct democratic forms of governance have to be stimulated. Citizen initiatives deserve encouragement. Cooperative arrangements between citizen, government, and market at all levels of society create a stronger engagement with democracy. The technological possibilities of the information society are creating a new dynamic on this front.

Our pursuit of more direct forms of democracy does not imply that we believe that representative democracy is an outdated model. The complexity of administrative issues requires decisions in which many arguments and interests must be weighed. In order to make these decisions, elected representatives with the requisite knowledge and a sense of responsibility are indispensable. However, this system of indirect influence does have to be legitimised through transparency and accountable representatives.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, we have examined trust in people's own strength from three perspectives. First, we looked at the particular perception of mankind at its root. Then we discussed what this trust means for the relationship between people among themselves and between the citizen and the government.

The political sphere (the government) has the unusual characteristic of being able to determine the scope of its own reach, size, and responsibilities. It can decide for itself to what extent it can encroach into other spheres (private and public). As discussed in this essay, we make the principled, positive choice to trust in people's own strength when it comes to this demarcation. This indicates the need for a redistribution of power: redistribution down to the level of people, to that of people among themselves, and to that of the individual citizen. Redistribution means that the existing power must always be critically assessed to see how we can adapt to ever-changing societal circumstances. This pragmatic need for change is based on a theoretical foundation that we have described in this essay.

We trust people's own strength and their personal development. That is why we are optimistic about the future. People are creative and always find solutions on their own. We want the government to support and provide room for this power, resourcefulness, and creativity. The key to change lies with people themselves, and we want the government to align itself with this. What people can do for themselves and for others is much more important and effective in the end than what the government can do.

- We want to approach the world with respect and compassion. That applies to the people around us and to our environment. The earth is neither our personal property nor an expendable consumer good. We wish to end the depletion and pollution of our environment. We feel that, in the discussion about the environment, the burden of proof should shift from having to argue for preservation to offering arguments for exploitation.

WORK TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE AND HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable, harmonious, ambition

There is something very wrong with how we treat our planet. On this most people agree. We are rapidly approaching the point of irreversible climate change. We are burning through natural resources. Ecosystems like coral reefs and rain forests are in danger of entering similar downward spirals. We are overfishing the seas and polluting them with marine litter and plastic. Landscapes and natural environments are deteriorating. Animal and plant life are going extinct at a staggering rate. We are breathing polluted air. The list goes on and on. In other words, we are using up our ecological capital. Many people know or sense that this is not sustainable. Nonetheless, a sense of urgency is often lacking and too little is actually done. Is this because unsustainable behaviour still benefits countries, companies, and individuals? Or is it because the problems are too remote, the negative consequences too far in the future, or the challenges so great that our individual capacity to make a difference is too insignificant?

This essay does not further address the causes, scope, and gravity of these ecological problems; we take them as a given. We mainly examine how we, as people, progressive liberals, can change this. Why is the ambition to create a sustainable and harmonious society so important to progressive liberals? And what do we mean by sustainable, harmonious, and ambition? How does this ambition relate to progressive liberalism's core principle: the freedom of the individual to shape their life as they see fit? What is the role of the government in this? And is this sustainable society a realistic goal or an unattainable ideal?

'Sustainable': a political issue

Sustainability has become a catch-call concept that describes a great deal, and yet no one knows exactly what it is. In 1987, the Brundtland Report, from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), defined sustainable development as a development

that meets the needs of the present generation without endangering future generations' ability to meet their own needs. It is about a sustainable 'quality of life' for as many people as possible, now and in the (near) future. This quality of life is a subjective concept. To progressive liberals, every individual's personal answer to this is central: what does he need to shape his life the way he sees fit and to best develop himself? So for us, sustainability is about the freedom of every individual, now and later, to live as they choose and to have equal natural capital at their disposal for it. This is also called intergenerational freedom.

> 'Sustainability is about the freedom of every individual, now and later, to live his own life'.

Although individuals' quality of life is influenced by many different factors, we primarily address its ecological preconditions, such as clean air, clean drinking water, living space, and natural resources. The ecological system is the basic foundation of our existence, and so it is of existential importance to human freedom and development. Human beings cannot exist without this system. Not only because it provides us with useful resources and the basic necessities of life, but also because, to many individuals, nature has beauty and value in and of itself that enriches our lives.

Sustainability is an important political issue; it is about resolving conflicts of interest between individuals and groups here, elsewhere, and in the future. Who has a 'right' to which part of the ecological system? It is a power struggle over scarce resources, because not everyone can use everything to the same degree. The earth cannot keep providing what we consume in natural resources every year. To fulfil our current requirements, we would need two earths. When the world population grows and many more people attain our Western standard of living, the gaping hole between what is needed and what is sustainably available will only continue to grow. There is enough of some environmental resources, if we use them more intelligently. For instance, the sun provides as much energy per hour as the total annual energy consumption of everyone in the world combined. However, the decisiveness and political will to use this energy source is often lacking.

This political battle is not always fought fairly; for some people, companies, and countries, unsustainable behaviour still pays off. Others foot the bill for this; everywhere in the world, it is clear that the poor suffer the most from unsustainability. Not to mention future generations. As such, sustainability is also a moral issue: what do we consider just? How do we give (not yet born) outsiders a fair chance at what they would feel is a qualitatively good life?

'Harmonious': Freedom in connectedness

So, from the progressive liberal perspective, sustainability is about the freedom of every individual to live their own life. But this freedom is 'freedom in connectedness', the loose translation of progressive liberalism.[1] In essence, it comes down to the fact that human beings are social creatures, who develop and shape their freedom in interaction and connection with their environment. That environment is made up of other individuals and groups (including governments and their rules), but also by the natural world and the ecological system. This is a richer conception of freedom that deviates from the more common use of the term, with which liberalism is unfortunately often associated. Some liberal thinkers define freedom as the right of the individual to lead their own life without the interference of others. This is the so-called negative freedom (Berlin 1969: 178) which, in today's consumer society, is often reduced to 'consumptive freedom'; the freedom to buy what the individual wants. However, progressive liberalism considers so-called positive freedom to be just as important: the freedom that enables the individual to optimally develop their potential. In this, the ecological system plays a decisive role.

This is how the second important word from the Basic Value, the harmonious society, has to be understood: this is the fundamental connection between people among themselves and between human beings and their

1 *Libertas* means *freedom*; *societas* means roughly *those united for a common purpose*.

environment as an essential characteristic of human freedom. Pursuing a harmonious society means finding a balance within this connection; it does not (by definition) refer to a state without conflict or a society of only conflict-free solutions. In our understanding of the term harmonious society, the often-made contrast between people and nature is meaningless: does the natural environment exist purely for human consumption (anthropocentric), or does it have a value in and of itself, independent of mankind (ecocentric)? The anthropocentric perspective essentially leads to an instrumental approach to the relationship between people and nature, in which nature is mainly a commodity. The ecocentric perspective, on the other hand, holds that nature has intrinsic value, independent of mankind. We believe that both perspectives do not do justice to the relationship between human and nature.

> ‘Pursuing a harmonious society means finding a balance within this connection; it does not (by definition) refer to a state without conflict or a society of only conflict-free solutions’.

The anthropocentric perspective takes human beings as a starting point, but it sells nature short because even a narrow instrumental view of the value of nature for the individual leads to the necessity of sustainable development. After all, ‘use’ of nature can limit its use by a future individual. The use of fossil fuels is a good example: these can only be used once. But air pollution can also limit other people’s freedom in that it causes health problems. This way of thinking involves the so-called harm principle: from a liberal perspective, if there is harm, or even a considerable risk of harm, the limitation of individual freedom is justified. Of course, the harm principle might not be of great use when it comes to issues in which the relationship between the actions of individual people and their consequences for the ecosystem are indirect. Think of the death of coral

reefs due to acidifying oceans or the destruction of the rainforest due to an increased demand for palm oil.

The ecocentric perspective may contain solutions to these problems, but it wrongly places mankind on the unsustainable, instrumentalist side. In this essay, we argue that individuals do not merely ‘use’ nature for an obvious and pre-defined purpose. Our relationship with nature is much more diverse; we can enjoy its beauty or ascribe value to it that does not serve a practical purpose for us, out of empathy or respect for nature and (future) people. We could speak of liberal stewardship. Not on the basis of some higher mission, but in the service of an unknown other, in the future or in another part of the world, and based on respect for nature. A (preventative) care principle applies here: it is damage to the ecological system that has to be justified, not its protection.

> ‘The sustainable society—finding a balance between man and the natural world—is not a fixed end point we can travel towards along a clear-cut path’.

In other words, in the progressive liberal vision, free people live in connection to their natural environment. A balanced (‘harmonious’) relationship with nature, food, water, natural resources, energy, and air is our goal. Wherever this relationship lacks harmony, we have to change it.

‘Ambition’: utopia, dystopia, and transition

This brings us to the last key word: ambition. What does this mean? Does ambition mean that ‘trying’ is good enough? Or do only results count? The sum of these questions: to what extent are we actually able to create a sustainable society? In the debate about sustainability, the sustainable society is often regarded as a utopian end point which we all have to work towards in the long run. Because if we do nothing, the result will be a dystopia: the end of the world. There are only two flavours here: someone is ‘green’ or they are a ‘denier’. Illustrative of this is how the threat of

climate change is depicted in the press: on the one hand, the need for direct action due to the inescapable and disastrous consequences of climate change, and on the other, an easy rejection of this because it is perceived as alarmism.

This utopian/dystopian perspective on the sustainability issue is not helpful in shaping our ambition of a sustainable society. The sustainable society—finding a balance between man and the natural world—is not a fixed end point we can travel towards along a clear-cut path. Balance is a verb; it requires constant effort. Just like when you ride a bicycle, the balancing never stops. The ambition for sustainability is, in other words, a goal-seeking activity, in which the goal is not fully known beforehand, but in which it can be described with increasing accuracy through experience, reflection, and debate. Sustainable development does not mean the same thing to every generation. Our ambition for a sustainable society requires an open public dialogue, a trial-and-error approach, a flexible attitude, and a great deal of (technological and organisational) innovation and creativity. The transition to a sustainable society is a complex process. It involves structural changes in the economy, culture, nature, technology, and politics, of which the direction is clear, but for which no precise 'plan' can be made.

Additionally, we believe that preaching 'hell and damnation' is not helpful to our ambition for a sustainable society because it does not motivate people to take action. Why should people make an effort when it seems like it makes no difference anyway? Balancing nature and man requires big changes in attitude, behaviour, and institutions, but it is a realistic pursuit. We also find hope in the ability mankind has shown in the past to deal with crises—such as acid rain, soot pollution in cities, and the hole in the ozone layer. We are especially hopeful because many of the techniques we will need to achieve increased sustainability are already available or within reach. Our optimism is also fed by the observation that increasing numbers of people are coming together, often at the local level, to work towards more sustainability.

Progressive liberal limit testing: setup of the essay

It is clear that the sustainability issue raises a number of dilemmas and questions for progressive liberals, especially where the ambition to create a sustainable society leads to possible restrictions of individual freedom. Because when can we limit someone's freedom to shape his own life in order to grant this same freedom to other individuals, both elsewhere and at a later time? Do individuals have the right to collectively self-destruct? To what extent can individual freedom be limited in the service of a 'general' or 'ecological' interest? And who defends this interest? The government? So what should the government do, in that case? If there are limits to how much we, mankind, can extract from nature, how do we divvy up these scarce resources? And should the people who are already taking a lot receive more, fewer, or different rights than the hundreds of millions of poor people who also want a better life? Are there conceptions of the 'good life' that we consider beyond the pale? And how do we choose which lifestyles fall into that category? These questions seem abstract, but they become very real when the fish stocks that feed hundreds of millions of people are plummeting, when climate change causes residential areas to flood, or when it becomes clear that our children will no longer have access to certain natural resources.

This essay explores the limits of our progressive liberal ambition to create a sustainable and harmonious society in three different areas.

1. the private sphere of the individual
2. the public sphere of people among themselves
3. the political sphere of the state and the citizen

Our pursuit of a sustainable and harmonious society takes place in each of these three spheres, but in different ways, and involving different opportunities and dilemmas. We believe that the key to a sustainable society mostly lies in the public sphere: we trust in the power of people to, on the basis of their own moral compass, in mutual trust, from the bottom-up, and often initially at a local level, come up with innovative solutions to problems in the natural environment. There is also a role for the

government in this; sometimes through bans on unsustainable behaviour, sometimes in offering frameworks or changing rules, and sometimes in giving people the space in which to find solutions. It is good to always keep in mind that a liberal democracy that upholds the rule of law does not produce sustainable outcomes in and of itself. That depends on what people, voters and elected officials, tell the government to do. After all, politics is really us.

PERCEPTION OF MANKIND: THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Free individuals who shape their own lives are the guiding principle of progressive liberalism. As such, our political considerations begin in the private sphere of the individual. Progressive liberalism trusts in people's own power.[2] This trust is based on the conviction that every individual has a will and morality of their own and is capable of making their own decisions. This does not mean that all people are or do 'good' and so act or intend to act sustainably. That is a matter of personal morality.

Personal identity: acting sustainably

Why would people think and act sustainably? People are driven by a plethora of motives, preferences, desires, and urges. Together, they influence who we are (individually and collectively): they are our personal and collective identity. Many people do make a personal effort for a sustainable society; sometimes out of self-interest (enlightened or not), sometimes due to a strong inner conviction, sometimes because of feelings of compassion for their fellow man or empathy for animals, sometimes due to social pressure, and often because of a combination of all of the above. We do not see people as purely egocentric beings. Even the addition 'enlightened or not' to self-interest does not cover the multiplicity of motives that guide people. People are not driven purely by egotistical impulses, competition, and self-interest. Empathy, helpfulness, and a sense of fairness determine our actions just as much.

Of course, there are also people who choose to only take care of themselves, think only of the short term, and turn a blind eye to others and their environment. Most of the time, though, people do a little of every-

2 Hans van Mierlo Foundation (2009). "Trust in People's Own Power". The Hague: Hans van Mierlo Foundation.

thing. However, the progressive liberal vision is based on strong individuals with generally good intentions. This clearly differs from the social democrats' perception of people as weak and always in need of help, the conservative liberals' assumption that people are ill-intentioned, or the current (neo-) liberal idea that people are rational, need-satisfying individuals who will keep consuming, no matter what. Especially the latter perspective leads to the assumption that acting sustainably requires a serious sacrifice on the part of the individual. In this view, sustainability means consuming less; restraining ourselves; and, since it is assumed that people will not be inclined to do this, 'forcing' people to act sustainably.

We believe that this perspective sells mankind short. Acting sustainably is not necessarily a 'sacrifice' or a worsening of personal circumstances to us rich Westerners. Certainly, there will be material consequences, and the way in which we meet our needs will change. However, people's inventiveness and adaptability can enable us to satisfy (existing and new) needs in new ways. Moreover, and much more fundamentally, our needs and preferences are not fixed. Unlike the (neo-) liberal 'sacrifice' assumption would suggest, our sense of wellbeing is not just based on material satisfaction. People are always evolving, and our needs change on the basis of experiences, critical self-reflection, and debate. The same is true of our consumption patterns. We do not 'naturally' need a smartphone, car, or vacation flight to New Zealand. Technological, social, and economic developments partly decide our needs. The fact that unsustainable consumption now often takes centre stage ('I am what I buy') is not because of human nature, but because that side of us is emphasised and stimulated by our social and institutional environment.

That this consumptive, material satisfaction is not enough to make us happy is demonstrated by today's (re-) evaluation of immaterial things like joy in work, volunteer work, and a sense of purpose in general. In the area of sustainability, we also see that needs are shifting and are no longer just about consumptive self-interest: the increase in the number of vegetarians and people who buy biological products, the effort made on behalf of nature-preservation organisations, the rise of city gardens, the resistance against whaling or intensive bio industry. Acting sustainably

feels good to a lot of people, and it can also be fun to, for instance, use your talents to start a sustainability initiative. People's desire to do good and use their talents is a driving force for a sustainable society that should not be underestimated. The trick is tapping into, and possibly stimulating, people's own power.

> 'People's desire to do good or use their talents is a driving force behind a sustainable society that should not be underestimated'.

Personal morality: harmony

An important (progressive-) liberal principle is that people are free to, based on their personal needs, shape 'the good life' for themselves; in this, what is 'good' cannot be imposed by others (neighbours, friends, church, state, and so on). This is not an argument for doing whatever you feel like. The essence of progressive liberalism is the free individual, but in connection with others, and so with responsibility for the whole. The right to self-determination obliges people to critically examine their own actions and take responsibility for the consequences. This includes consequences for others and the environment, even across (national) borders. We can confront one another about this moral responsibility in the public sphere.

This connection between freedom and responsibility is common in liberal philosophy, and it is highly relevant to the sustainability issue, which is, after all, about the consequences of our actions. About the use of nature by individuals, British liberal philosopher John Locke said that people have a right to utilise nature, but only on the condition that 'as good and enough' is left for others. What this means exactly is, of course, open to interpretation, but it does not relieve the individual of the obligation to reflect on it. The goal is not to lead 'perfectly sustainable' lives, but as another liberal philosopher, John Stuart Mill, posited, to balance out the different human impulses. Essentially, 'the good life' is a life in which

people are in harmony with their moral codes and their personal needs. The question of what you consider 'as good and enough' or fair is a matter of personal morality. What do you think is just? From a progressive-liberal perspective, 'just' is what an individual would do or not do if he did not know if he was himself or any other sentient party, now or in the future. The overwhelming majority of people make sustainable choices from behind this 'veil of ignorance'.

> 'The right to self-determination obliges people to critically examine their own actions and take responsibility for their consequences for others and the environment'.

Incidentally, personal morality does not only apply to our private lives, but to all human actions, including what we do as an employee, neighbour, or citizen. Especially at work, people often make decisions that have significant effects on the environment. There is no divide, in our opinion, between personal morality (the moral decisions we make as private individuals) and role morality (the moral decisions we make when we occupy a professional role).

Ambition: results count?

A crucial question here is, of course, how far personal morality goes. Are good intentions enough, or are we fully responsible for the consequences of our actions? When you are driving your car, are you responsible for the health problems that others in your city may experience as a result? Should you be aware of those consequences? And should you compensate those who have suffered injury for it? That is not even mentioning the consequences for people in other countries, or even future generations. Usually, individuals are not directly or indirectly responsible for damage caused by a natural disaster in Asia, for instance. Someone who buys a table, however, can be partially responsible for deforestation in South America. Do individuals have the moral duty to inform themselves about these things? And should they perhaps refrain from buying that wooden table?

The further away in time and place the consequences are to us, the more difficult it is to estimate what those consequences of individual behaviour are, exactly. And individuals' ability to change anything also decreases as the scale of a sustainability problem grows. However, the global size of sustainability problems and our limited effect on them is no excuse not to act.

Within our personal sphere of influence, however, we can ask people to make an effort. The greater the knowledge and awareness of the consequences of a person's own actions, the greater the responsibility. Of course, individuals cannot create a sustainable world on their own. The unsustainable reality is far too intractable for that. But each of us can be confronted over our positive or negative contributions.

The good life, personal morality, people's own power

Progressive-liberal limit testing

This brings us to a final point: how can we stimulate people's own power to make moral choices? As the Basic Value trust in people's own power already indicated, people's own power is not a given; it has to be developed. Education is an important tool for the stimulation and development of people's self-regulatory capacity and judgement, the enhancement of critical self-awareness about the role and position of the individual in society, and the attainment of insight into the ways in which people live their own lives and can improve their environment. Experience, reflection, and debate are essential for this.

Individuals' critical self-awareness is not enough, however: people also have to have the means to make sustainable choices in their daily lives. Luckily, there are ever more ways to do this: use of fuel-efficient or electric cars and scooters, fair trade clothing, biological or locally-grown food, green power, solar panels on the roof, and so on. However, the social and institutional environment still does not always stimulate sustainable

choices, nor does it always make them easier. Our desire to buy things is fanned by a constant stream of consumer stimuli; unsustainable products are cheaper than the sustainable alternatives; people's initiatives to sustainably generate energy are often frustrated by existing regulation. Oftentimes, effort in the area of innovation does not yet pay off. In the overload of products, opinions, and consequences, people often cannot assess what is truly sustainable.

In other words, sustainability requires a fundamental change to our political, economic, and social systems. This change begins with sustainable individual choices, which are further formed and strengthened by shared experiences and initiatives with other individuals. This brings us to the public sphere of people among themselves.

PEOPLE AMONG THEMSELVES: PEOPLE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Individual sustainable choices form the basis of our pursuit of a sustainable and harmonious society. However, progressive liberalism views people in their social context. People evolve and shape their needs and preferences in relation to others. This brings us to the domain of people among themselves. Alone, individuals are not able to create a sustainable society. For that, we need each other.

People among themselves: sustainable with others

In the public sphere, individuals interact with other people, have conversations, sometimes fight, and form short- and long-term relationships; we create communities together. This is what makes a person human. People make connections for all sorts of reasons. In recent years, we have seen a resurgence of social relationships around sustainability issues. Besides the existing NGOs (non-governmental organisations), we often see local initiatives of people among themselves. Take the local energy companies that are set up by neighbours, the volunteers who maintain little parks or plots of nature, or the internet sites that allow people to reuse or share excess goods or food. We see that 'in the marketplace' too— which is also a connection between people, after all, but then mostly as producers and consumers—people purposefully buy more sustainably and, sometimes even without direct commercial incentives, commit themselves to more sustainable and responsible entrepreneurship.

Just like in the private sphere, not all connections and interactions between people in the public sphere benefit a sustainable society. It depends on the personal morality of the individuals who are making the connections and together develop these initiatives. From a progressive-liberal perspective, this morality cannot be imposed by the community. However, in the public sphere, individuals can confront each other about their

moral responsibility. This is the sphere where the dialogue about what people consider important for society as a whole takes place: for instance about what constitutes sustainable development, and what is fair in relation to this. This search for an 'overlapping consensus', for shared values, is crucial to the stability and continuity of any society.[3]

> 'Sharing experiences, frequent contact, an open dialogue, and an exchange of arguments can produce trust and mutual understanding. A feeling of connection with another often leads people to feel responsibility for, or at least solidarity with, that other'.

The power of people among themselves: connectedness and creativity

What makes initiatives and interactions between people so potentially powerful, especially when compared to, for instance, bureaucratic government intervention, is that they can stimulate the connectedness needed for a respectful and empathic attitude towards the other and the natural environment. Sharing experiences, frequent contact, an open dialogue, and an exchange of arguments can produce trust and mutual understanding. A connection with someone else often leads people to feel responsibility for, or at least solidarity with, one another. Even if the other is a stranger. We believe that this bottom-up mutual connection is much more effective than solidarity imposed from above. Most of all, though, the power of people among themselves can lead to diversity in society, and with it, to creativity and innovation: the emergence of new ideas for solving problems. Technological and organisational innovations are vital to our pursuit of a sustainable society, precisely because there is no blueprint for the ideal sustainable society. People among themselves are much better than the government at producing the flexibility and customisation required to solve specific problems.

3 See also the Basic Value "Cherish Fundamental Rights and Shared Values".

When 'people among themselves' does work

People often make connections and enter into relationships spontaneously. This method of organising or creating order is 'natural' for human beings. However, when it comes to sustainability, the power of people among themselves can be further stimulated. First and foremost, creativity emerges from free confrontation with other visions, sharing experiences, and an exchange of arguments. The supply of good information is extremely important for this dialogue. It is only when people are aware of sustainability problems, their causes, and realistic solutions that they can effectively work on solutions in the sphere of people among themselves. Transparency and an evidence-based information supply are required to counter to disinformation about sustainability. Using product information, annual sustainability reports, or policy making, we have to focus on dealing with facts, statistical data, and scientific insights. Also crucial are the independent bodies and civil society organisations that monitor transparency by, for instance, shining a light on environmental crime and greenwashing ('green' advertising by companies that behave unsustainably).

Second, creativity thrives in an environment in which people have the opportunity to conduct trial-and-error experiments and to make mistakes. This requires trust. Excessive bureaucratic regulation, often based on distrust, can frustrate the creativity of people among themselves. We are now seeing the potential power of people among themselves in the trend of people making more and more 'casual connections': connections that are less formal, less long-term, and less hierarchical than before. We see voluntariness, not non-commitment, reciprocity and equality from the bottom up, and often on a small scale. Technological and social developments in the area of, among other things, social media create new meeting places for people and enable new conceptions of communities, such as crowdfunding.

Besides a reliable information supply and trust, a certain degree of 'contestability' is also important in order to tap into the creative adaptive capacity of people among themselves. Contestability means that a domain is open to newcomers. Unfortunately, this is barely the case in our public sphere.

> 'Organising a countervailing power, or levelling the societal playing field, is an important element in our ambition to create a sustainable society'.

Some people, organisations, and companies have more power—because of privileges, or due to their economic or political positions—than others. They still often benefit from existing unsustainable structures and can freeride on the other people's investments. We often see this in parties to inherently unsustainable industries, such as the fossil fuel industry, energy-intensive industries, or bio industry. These parties use their powerful lobbies to stop or repeal measures aimed at sustainability.

That is why organising a countervailing power, or levelling the societal playing field, is an important element in our ambition to create a sustainable society. Supplying better information, a powerful voice for all, and pointing out and combating obstacles enables a fruitful political discussion about sustainability. This 'democratisation' of the sustainability issue ties in well with the democratic principles of a progressive-liberal party such as D66, which aims to give people influence and decision-making power over their own lives.

When 'people among themselves' does not work

Not all initiatives by people among themselves produce sustainable results. Initiatives by people among themselves have weaknesses. First of all, there is a risk of freeriding, in which the fruits of sustainability efforts are not only reaped by those who started the initiative but also by those who did not contribute anything or who no longer need to make any

effort for it. Think, for instance, of companies that reduce their waste disposal into a river, but since they are located upstream, companies further downstream no longer need to purify their water or reduce their own waste disposal. When it becomes relatively attractive to freeride, the willingness to take voluntary action is undermined.

Often discussed in the sustainability debate is the tragedy of the commons, from the article by Gareth Hardin in Science in 1962. Water, air, wild animals, and forest in no-man's land are owned by no one, and thus by everyone. If everyone pursues their own individual gain, these resources are over-exploited and, in the end, depleted. Even if an individual user or community is aware of this; as long as there are individuals who want to keep exploiting for their own benefit, the over-exploitation will continue. We see this every day in overfished stocks, overgrazed communal pastures, and overused groundwater. A third weakness of people among themselves is the inability to achieve saturation and enforceability. Within their own circle, people among themselves are perfectly capable of setting higher standards and achieving much better sustainability. But the spread of these standards to society as a whole does not always happen automatically. When new solutions are inherently better, cleaner, cheaper, etc., they are quickly adopted. However, as long as it remains attractive to an individual logger to unsustainably cut down a rainforest and for individual consumers to buy this unsustainable wood, the unsustainable behaviour will persist.

> 'The solution to the sustainability question calls for much more than strong government intervention; it requires a powerful social movement committed to a sustainable society'.

Hardin (and many others after him) believed that a state's authority is needed to solve these problems of freeriding, the tragedy of the commons, and full enforceability. In the next part, we will discuss the progres-

sive-liberal fulfilment of this role. In this, we also acknowledge the limits to government. The government as an instrument of the rule of law—and of our democracy and public administration—is the result of social forces. As such, many measures will not be effective if they are not supported by a considerable portion of society. Just as the initiatives by people among themselves should be protected and supported by the state at critical junctures, so the state needs the support of bottom-up initiatives to implement measures that are accepted. The solution to the sustainability question calls for much more than strong government intervention; it requires a powerful social movement committed to a sustainable society.

People among themselves: the economy and the market

The 'economy' is part of the public sphere because it is a system of connections between people: as consumers and producers, employers and employees. The Western economy, in the form of free market capitalism, is often viewed as one of the most important causes of our current ecological crisis. In an economic system where growth, profit, and consumptive freedom take centre stage, the ecological interest seems to lose out. Is our pursuit of a sustainable society compatible with our current economic system? Is there a contradiction between 'economy' and 'ecology'?

An economy is a system of production, distribution, and consumption of scarce resources. That is the description on which John Stuart Mill (in his Principles of Political Economy) based his vision that the economy can only develop within ecological boundaries. After all, nature is finite and, therefore, natural resources are scarce. Our ecological system also places firm limits on the growth of our production, and thus on the potential of our economic system. If we cross these boundaries, our economic system becomes unstable and inviable. So can we instead say that there is a contrast between 'the (free) market' and 'ecology'? A market is a means to an end, mainly suited to regulate the efficient allocation of scarce resources. As with all connections between individuals, the market does not generate sustainable or unsustainable outcomes per se. These are determined by the rules governing the interactions between people and individuals' personal morality. That is why we believe that unsustainability is not the result of a fundamental conflict between 'economy' and 'ecology', but

of the problematic setup of the market: on the one hand, it denies the scarcity of collective ecological resources like water, air, and nature; on the other, it places too much emphasis on unlimited growth, unbridled profit maximisation, and consumptive freedom, without taking heed of ecological limits. There is no fundamental tension between 'market' and 'ecology', but it seems that way because of the lack of rules protecting the environment and an underappreciation of the economic value of ecological resources.

This narrowing of the economy coincides with the narrowing of human beings into instrumental, need-satisfying individuals (see the private sphere). This narrowing is problematic for our pursuit of a sustainable society. Essentially, it is all about what has 'value' in the economy. We have shaped our economy in such a way that financial value is most important, and the used natural and also human capital is not always sufficiently included in the equation. This is especially glaring in the way we measure prosperity. In measuring our Gross National Product (GNP), natural resources, wellbeing, or the quality of the environment play no part. This leads to a linear economic model in which use rather than re-use (circular) is central, and in which 'value' is primarily expressed quantitatively.

Towards a circular economy

To achieve a sustainable society, we need to move from a 'linear' (extraction) economy based on consumption and depletion, to a 'circular' economy based on re-use. The transformation in the economy and society that ascribes economic value to sustainability is starting to take shape gradually and with increasing speed. For some companies (and even countries), economic growth is 'green growth' which coincides with a reduction of the pressures placed on nature, the environment, and natural resources. More and more companies are viewing increased sustainability and corporate social responsibility as a strategic necessity, not as something 'extra' in addition to making a profit. We see this in the development of modern technologies like solar power, electric cars, and green chemistry that enables production that is both profitable and sustainable. Also notable are companies' efforts to make their existing activities more

sustainable: initiatives to buy sustainable resources like palm oil, reduce energy use and waste, and use less polluting ingredients and packaging materials. In this, many Dutch companies (Unilever, AkzoNobel, DSM) are global frontrunners in their industries.

> 'The breeding ground for necessary innovations is the sphere of people among themselves: initiatives between people as entrepreneurs, as consumers, as citizens'.

Innovations that are of vital importance for the transition to a circular economy are rarely produced by government initiatives or solitary inventors. The breeding ground for necessary innovations is the sphere of people among themselves: initiatives between people as entrepreneurs, as consumers, as citizens. However, the mechanisms of the amoral market also place limits on companies' sustainability advancements. Increased sustainability that requires investments or increased costs but that is not accompanied by higher revenues cannot be endlessly implemented by companies. In that case, they need the help of consumers, other companies, or the government.

Navigating the progressive liberal terrain

Progressive liberalism is based on the conviction that people among themselves are so creative that they always find solutions to problems in their environment. Especially when there is a clear common goal and close cooperation without a high risk of freeriding, people can achieve a great deal together when it comes to sustainability. People influence one another through social interactions and exchanges of arguments. This is the power of people among themselves, but at the same time, it is also a pitfall. Existing practices, institutions, rules, and interests can frustrate people's freedom to make their own sustainable choices to such a degree that initiatives by people among themselves turn out to be ineffective. Especially when private parties can benefit significantly from freeriding, in which the collective costs are spread across many people or shifted towards the future, cooperation of people among themselves in the public sphere falls short. Companies can privately benefit directly from dumping toxins and releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere; fishermen benefit from overfishing; farmers from depleting the soil. In the end, the bill is paid in the long term by the collective. In order to make this allocation of costs fairer, to clear obstacles, or to set systems into motion, laws, rules or other government interventions are sometimes necessary. This is the political sphere.

PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT: CITIZENS AND THE POLITICAL SPHERE

The sustainability question cuts to the heart of politics: it is, after all, about resolving possible conflicts of interest between individuals and groups, here, elsewhere, and in the future. Unsustainable behaviour is beneficial for a particular individual or group, while others suffer. Progressive liberals believe that, when the fairness of a society is threatened, strong government action is desirable and necessary. Existing socio-economic structures, vested interests, but also rules and laws too often make (individual and collective) efforts towards sustainability barely worthwhile.

Fairness and government intervention

The progressive-liberal political philosophy is highly critical of political interference in the life of the individual. The political sphere—the sphere of the state and the citizen—is the only domain that can set its own limits, and so that can shrink or enlarge the other spheres (the private and public spheres).[4] It cannot be emphasised enough, however, that (progressive) liberalism is not an anti-state philosophy. The aim of progressive liberalism is the freedom of as many individuals as possible to live their lives as they see fit (and so determine their own quality of life); and government intervention might be necessary to achieve this freedom. Especially where justice is at stake—such as where the costs of sustainability are unequally distributed and people can harm one another through depletion and pollution—a strong government is required. Or, in other words, that is where we need bureaucratic rules that specify the rights and duties of individuals and a strong state that ensures compliance with them. Usually, government intervention constitutes a limiting of individual freedom, but with the aim, from a progressive-liberal perspective, of safeguarding the freedom of all (parity).

4 See "Trust in People's Own Power" (2009).

Government intervention by means of bureaucratic rules can be necessary, but it has limitations of its own. First of all, the (sustainable) society cannot be created with rules and blueprints 'imposed from above'. Because a bureaucracy is inherently not very good at innovation and customisation, having it devise solutions and draw up blueprints is not the smartest approach. Moreover, government measures often have little or no practical effect if there is no support for them in the private and public spheres. Rules sometimes lead to creative ways to circumvent them or bend them to someone's needs. Finally, bureaucratic rules are good for prohibiting unwanted behaviour and creating fairness, but this can come at the expense of both efficiency—in the sense of innovation—and connectedness.[5] Both, but especially the latter, are necessary for our pursuit of a sustainable society. Bureaucratic rules can be an obstacle to people's own power and people among themselves to find sustainable solutions.

> 'Especially where justice is at stake, a strong government is required'.

The liberal-democratic rule of law

In our part of the world, the government is controlled by democratically elected bodies. And in a democracy, every individual has the right to choose which parties and people can represent 'the people' and the 'common good', and also whose view of society and the future takes precedence. This means that democracy does not guarantee sustainable outcomes. The outcome depends on individuals' preferences. There is a fear, therefore, that sustainable development is held back by a 'contented majority', the Western middle classes, that takes full advantage of the opportunities provided by a Western lifestyle (two cars in the driveway, vacation flights twice a year). Leaving aside the question if this is really the case—

5 See: 'Ordering in order: a progressive-liberal vision on the relationship between people, market, and government' (Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2011, 2012).

in the Netherlands, a fairly large portion of the upper-middle classes vote for 'green' parties—it does beg the question how, from a progressive-liberal perspective, a democracy can generate sustainable outcomes.

This brings us to two important arguments from previous parts of this essay. Progressive liberals believe that, just as in the private sphere, in the political sphere, the freedom of individuals is coupled with moral responsibility. In a democracy, citizens are expected to cast their vote in an informed and well-considered manner; that is to say, that they take the best interest of society as a whole into consideration, and not just their personal preferences, or, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau put in the 18th century, their personal 'passions'. Just like in the public sphere, the 'purification of these passions' requires dialogue, an exchange of arguments, and shared experiences. Incidentally, this moral responsibility is not only important for citizens but also for our political leaders. Political leadership means that politicians not only pursue the interests and preferences of their own support base, but can also tell them 'uncomfortable truths'.

Our ambition to create a sustainable society is primarily rooted in the liberal fundamental rights that every citizen of a liberal democracy has. These rights enable people to, free from government interference, create their own version of 'the good life'. As such, the state cannot advocate or impose a particular vision of the good life. This principle of state 'neutrality' is an important part of modern-day liberalism. Does this mean, however, that the state cannot stimulate 'the sustainable good life'? It is good to realise that this neutrality is not 'value-free'. The neutrality principle safeguards the values of individual freedom and social diversity. On this basis, the state can tweak social structures in society that constrain this freedom and diversity. Right away, this establishes a link with sustainability, because the ecological system is an important precondition for all individuals' freedom to develop themselves.

Harm principle and precautionary principle

It follows then, that from a progressive-liberal perspective, state intervention can be legitimised if certain structures or behaviour inflict harm on other people. This is called the harm principle. Harm in the broad sense;

as a constraint on the possibilities of others. Of course, the big question is: what constitutes 'harm'? And also, how much harm, or risk of harm, is acceptable? If there is no (scientific) consensus about a possible harm, the so-called precautionary principle applies. This principle states that, in case of unknown harm, the onus of justification is on unsustainable, not sustainable behaviour. Or, as we say in our Basic Value: not the protection, but the erosion of nature should have to be legitimised. An assessment of the damage, as a basis for government intervention, again emphasises the need for the supply of transparent and evidence-based information. This is not just true of the determination of harm, but also of the assessment of value. For instance, the blind pursuit of a GNP in which the consumption of natural capital is viewed as the creation of added value is by definition not sustainable.

'If there is no consensus about a possible harm, the so-called precautionary principle applies. This principle states that, in case of unknown harm, the onus of justification is on unsustainable, not sustainable behaviour'.

The government has various tools at its disposal to shape both principles. The most effective, but also the most 'crude' government instrument is the prohibition of unacceptable (read: unsustainable) behaviour and the prescription of minimum requirements. This instrument has proven its value in the ban on highly dangerous pesticides like DDT and on whaling, but also in the imposition of basic standards with regard to safety and the protection of the environment in relation to industrial activities. The instrument has its obvious limitations though; it is only suitable when black-and-white choices are possible and desirable. This requires a high level of certainty about what is harmful, as well as the availability of realistic alternatives.

Sometimes, banning certain behaviour is not ideal, but it is still necessary to reduce its harmful effects. 'Negative externalities' occur when the gains from a certain behaviour (for instance, catching fish) are private, but the harm produced by it (the plummeting of fish stocks) is collective, or even 'no one's'. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult for people among themselves to produce sustainable solutions. After all, even if all the fishermen in the Netherlands were to switch to sustainable fishing methods, it still would not stop fishermen in other countries from depleting the seas. The government plays an important role in 'internalising externalities'. The state functions as a custodian of our collective goods: things we all need, but that are not privately owned. By creating property rights and turning that which is 'owned by no one' into collective property, a context of rights emerges within which people, as individuals and in concert, can come to sustainable solutions.

Fairness, harm principle, precautionary principle, level playing field

In situations in which the government considers a particular behaviour to be desirable, but in which bans, dictates, or strict frameworks would be going too far, it can use incentives. Using financial incentives ties in well with progressive liberalism. People retain their freedom to choose and, as free individuals, are stimulated to make choices that further a collectively agreed-upon common good. Making people pay extra for unsustainable behaviour also fits in with thinking in terms of harm ('polluter pays'). The payment can be viewed as a compensation for that damage. However, it is difficult to decide how high the amount should be. Also, this instrument is not always morally defensible: 'bad' behaviour is not made 'good' because people pay to compensate for it.

Level playing field: the market and civil society

In short, the harm principle and the precautionary principle can lead to laws, rules, duties, or taxes that incentivise sustainable behaviour and/or disincentivise or even prohibit unsustainable behaviour. However, based on the neutrality principle, the government also has a more indirect role to play when it comes to sustainability: the government is responsible

for creating a level playing field, for a fair competition between visions of the good life. Because of indirect subsidies, permits, duties, and taxes, unsustainable companies still have an advantage over the sustainable alternatives. Especially because negative externalities—the damage market players cause by their use of the natural environment—are not factored into the market price. The transition to a circular economy can only happen if the government changes these rules of the game.

A similar kind of unlevel playing field can be found in the public sphere, where vested interests often enjoy institutionalised privileges. Sustainability initiatives by people among themselves often run into a minefield of bureaucratic rules (like permits). It is up to the government to create space for people among themselves. Creating space does not mean 'doing nothing', but often establishing an ambition and a framework and then giving people room to devise their own solutions. The emission of CFCs was dealt with in a similar way. The government proclaimed an ambition, 'no more CFCs in a few years', upon which people among themselves produced solutions. In this way, the government does not have to depend on its own capacity for innovation.

'Creating space does not mean 'doing nothing', but often establishing an ambition and a framework and then giving people room to devise their own solutions'.

Finally, the pursuit of a sustainable society benefits from consistency in the long term. A certain measure of predictability is required. Many green initiatives have encountered major difficulties due to vacillating government policy: wind energy, solar energy, and biogas, to name a few. It is good that the government is active, spots opportunities, and adapts its policies accordingly. But the instruments do have to be constructed in such a way that they can be maintained for a longer period, and not fall prey to (financial) recalculations. Of course, this does not mean that pol-

icy should not change in the case of relevant scientific advances. When it comes to sustainability policy, we can follow the example of timeproof arrangements around the Delta Works and road construction, in which earmarked funds ensure continuity. A reliable government is at least as valuable as an active government.

Level of scale: globalisation and regionalisation

Government intervention exists on many levels: that of the national government, municipalities, provinces, but also the European Union, and even of possible 'world governments' like the United Nations or international treaties. Sustainability is an issue at every level. For instance, waste disposal and landscape management are typically local and regional issues; air pollution by exhaust fumes is a European issue; and limiting climate change and the loss of biodiversity is relevant at the regional, national, European, and global levels. The point is that every problem requires a solution on the scale at which it occurs. Sometimes other European countries have to be involved, sometimes the entire global community, by means of international treaties, and sometimes a solution at all levels of scale simultaneously will be required. Especially to the sustainability issue, another D66 Basic Value applies: think and act internationally.

The 'globalisation' of ecological issues does not mean that we should put all our trust in internationally imposed solutions. Trusting in people's own power, our foundational progressive-liberal principle, points to the importance of solutions close to home, also when it comes to sustainability. People, including local administrators, are often better at seeing local opportunities and obstacles than national civil servants and politicians. Decentralising political decision-making can lead to the involvement and connectedness of people that is required for a strong social sustainability movement. In the public sphere of people among themselves, the people and companies involved often already work on sustainable solutions across borders. There are plenty of examples: from NGOs protecting nature in other countries to international cooperation between companies, NGOs, and consumers with regard to sustainable resources. For the government, the trick is not to get in the way of such initiatives and be ready to support them when asked and needed. For instance, when they

have reached their inherent limits, when the need for regulation is evident, and when the initiatives by people among themselves have become socially accepted.

> 'Trusting in people's own power points to the importance of solutions close to home, also when it comes to sustainability'.

Navigating the progressive liberal terrain: it is the result that counts

A liberal democracy that upholds the rule of law safeguards the individual freedoms of all, even of future citizens. By establishing frameworks, creating and enforcing rules, or through duties or subsidies, the government influences the 'rules of the game'; the way we relate to each other and the environment. Unlike citizens, the government has to do more than simply put in its best effort when it comes to sustainability. Results are what matter. If the desired result is not achieved, then the rules of the game have to be changed again. As said, the pursuit of a sustainable society is not a clear-cut path towards a fixed end point, but a complex, goal-seeking process. Where individuals and people among themselves need room for trial-and-error, the government needs to critically evaluate which measures are successful and take the lead in pursuing concrete results.

- **The Netherlands is not alone in the world. Societies are connected in ever-increasing ways. International cooperation and economic progress are key to a world with fewer wars and conflict. We acknowledge that Europe and the Netherlands are drawing ever closer. In everything we do, we ask what effect our actions will have on others in the world. Through this, our decisions are pragmatic, level-headed, and fact based.**

THINK AND ACT INTERNATIONALLY

INTRODUCTION

International connectedness and open-mindedness have been of great benefit to the world: never in history have so many people been fed and healthy; never have so many people been educated. This is partly the result of international trade increasing wealth worldwide and of international cooperation enabling a relatively stable world order, despite all the conflicts we see.

Social and economic activity is less and less bound by national borders. Due to the increasing rate of technological development, distances do not matter as much, and we form bonds and networks with people ever farther away. There is a growing level of international connectedness and mutual dependence.

At the same time, we also see significant challenges that demand a response. Think of large groups of people who travel thousands of miles to find a better life for themselves and their children, of tensions between states, or of the depletion of resources and the pollution of the oceans. International terrorism and climate change do not take heed of nationalities or borders. These types of developments demand international answers and are best approached with an open, international attitude.

Progressive liberals think and act internationally. When you read that, you may think of G20 summits, international companies, or international security crises, and perhaps of the football world championships. Of course these are all examples of thinking and acting internationally, but to progressive liberals, the credo starts a lot closer to home. It is at the heart of the way we look at the world. In this essay, we examine the Basic Value think and act internationally. What does it mean to 'think internationally'? How do you act accordingly? And why should you? What does thinking internationally mean for you personally?

The most fundamental goal of progressive liberals is increasing and preserving the personal freedom of the individual. We strive for a society in which people decide 'truth, beauty, and goodness' for themselves. This is

true of all liberals, but for progressive liberals, freedom means both the absence of external coercion so you can make your own choices, and the ability to achieve self-determination and self-fulfilment. Progressive liberals believe that when individuals have these freedoms, most people will shape that freedom in solidarity with others.

> ‘Our pursuit of freedom does not stop at national borders’.

We want a world in which people are free in connectedness. This is the social aspect of progressive liberalism, and it starts with self-determination: people’s freedom to develop and reach their potential. That freedom can only lead to just outcomes when there is equality of opportunity. In the end, talent, effort, and good or bad luck have to be the only factors that determine an individual’s success. Not their nationality, background, religion, or the wealth or education of their parents. For us, though, this freedom and equality of opportunity is not enough. When everyone has reached their potential, that is not the end of it. On the basis of our connectedness, we want justice in terms of wealth redistribution. So if someone drew the short straw in the distribution of talent, or if they take a tumble in life, we do not leave that person behind. In this, we do not just look at the people in our immediate surroundings, or even only those who are alive today. Our connectedness reaches beyond national borders and also includes future generations. That is why we want to make choices that are future-proof.

We believe that the pursuit of freedom does not stop at national borders. This stems from the conviction that the right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’ has to apply to everyone in the world. This goes hand in hand with an enlightened self-interest: the decisions and actions of people in the rest of the world have an impact on us. Additionally, we do not want our own freedom to be limited by something like national borders. So it is both out of mutual respect and out of self-interest that progressive liberals take an international perspective.

In the first part of this essay, we go deeper into the convictions that underpin think and act internationally; after all, these are convictions that every individual has to question, consider, and substantiate. In the second part, we look at what happens when people enter the public sphere with these convictions. It is between people, but also between companies and non-governmental organisations that thinking and acting internationally has a practical impact. Finally, the third part of this essay addresses this Basic Value’s implications for a progressive liberal perspective on inter-state relations. After all, it is in the domain of states that international politics has the biggest impact.

THE INDIVIDUAL

'Approach the world with an open and curious mind!' That, in a nutshell, is what our Basic Value means. The credo think and act internationally evokes associations of world politics, diplomacy, and globalisation, but the starting point of our international outlook is more fundamental. It is anchored in the progressive liberal pursuit of the freedom of the individual, regardless of where this individual lives. Human beings are social creatures, which live in mutual interdependence. The belief that everyone, anywhere in the world, has to (be able to) be free is why progressive liberals think internationally and, in doing so, are encouraged to approach the world with an open mind. In this first part, we discuss the principles and consequences of thinking and acting internationally as they apply to the individual.

Thinking

Our pursuit of freedom for all, no matter where they live, stems from three important principles that progressive liberals hold dear: every human life is equally valuable, you have to want for others what you want for yourself, and everyone on earth is inextricably interconnected. These are the most basic reasons why we think internationally. Based on the principles of moral equality, reciprocity, and a shared destiny, we can come to an action framework, namely an open mind. Where thinking and acting come together, tensions will always arise. This is why we discuss some of the areas of tension that we think symbolise the Basic Value think and act internationally.

Moral equality

As progressive liberals, we think that everyone is born with the same moral rights, and that every individual has the right to pursue (their idea of) the good life. These innate rights are not reserved for those who were born in the right place, but to all people. We call this 'universal'. We believe this because we think that no one can decide for anyone else what is good and what is bad, nor what another should or should not do as a consequence. No one has all the answers. This principle reflects our shared humanity, from which the conviction that everyone should be free to make their own choices flows[6]. Progressive liberals strive for 'freedom in connectedness'. This is based on both an emphasis on humans as social beings and the belief that free individuals will automatically seek connections with others[7]. In our view, freedom leads to connectedness. To progressive liberals, 'freedom' has a broader meaning. Some liberal thinkers define freedom as the right of the individual to lead his or her own life without interference from others. This is so-called negative freedom. In progressive liberalism though, so-called positive freedom[8] is just as important: this is the freedom that arises because the individual is able to develop his or her own potential. Moral equality, and the pursuit of (negative and positive) freedom and self-determination for all, is why we think and act internationally. After all, everyone, within and outside of the Netherlands, has to be able to pursue their own happiness in their own way. We believe that when people are not able to do this by themselves, others have a responsibility to help in achieving this pursuit.

However, there is a tension in pursuing happiness and freedom for all: everyone may be equal, but that does not mean that we are going to feel equally connected to everyone. More Dutch people feel connected to Belgians, for example, than to people from Swaziland. In their quest for happiness, human beings have an innate need to distinguish themselves from others. In order to make sense of a complicated world, a person draws borders and tends to feel at home with a specific group of people.

6 That no one has all the answers does not mean that there is no such thing as truth, and so we do not need to debate about it. It does, however, lead to the conclusion that the best society is a society in which people discuss what is 'true' and 'good' in freedom and without violence. In that society, we are allowed (and often required) to express our own opinions, but we do so in the knowledge that we should not assume that we are indisputably and absolutely right. For more on this, see: "Trust in People's Own Power" (Hans van Mierlo Foundation/Permanent Programme Committee D66, 2009.)

7 Incidentally, everyone has the right not to, of course. This does tend to have consequences though, which that person will have to accept.

8 The terms positive and negative freedom were made famous by Isaiah Berlin in his essay 'Two concepts of liberty' from 1958.

Everyone should have the right to take root in a certain place and to view and experience its way of life as valuable. This focus on the familiar, on the private, is in our nature. As such, the progressive liberal ideal of freedom in connectedness should be accompanied by the realization that a person's connection may be greater with one person than with another. The fact that all people have equal rights does not change this. There is a constant tension in our thinking between the universal and the private. The phrase think and act internationally does not lead to a denial of this tension. On the contrary, it must be continually explored, examined, and questioned. The human fondness for the familiar has to be brought into harmony with the equality of all.

Reciprocity

The freedom of self-determination can only lead to just outcomes when opportunities are equal. In the end, talent, effort, and good or bad luck have to be the only factors that determine an individual's success. Not their nationality, background, religion, or the wealth or education of their parents. The pursuit of equal opportunities is expressed in the principle of reciprocity, often conveyed in the form of the motto 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. As a principle, reciprocity is a logical consequence of the idea that people have equal fundamental rights. After all, if all life is equally valuable, you should treat each person in the way that you want to be treated. It then follows from that you want others to have the freedoms (and opportunities) that you yourself have. This leads to a (moral, not legal) obligation to make the effort required to ensure another's freedom which, if necessary, you would want them to exert, both in terms of words and in actions, on your behalf. As said: progressive liberals strive for a world in which there is individual freedom for everyone, no matter where. The principle of reciprocity is a way to express this international outlook. That in some countries certain people are denied rights because of their religion, culture, or origin cannot be justified. Everyone has the right to a life that is as valuable and as healthy as possible, and to just treatment from the government and others.

There is both an element of selflessness and an element of self-interest in reciprocity. It works well to build mutual trust and to make long-term

commitments. After all, on the basis of reciprocity, you may rely on the fact that others will treat you the way that they themselves would want to be treated in a similar situation. That is how reciprocity stimulates cooperation and the honouring of agreements. It is therefore seen as a fundamental principle for interaction between states and as a way to effectively manage crises. It is because we want freedom for everyone, and the reciprocity that flows from it, that progressive liberals strive for an agreements-based international legal order.

'Everyone has the right to a life that is as valuable and as healthy as possible, and to just treatment from the government and others'.

A shared destiny

From the idea of moral equality and the principle of reciprocity, an awareness of shared responsibility emerges: we are all in this together. To progressive liberals, the individual and individual freedom may take centre stage, but it is always with the knowledge that individuals are not islands; they are connected to others. This is also true of people you do not know, of people on the other side of the world, and of (individuals in) other countries. We are more focused on what unites people than what divides them. The progressive liberal pursuit of freedom for all is inextricably linked to this.

In a globalising world, things that happen in the Netherlands have consequences elsewhere, and vice versa. A mere glance at problems that span the globe immediately shows how much the fate of people in the Netherlands and Europe is bound to that of people on the other side of the world. Climate, intercontinental migration, resource scarcity, and terrorism are all phenomena of which both the causes and the consequences are so huge and all-encompassing that we are forced to take the whole world into consideration. Connectedness is real and cannot be denied, and it is one of the most important reasons for progressive liberals to

always look for solutions to political and administrative challenges that are as comprehensive as possible and that also extend beyond our own borders[9].

This can go without saying on paper, but in practice, connectedness is hardly ever as self-evident. This has to do, amongst other things, with how people shape their identities. Who does someone feel connected to? This is less straightforward than it sometimes seems. Progressive liberalism views the individual as a complex of multiple identities. People are more than just their ethnicity, gender, religion, race, or the sum of these parts. Experiences we have in life also make us who we are. This layering of identities can bring great colour to people's lives. From the perspective of the emphasis on multiple identities, it is also possible to see how, for instance, an atheist can feel connected to a deeply religious person, because they are both fathers, or football fans, or because they are from the same country. Recognising this layering in one another creates an awareness of connectedness, no matter how different we are. On the basis of this multifaceted view of what makes people tick, it almost goes without saying that we tell ourselves: think and act internationally.

An open mind

A good way to express moral equality, reciprocity, and connectedness is to have an open mind, which stresses what unites people, despite the differences between them and the distances and borders between them. This means observing without immediately expressing an opinion (which is not the same as not having an opinion!). An important element of an open mind is curiosity about the outside world. This curiosity is driven by the knowledge that things are often not what they seem, which leads to an openness to further information, which may contradict existing beliefs. An open mind should come with the realisation that, like everyone else, we have blind spots too, and we should take that into account. By doing this, people can put themselves in someone else's shoes (which is part of reciprocity), which can lead to a feeling of connectedness. The ability to

9 This also means that solutions need to be future-proof, because there is also a connectedness with future generations. For more on this, see: "Work Towards a Sustainable and Harmonious Society". (Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2013).

see through another's eyes, empathy, helps a person to understand other people. This is essential to (having) an open mind. A lack of empathy often leads to (possibly unnecessary) disagreements and (thus avoidable) conflicts. Curiosity and empathy are the tools of an open mind.

The Basic Value think and act internationally does not offer any ready-made solutions or unnuanced prescriptions for dealing with complicated international issues. It does, however, provide basic ideas that anyone can use to find their own way. Being aware of the complexity of the world and still looking at it with an open mind is essential for thinking and acting internationally. An open mind does not mean you turn a blind eye to conflicts and differences between people, or to borders or distances. Instead, it imposes a responsibility not to make these conflicts, differences, borders, or distances too great and unalterable. On the basis of this, we must always decide if we will remain the 'open-minded observer' or if we will (argue that we should) intervene.

A feature of an open mind is asking what the consequences of your actions will be for others. This question brings an insight into and a perspective of big international issues that would otherwise remain hidden. For instance, consider international migration: it is often viewed as a force of nature that is unchangeable and in which 'we' have no part. From an open-minded viewpoint, our first question is not 'What do we do about it?' but 'Why are things the way they are?' Not to use the explanation as a way to trivialise the problem but to—where necessary—come up with a better solution. It is good to look at a subject such as migration from a perspective of reciprocity and connectedness. First, an open-minded international perspective shows that migration from sub-Saharan Africa to the European Union (EU) is more the exception than the rule, and that its scale is highly relative: most of the refugees are staying in the region. In addition, we see that the refugees not only enjoy far less freedom in their home countries, but also that part of that lack of freedom is caused by restrictions and rules to which the EU, intentionally or unintentionally, contributes. The international trade system often creates a one-sided focus on the production of natural resources. Partly thanks to 'Fortress Europe', it is made difficult for people in African countries to develop a

strong, balanced local economy, causing many to migrate in search of a better life.

An open mind also leads to the realisation that we not only want to actively influence others, but that our influence on others can also be questioned. This is very clearly the case when it comes to the environment and the climate. The Dutch 'use the Netherlands five times over' to meet their needs. If everyone were to live the way we do, we would need five planet earths.[10] In order to make prosperity possible for all, we have to reduce our footprint. This is how reciprocity and empathy give you a different picture of international problems. And most of the time, thinking internationally naturally leads to acting internationally.

An open mind close to home

The open-minded attitude of thinking and acting internationally opens the world to us and enables us to broaden both our minds and the space in which we live—without having to travel so much as a mile. On the other hand, having an open mind does involve a constant balancing act. After all, it may seem easy at first, but when you look closer, you will see that having an open mind burdens a person with difficult choices. For instance, it exposes us to (interactions with) people who think differently. On the one hand, we want everyone to be free to devise their own idea of the good life, but on the other, we are convinced of our own progressive liberal view. We often see this tension between freedom and conviction in the Netherlands (stemming both from xenophobia and fundamentalist religion). The differences are at least as great on an international scale, and there, power and influence play a much bigger role. This leads to questions of intervening in other countries—more about that in Part 3 of this essay.

International issues are oftentimes too big and complex to fully grasp, let alone to directly influence as an individual. But the ideas behind this Basic Value are about more than just the domain of international politics; they are a call to people to see beyond their own borders. These do not necessarily need to be national borders; they can also be municipal, or even neighbourhood borders. The open-mindedness that is connected to the credo think and act internationally also inescapably comes with obligations. For instance, the obligation to put yourself in someone else's shoes. But more specifically, we also have to find a balance between, for instance, the belief that refugees deserve a better future and actually doing something about that in our daily lives. Or between taking other people into account and not losing sight of your own interests. It is also possible to consider all cultures to be equal in theory and still have a problem with your best friend having his newborn son circumcised. And how do we deal with a friend's criticism at your teenage daughter being allowed out of the house at night? An open mind means that you take heed of what the consequences of your actions mean for someone else. In looking out for our own interests, we have to ask ourselves: 'Is this what I want, taking into account the consequences my choices have on others?'

> 'Curiosity and empathy are the tools of an open mind'.

The feeling that comes with an open mind can also go off the rails sometimes. When this happens, a person paradoxically closes their mind; for instance, they fervently embrace the exotic abroad while forswearing the familiar at home as bourgeois, backwards, or overly nostalgic. They know exactly how to find their way in the back alleys of Hong Kong or enjoy the rural life and the folklore of France or Italy, but turn their nose up at customs or ideas that are not common to their own circle of friends because 'they are no yuppie, country bumpkin, or townie'. Being a citizen of the world does not require distancing yourself from your own heritage. In other words: a love of the foreign does not have to lead to an aversion of the familiar.

Still, there is always a tension between far away and close to home. How do you choose between them? In a world of finite resources, we have to choose what we spend our time, money, and energy on. How do progressive liberals make a conscious choice between investing in opportunities

10 There is much discussion about the exact determination of an ecological footprint. Whether the exact number is 4, 5, or 6 makes no difference to the point being made here.

for a newborn baby in Africa or in the (in absolute terms, considerably more expensive) work opportunities of a 55-year-old receiving unemployment benefits in the Netherlands? And when (if ever) do we say to a poor child in India: 'your society is now so rich that it is time for the prosperous middle class in your own country to take up your cause'? Despite the focus on effectiveness in the public debate about development cooperation, fundamental questions lie beneath the surface. Although, in principle, progressive liberals do not distinguish between different poverty-stricken countries, or places that violate human rights, it is still human nature to feel solidarity for those who are in some way closer to us. There is something arbitrary in this, but that does not make it any less real. However, an open mind can serve as an antidote to prejudice. The thoughts expressed here regarding moral equality, reciprocity, and connectedness do not provide ready-made answers. They offer a footing and a frame of reference for putting these issues on the agenda and then taking a position on them. After all, first and foremost, think and act internationally articulates a challenge, not a solution.

'Trying to keep an open mind bolsters a world of shared humanity, reciprocity, and connectedness'.

Keep an open mind, think big, and act where your actions will have the biggest effect, close to home if necessary. Trying to keep an open mind bolsters a world of shared humanity, reciprocity, and connectedness. This not only improves the lives of people here, but also elsewhere. For instance, by examining how questions of social security are answered in Denmark, we can learn valuable lessons. And because the Netherlands is a forerunner when it comes to same-sex-marriage legislation, we have an influence on people and countries all over the world.

In this first part we have, from an individual perspective, discussed the foundations of our convictions about thinking and acting internationally. In the next part, we will principally deal with what this approach means for groups and communities. The non-state international domain also involves a constant balancing act, and oftentimes we have to make a choice between two evils. In that case, what does the progressive liberal ideal of think and act internationally offer in terms of perspectives and insights?

THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Today's world is characterised by innumerable international connections between people. When people think and act internationally, they come into contact with others, who have concurring or opposing views. Whether it is through a student exchange program, an internationally operating small business, or an online community; an open mind comes to mean something only once it is tested through interaction with others, in the public sphere where people interact with each other. Interaction can spark mutual understanding. The exploration of, and confrontation between different viewpoints benefits people's creative potential and thus forms an important condition for individual freedom.[11] People have to discuss considerations and dilemmas such as those described in the first part among themselves.

The previous part of this essay detailed why think and act internationally is a typically progressive-liberal value. Because we believe moral equality, reciprocity, and connectedness are so important, we want individual freedom for all people, no matter where they live. And we give shape to this goal by keeping an open mind. Much of the international activity happens between people, companies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In this part, we discuss what it means to have an open mind when it comes to these actors. The last part of this essay will address thinking and acting internationally with regard to a different, highly influential actor: the state.

Having a conversation about thinking and acting internationally

In real life, an open mind leads to certain tensions, as we have seen in the previous part. In first instance, the conversation about these tensions should take place in the public sphere. This is impossible if people do not

11 It is obvious that interactions with people who think differently can also lead to conflict; this was addressed earlier in this essay. Here, we deliberately emphasize the alternate view.

stand up for what they believe in, as individuals and on an equal footing. Meeting someone who, for instance, has a different background, was raised differently, thinks differently about life, or has a different religion, introduces people to other ideas about what is 'good' and 'normal'. It places people on the tense middle ground between their own convictions and those of others. As said, for progressive liberals, everyone has a right to shape their own ideas about the good life. But the maxim that no one has all the answers should not be a reason to not defend your own principles. On the contrary, it is possible to stand up for your own values and ideas and still be open to the ideas of others or admit that things do not necessarily have to be a certain way. Accepting that the other person might be wrong, however, is not the same as being certain that they are. This is as true of domestic social issues as it is of deciding what position to take on the international stage.

The primary responsibility for decision making in international affairs lies in the political arena.[12] Politicians are also a part of the domain of 'people among themselves'. It is in this domain that decisions gain support and legitimacy. Whether it is about allowing Poles, Romanians, or Bulgarians access to the Dutch labour market; about a response to privacy violations in the Netherlands by foreign intelligence services; or about armed intervention in another country: the more people speak about something among themselves, the greater the pressure on the government to take action will be. The degree to which the government takes the sentiments of society into account may differ; for liberals, policy positions can, in principle, only emerge from the population and cannot initially be prescribed by the government. This observation places a great deal of responsibility on people to have the conversation among themselves. Political and community leaders and organisations also have a part to play; not prescribing what others should do, but in the vanguard, leading by example and picking up signals from society. From a liberal perspective, a government can never be the deciding factor in a debate, but progressive-liberal poli-

12 There is a significant difference between 'politics' and 'the government', although in everyday language they are sometimes used interchangeably. Politics is, in essence, citizens working to influence the public administration. The government is all the organs of state, which execute the public administration.

ticians—so individual citizens, united in a political organisation—do have to be.

People among themselves: a group, a population? Start with the individual!

Progressive liberalism wants people to be free and to live connected lives. To us, every thought in the area of international relations begins here. At the same time, the subject of many reflections in the international context is 'a population'—so a group of people. A population is often seen as organic. It is discussed as though it were a body, to which all the constituent parts are ancillary. This view is in direct opposition to the central principles of progressive liberalism. Our thinking and acting internationally starts with individuals, not with poples or nations. In our eyes, the nation is given far too much credit.[13]

Moreover, the classic idea of the nation conflicts with progressive liberalism. After all, in the classical view, the nation supersedes the individual, who ought to conform to the nation. For conservative nation-state thinkers ('the nation is leading') and globalisation enthusiasts ('there are no such things as borders') the world looks simple; to progressive liberals, it does not. As discussed earlier in this essay, the progressive liberal acknowledges that there are differences between people, and that borders and distances are real. As such, we do not believe that nation states have become irrelevant in the modern world. At the same time, individuals always have multiple identities. This means that individuals should be able to join 'other' communities, experience connections across borders, and

13 Incidentally, it is very useful to realize that nations, the understanding of what it means to be a nation, constantly changes. The average Dutch person from the 1950s would hardly recognize himself in the early 21st century Dutch self-image. Moreover, nations were 'invented' in large part in the 19th century, when government and societal elites created a uniform picture of nations—through language politics, education, and compulsory military service—in a time when most people identified primarily with their city, village, or region. As such, nations are not unavoidable 'natural' phenomena. However real the existence of nations is these days, the fact that they were once 'activated' shows that they are not the only way to express connections between people. As said earlier in the essay, 'people are more than just their ethnicity, gender, religion, race, or the sum of these things'.

certainly should not be limited to their 'own' nation if they do not want to be. 'Freedom in connectedness' is fundamentally different from 'freedom in confinement'. That is why progressive liberalism wants to bridge differences and cross borders: based on the belief that the freedom of the individual is the highest good. Thinking and acting internationally serves as a reminder for (progressive) liberals to never forget that the freedom of the individual must always be the guiding principle.

Acting internationally: individuals and organisations

A public debate about international issues ought to have an effect. This often happens between individuals and non-state organisations—so between people among themselves—and in many different ways: from international internet-based communities and NGOs to international sporting bodies and large multinationals. We see that acting internationally has acquired an entirely new character in the past few decades; the public sphere of 'people among themselves' plays a very different role than, say, fifty years ago. Modern, non-state organisational forms generally have a cross-border character. In the non-state domain, there is no longer a strict division between the national and the international. We see that, increasingly, people are organising around shared interests and values, in which what is often more important than where. Prominent examples of this are organisations like Amnesty International, Plan International, or Greenpeace. These organisations exist primarily because people all over the world support them, which gives them standing and a voice in the international arena. This is entirely new in world history. Many of these non-state organisations are not primarily political in nature, but they are a good medium through which individuals can channel their international (progressive-liberal or other) engagement.

So the progressive liberal interpretation of think and act internationally is this: from and because of the connection between individuals, it is possible to pursue and further individual freedom for all. We see that organisations of different shapes and sizes can unite behind a common goal. An example is a large international cooperative effort for vaccinations, consisting of the World Health Organisation, several nation states, civil society-organisations, and a charity. People can find one another in

the international arena for other goals as well, often through informal networks and the internet. An example of this are websites with online petitions that keep the pressure on governments and companies to be socially responsible.

> ‘Our thinking and acting internationally begins with individuals, not with peoples or nations’.

In spite of these positive examples, not every international organisation is good news for the world in general or individual freedom in particular: far from it. Most obvious in this regard are the international fundamentalist terror groups that have no regard for borders and use global networks to create a state of confinement that is in direct opposition with everything progressive liberalism strives for. They think and act internationally too, but to impose their vision of the good life on other individuals, by force if need be. The challenges that these types of organisations represent for our ideal of personal freedom can, in large part, be met by states (see Part 3 of this essay). But this starts with a societal call against such groups, from people among themselves. When people speak out strongly for their convictions among themselves and enter into a public debate with fundamentalists, it offers support for the work of administrators.

Acting internationally: companies

Material wealth provides the means and conditions for personal freedom. The Netherlands is a trading nation, with a strong international orientation and an economy based on exports. But even if this were not the case, one of the progressive-liberal Basic Values would still be: think and act internationally. After all, international trade is an excellent way to generate and share material wealth. In the past 150 years, international trade has led to an unprecedented growth in prosperity worldwide. Never before has the world’s population been this well-fed, this healthy, and this well-educated, and that is partly due to international trade. In the ideal case, companies transfer wealth from one country to another and vice versa. When a Dutch company builds a factory in, say, Vietnam, it creates jobs there.[14] Families can subsist on this salary, children can go to school, and society can undergo further development. At the same time, it generates wealth in the Netherlands because the Vietnamese factory uses Dutch know-how and equipment. Moreover, in this way, products can be made more cheaply than if they had been produced in a Western country. During a time of growing protest against globalisation and companies that operate internationally, it is important to also keep talking about the positive sides of international trade. Fair trade exemplifies our principle of reciprocity and contributes to equal opportunities for all. And if all the elementary conditions[15] are met, it increases the material prosperity of both parties.

This is not to say that every international company is good news to individual freedom in the world. Large agro-engineering firms, for instance, are drawing significant criticism for the way they handle intellectual property, for the influence they have on the drafting of international treaties, and for the pesticides they produce, which are said to threaten biodiversity. On the other hand, partly due industrialised agriculture and the companies in this sector, world hunger is at its lowest point in history. So we see tension here as well; finding a balance is not easy. After all, although progressive liberals embrace and see the good in globalisation, we do not shut our eyes to the negative aspects.

The key is people who think and act internationally in both countries. People in, for instance, Nigeria and Bangladesh, who can shine a light on what happens during oil extraction or in textile factories. That way, Dutch people who are open to it can gain better insights into the circumstances created by the parties involved and can then act accordingly. Sometimes, this insight can be translated directly into a choice (not) to buy certain clothing. Sometimes it works more indirectly, for instance through

14 It is good to know that an overwhelming majority of Dutch companies that export are small- and medium-sized companies, although exports from large companies do make up 40% of the total. Nevertheless, the idea of an import and export sector that is totally dominated by big corporations is incorrect. (data: cbs, 2009).

15 For instance, the removal of trade barriers, the enforcement of market transparency, and an accessible credit provision for new businesses.

demonstrations to convince banks and pension funds to no longer make certain investments. This forces companies to behave differently.

States also have an important role to play. Sometimes the circumstances are such that individuals cannot expose the consequences of corporate actions. This is where states have a responsibility. For the organisation of an effective oppositional force, individuals and groups delegate (a large) part of their power to another authority or representative body. This can be a lobby group or a union, but on the international stage it is usually the state. States have to make sure that (large, multinational) private organisations play by the rules, and that the rules further individual freedom. The need for this is clearly exemplified in the financial world, where citizens' interests have gone underrepresented for too long.

States have to ensure freedom of choice, enact legislation, and make sure that companies abide by it. True freedom of choice requires concrete and relevant information. Because large companies operate in multiple countries, states have to insist on international cooperation and international agreements. Information about production processes in the entire chain enables consumers to express their connectedness with other countries in their behaviour. In an international context, it is difficult to compel companies to behave morally by means of legislation. What is oftentimes possible though, is transparency. Public insight into companies' production processes16, and those of their subcontractors, should be required by law if necessary. Citizens and consumers need this information in order to make a fair assessment and be responsible for their choices.

There are countless ways in which the open mind advocated in Part 1 can take shape: thinking and acting internationally happens between people, in non-state organisations and by actually trading internationally. In that way, shared humanity, reciprocity, and connectedness are made real. It is this kind of international interaction, coming from people themselves, that is an important force behind international exchange. The public sphere is also the best place for an individual to put his international engagement into practice. And it is through international trade that advantages are created for many. This way, thinking and acting internationally contributes to a world in which people can be free, no matter where they live.

Although a great deal of international interaction happens on the non-state level, interaction between states is of great importance in the world. Not only do states have a monopoly on the use of force and the right to raise taxes, but, in the progressive-liberal view, they also have a responsibility to represent us on the international stage. After all, international challenges require international solutions. It is paramount that states work together with other states to reach agreements that apply everywhere. In the last part of this essay, we will explore how the Basic Value think and act internationally can apply to states.

16 Of course, this is possible in national legislation, for instance through terms of employment or safety measures.

THE STATE

Individual freedom in connectedness is not only achieved in our own community, or even in our own country. Many international challenges are not easily tackled by individuals or civil society organisations. Even individual states cannot do everything on their own. To progressive liberals, human rights are the most important guiding principle in international relations, but that is not enough. Individual freedom for all is best served by an international order of functioning states that enable their citizens to be free. For this, international cooperation is essential.

International cooperation

For hundreds of years, international activity has largely consisted of interactions between states. This is primarily about power and interests, of course, but it also makes sense from a liberal perspective: sovereign states had to safeguard the individual from interference in their private life and in their freedom of choice[17]. States acted as advocates for the interests of individuals. Over time, however, many international challenges have become too big to be met by individual countries. Cooperation is thus required. This cooperation is effected through all sorts of international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), NATO, or the EU, but also the World Bank or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Cooperation also comes in less explicit forms, such as international consensuses. A good example of this is the (usually) unspoken assumption that free trade is the best basis for a global economic system.

17 Progressive liberals place great value on a (democratically legitimised and monitored) state as the guardian of individual freedoms. It should be clear from this essay that this state does not necessarily have to be a nation state. Many of the world's problems ought to be addressed on a global scale. We think that a world organisation like the UN should have greater authority when it comes to problems like climate change or global pandemics. However, we believe that it does remain essential for public power to be democratically legitimised. And, that requires nation states.

As international interconnectedness increased, in the previous centuries, the share of purely state issues in the international system decreased. Besides states, non-state or interstate cooperative partnerships also play an important role. The state is no longer an isolated player on the international stage, and states do not always have the power to monitor and control non-state actors. As such, foreign policy is no longer just power politics; cooperation is possible and necessary. Besides national security, socio-economic issues are also important subjects in today's international relations. This situation is also called transnationalism. These days, the international system is characterised by a complex interdependence on all sides. Whereas traditionally the international system was viewed as a game of billiards (of balls smashing into one another) it has now become a large network. In a world of great interdependence, international institutions are the best way to manage these interdependencies. Many large multinational corporations have become too big for small countries to control. When such corporations do not like certain rules, they simply divert their cash flows. This erodes the influence of national governments. International cooperation can provide a counterweight to this behaviour. As such, the freedom of individuals in countries all over the world can be strengthened when states work together.

> 'Despite all the conflicts that exist in the world, the extensive and multifaceted system of international cooperation offers a historically unprecedented stability'.

Of course it still happens that states let their own (short-term) interests prevail over a (long-term) collective interest, despite the fact that individual states, even the largest, can no longer handle a plethora of international problems on their own. This can lead to conflict, which puts pressure on the network of international cooperation. Even in these cases though, it is good that there are international organisations in which conciliation efforts can take place and where information can be exchanged. Transnationalism does not necessarily mean that were will no longer be conflicts

between states, but that, preferably, these conflicts are not decided by military means. Interests, conflicts, and power struggles will always exist, but never before in history have they been channelled the way they are today. This is the effect of international cooperation. It is how international cooperation furthers the reciprocity and connectedness we pursue. It is how our vision of thinking and acting internationally contributes to future-proof politics. Despite all the conflicts that exist in the world, the extensive and multifaceted system of international cooperation offers historically unprecedented stability. Of course it would be better if the UN were to do more and to act more decisively, or if established economic powers were to leave room for developing economies. But, considering that the alternative to the current, sometimes somewhat sluggish way of doing things has, in the past, always been armed combat between (the massive armies of) great powers, it would be wise to count our blessings. However, international agreement and cooperation only work when the most powerful state behaves responsibly and other states to do not enter into reckless military adventures.

In this transnational situation, sovereignty is a complex concept, which can be explained in many different ways. Sometimes it seems like it only means having final jurisdiction, the ultimate right of assent, or the power to impose something on a lower-level of government. But what is sovereignty worth when on crucial issues it leads to ineffective or even powerless governance? Are you still sovereign in that case? In our eyes, a state is sovereign not due to a lack of limitations imposed by others, or by virtue of an(unachievable)economic autarky, but because it makes all its own decisions, both good and bad, even if they are influenced by external circumstances or by others. In the past centuries, sovereignty rested with national states, which enjoyed a relatively high level of legitimacy from their citizens. Although we posit that sovereignty should be viewed with an open mind (and the nation state is not set in stone, as far as we are concerned), it should be handled with care. Far-reaching transfers of sovereignty must be defended and legitimised through public debate.

Our internationalist attitude does not necessarily have to lead to a plea for a single global super state, as some political opponents claim. Thinking

and acting internationally does not automatically mean merging with others. It does, however, mean working with others. We are looking for complex and diverse forms of political organisation in which nation states, as well as local and regional governments, can play their essential roles. For progressive liberals, in the end, every choice in international relations has to serve the ideal of individual freedom. Sometimes international overregulation puts pressure on this freedom. That is why it is good to realise that, just as global problems require global solutions, local problems are better tackled locally.

Relations between states are not set in stone. We see this, for instance, in the concept of an EU member state, which in the course of the European integration process has come to mean more than just being a member of an inter-state organisation. The EU member state has evolved into a state that exercises its sovereignty in an entirely new way, one that differs considerably from the traditional 19th century nation state. It exercises its sovereignty in dialogue with others; national sovereignty is 'shared' because there is an awareness that ever-increasing interdependence has surpassed national sovereignty, often causing the national interest to overlap with a shared European interest. This does not automatically mean that we are living in a post-national order; an EU member state also has national borders, and it too has its own goals and interests. Between the EU member states, a kind of 'intermediate zone' has arisen, in which a constant dialogue provides ways to manage and divert (potential) conflicts of interest, more so and more compellingly than in 'ordinary' international cooperation. This intermediate zone between the member states offers room to move between self-interest and shared interest. In concrete terms, the relationship the Netherlands has with Germany, for instance, but also with Slovenia, is characterised by a greater level of institutional interconnectedness than the Netherlands' relationship with the United States or Morocco. The emergence of this intermediate zone between EU member states shows that sovereignty and the thinking on sovereignty are constantly evolving. To progressive liberals, what matters most is that institutional interconnectedness has to, in the end, (continue to)

serve the individual, not the institution.[18] Whether we are talking about the municipality, the region, the state, or the Union; all these 'higher authorities' have to contribute to the freedom of the individual. This is also why the EU's institutions are in urgent need of democratisation.

Human rights

Our pursuit of freedom for all, everywhere on the planet, is best and most directly expressed through human rights. These rights, from the right to life and freedom of speech to the right to a fair trial, safeguard the recognition of the value of the individual.[19] For us, human rights are based in large part on the notions of shared humanity and moral equality.

> 'The tension between human rights and international law is best resolved by international cooperation'.

We have said it before in this essay: the fact that some groups and countries use religion, culture, or heritage to deny certain people rights is unacceptable. Everyone has the right to a full and healthy life and to fair treatment from the government and others. What this means in practice is demonstrated by real-life cases, usually involving (potential) state actions. Do we believe that a state is allowed to intervene when human rights are violated elsewhere? In principle, the answer is yes, based on our fundamental convictions, in particular the importance of reciprocity and equality of opportunity.

At the same time, we know from experience that we should exercise great caution in intervening in other countries. Although state authority is certainly no guarantee against human rights violations, it at least offers a point of contact. Wherever state power falls away, human rights violations increase, and then there is no authority left to deal with. The destabilisation of state authority by external interventions should be avoided as much as possible. The rights of states are expressed in international law, and one of the most important principles of international law is non-intervention.

But, again, tensions can arise, in this case between human rights and international law. After all, there are certainly cases in which international intervention is justified. International cooperation is the best way to resolve this tension. We believe that the international community can be justified in deciding to settle a conflict by a controlled use of force. However, this should, in principle, have a mandate under international law. In other words, not principled pacifism, but a pursuit of peaceful solutions to international conflicts. Progressive liberalism is also not averse to military deterrence, and this does not necessarily have to be organised by the nation state. International cooperation can also be preferable in the area of military affairs as well. That is why, as a social-liberal party, D66 has always been a proponent of NATO and of working towards an EU defence organisation.

In order to form an opinion about issues of international intervention with an open mind, it is important to realise that the tension that may exist between state sovereignty and human rights is not a form of hypocrisy. Oftentimes, conflicting principles are involved, and a complex international reality offers no easy answers. It would go a long way if this dilemma—and how we deal with it—were to become more widely known. It is unavoidable that when you think and act internationally, you come into contact with conflicting values and interests. The alternative is isolationist thinking, often expressed in phrases like 'put a wall around it' or 'put a wall around us' (in the Netherlands, this is often viewed in terms of dikes). This sentiment may sometimes be understandable, but it is counter to the aforementioned principles closely associated with progressive liberalism; an open mind as a product of connectedness, the moral equality of all people, and the importance of reciprocity.

In the early 21st century, the tension between state sovereignty and individual self-determination has come in many forms. International interventions are no longer limited to military interventions, but, due

18 For more on this, see: 'Europe, a prerequisite for freedom', Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2014.

19 Also see on this: "Cherish Our Fundamental Rights and Shared Values", Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2014.

to globalisation and transnationalism, have also acquired an economic dimension (in which non-state international organisations are increasingly influential), a legal dimension (in which the legal force of international law is slowly expanding, which may conflict with national legislation), and a political dimension (in which decisions by, for example, China have a significant influence on domestic policy in the United States).

Despite the relatively large number of humanitarian interventions in the past decades, historically speaking, state sovereignty has almost always won out over human rights.[20] Particularly since the end of the Cold War, human rights have acquired a more prominent place in international politics; this development can be called revolutionary. At the same time, the decision to intervene is still taken at the inter-state level. Most of the time, state sovereignty is the deciding factor in international relations, not the protection of individual people.

> 'The most important responsibility of a sovereign state is the protection of its citizens against genocide, war crimes, human rights violations, and ethnic cleansing'.

Luckily, the 21st century shows a trend of acknowledgement that a state's sovereignty is not an absolute right but that it also comes with responsibilities. The most important responsibility of a sovereign state is the protection of its citizens against genocide, war crimes, human rights violations, and ethnic cleansing. If a state does not live up to that responsibility, the international community has to step in. This idea, which emerged mainly in response the international community's earlier failures to intervene in cases of large-scale human rights violations and war crimes[21], has found expression in the principle of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (also called R2P). It has been advanced a number of times as a (supportive) principle to justify actions by the international community.[22] As such, there is an observable shift in the behaviour of states. Changing behaviour caused by a changing view in which human rights do prevail over a strict interpretation of the principle of sovereignty. Or better said: in which human rights make up an essential part of the concept of sovereignty. In this way, the progressive-liberal view of freedom—which finds its essence in these human rights—is gaining in strength.

It is clear that human rights alone are not reason enough to justify (intervention in) a conflict. If they were, interventions would be justified in every country that oppresses individuals. The tragedy is that human rights violations have to occur before the international community can intervene. What is more, human rights violations often only increase after an intervention. And intervention is often accompanied by unwanted side-effects, such as civilian casualties from military actions, economic damage to innocents, or the fuelling of intolerant ideologies that thrive in the chaos. Every time intervention is on the table, we have to ask ourselves if it will make the situation better or worse. As such, a fundamental question that our thinking and acting internationally evokes is: how do we strengthen human rights in a state without also threatening the stability of that state? To progressive liberals, helping individuals within countries (for instance, groups fighting oppression) is a better way to pursue our political goals; from the bottom-up and from within, rather than imposing things from the outside. Confronting states about their human rights violations can also have an effect.

Development cooperation is crucial for protecting and furthering the individual freedoms of people all over the world. The Netherlands is not able to do this alone, but with an appeal to reciprocity and the pursuit of equal opportunities, we believe that the Netherlands should take a leading role. The poorer parts of the world have gone through important changes in the past decades. Hundreds of millions of people have escaped the worst poverty, and great progress has been made by many countries in the areas of food security, health care, education, and economic devel-

20 Behind the tension between sovereignty and human rights, economic interests also often play a part in the background, making the consideration even more difficult.

21 For instance in Rwanda in 1994 and in Bosnia in 1995.

22 For instance in Kenia (2007/2008), in Ivory Coast (2011), and in Libya (2011).

opment. The Millennium Development Goals have largely been a success. But we are not there yet. Because, as progressive liberals, who want equality of opportunity for everyone, we also have to show solidarity[23] with those in the world who have very few opportunities. We do not use disappointment over development results in the past as an excuse to cut the development aid budget. We do draw lessons from these disappointments. That is why it is important to further modernise development aid. At the same time, we have to have a public debate about the moral aspects to development cooperation. As posited before: when do we say to a poor child in India: 'your society is now so rich that it is time for the prosperous middle class in your own country to take up your cause'? Despite the focus on the effectiveness of international cooperation, there are also fundamental moral questions involved. Sovereign countries may have a responsibility for their own citizens, but richer and more powerful people also have a responsibility for the world's poor and powerless.

We appeal to the principle of reciprocity. But if we think human rights are so important that we can sometimes set aside international law for them (and thus violate the sovereignty of another state), in theory, it should also be possible to turn this around. In other words: when should we, for instance, accept a humanitarian intervention by China in the Netherlands for the sake of human rights? Or, more moderately put: if we want to lecture others (about, for example, the lack of democracy in Egypt, or the death penalty in the United States) we should also keep an open mind when others have something to say about us (about the inhumane treatment of refugees in the Netherlands, for instance). In other words: reciprocity also has implications for our own sovereignty. That is how we give practical effect to not having all the answers; others can point out our blind spots and prevent us from losing sight of our progressive-liberal goals in our own country.

We said it in Part 1 of this essay: the Basic Value think and act internationally, and the open mind that goes with it, is an ultimate balancing act

23 The solidarity we aspire to is between individuals and, at most, between countries. We do not pursue class solidarity, which was the form international solidarity used to take in social democracies.

for a progressive liberal, in which multiple conflicting elements have to be taken into account. In the case of international action, these are factors such as: Are human rights being violated on a large scale? Is intervention too strong an instrument, taking a country's right to self-determination into account, or does doing nothing produce an unacceptable injustice? Is there an absolute Responsibility to Protect? Can intervention even make a difference? The progressive liberal sees that these questions cannot be answered with absolute certainty. The moral foundations of human rights are also the foundations of the progressive-liberal conception of justice, without losing sight of the realistic factor of proportionality.

The open mind with which we give effect to our reciprocity, connectedness, and moral equality helps us in our political pursuit of freedom for all, regardless of where people live. When it comes to international relations, this leads to the pursuit of a global system that is not merely focused on inter-state politics. We do this by emphasising international cooperation and non-state organisations. This transnational world carries an element of reciprocity. We are convinced that this is not just good for people elsewhere, but that, in the long term, it also contributes to our own freedom.

CONCLUSION

As said, this essay does not offer ready-made solutions. It is an appeal to readers to always have good reasons for the beliefs they hold, to keep an open mind, and to keep having conversations with people who disagree with them. This essay does, however, offer handholds for forming a political opinion about what the world needs. Mindful of the goal of freedom in connectedness for individuals everywhere in the world, the progressive liberal advocates international cooperation with an emphasis on human rights. He does this from the unshakeable conviction that this is the right thing to do, for others and for ourselves—and so not out of naiveté! We have to persuade political opponents (at home and abroad) that we are all connected through our shared humanity, despite our differences. Not everyone sees this as self-evident. More and more, doubts are raised in the political arena about the usefulness and necessity of development cooperation, far-reaching European cooperation, and tolerance of those who hold different views. Paradoxically, the call to think and act internationally requires more justification today, when foreign developments influence the domestic debate more than ever, than it did 25 years ago. Whichever internationalist position we have to defend, in the end they are (partly) based on arguments and considerations explained here.

At the same time, it is just as important to remind ourselves that an international attitude does not mean that everything foreign is good, nor that our small population is responsible for the prosperity and well-being of the whole world. Cross-border thinking is not the same as thinking there are no more borders—whether we are talking about geographical, economic, cultural, or administrative borders. Better yet, the open mind that goes with thinking and acting internationally enables you to deal with these borders without ignoring them. Differences are beautiful, because they give colour to life and the world. We want every human being, regardless of their background, beliefs, gender or sexuality, anywhere in the world, to have the freedom to be different. We pursue this freedom for all because we are all different.

All human beings are equal, but they are not the same, and we want a government that provides the freedom for those differences to flourish. We want as many people as possible to be economically independent, and we believe in rewarding those who excel. We aspire to a dynamic, open society in which everyone is free to make their own decisions and develop in their own way. We consider it self-evident that wealth should be shared. As many people as possible should participate in society and in the economy, as this is the road to increased prosperity for all. Last but certainly not least, we also have a shared responsibility to help those in need.

REWARD ACHIEVEMENT AND SHARE THE WEALTH

INTRODUCTION

Can someone with an extraordinary talent, like a brilliant football player or an inventive engineer, to make millions because of their talent? Do we believe that is fair? What if someone is not lucky enough to have been born with a special talent? Is it then fair they earn little? Or what if they make a lot, but it is unclear what their contribution to society is, and so why they do should be so richly rewarded? Say someone has the potential to become a great doctor, but does not get the chance to develop their talent—because their parents lack the time or money—is that fair?

What do we consider fair? This is a seemingly straightforward question, but not one which is easily answered. A legal minimum wage sounds fair, but what if it leaves many people unable to find work? And is a top tax rate of 49.5 percent fairer than one of 52 percent? What we consider fair is the result of a public debate between citizens. It also depends on the specific circumstances. This essay outlines the rationales and principles that are important to progressive liberals in entering into and trying to sway that public debate.[24] A conversation that is about income and wealth inequalities, but also about whether we should require people to do something in return for receiving unemployment benefits. Or how to deal with someone who is self-employed and uninsured who becomes disabled and can then no longer work?

For progressive liberals, the Basic Value reward achievement and share the wealth guides the way here. Like all liberals, progressive liberals believe that what you do as an individual matters and that you should be able to enjoy the fruits of your labour. The fact that the things you do or do not do—your own merits—determine your success in life. That those who work hard deserve to be rewarded for it. This not only shows respect for the individual, but it also spurs renewal and development within a society, which in turn creates opportunities for others. It is tempting, therefore, to view 'Share the Wealth' as a post-hoc social correction, meant to

24 Justice applies to all areas in which people interact. This essay focuses only on justice in the socio-economic domain, which we also call distributive justice.

dull the sharp edges of the liberal impulse to 'reward achievement'. However, this does not do justice to what progressive liberalism means. The social part of liberalism reflects the fundamental understanding that free individuals live in and are influenced by society.[25] In other words, by other people. As such, 'personal' accomplishments are hardly ever purely of our own making, but are, in many visible and invisible ways, made possible by the people around us: by our parents, family, friends, teachers, neighbours, but also by chance meetings in the street, by the guy who maintains the neighbourhood park, and by 'society' in the abstract. Not only that, but progressive liberals understand that not everyone is equally fortunate. That is fortunate to have been born with the genes to become a brilliant football player or brain surgeon, with parents and teachers who supported them and had the money to go to university. Some are unlucky enough to have none of these. It is obvious that someone born into a poor family, with a different cultural background, in a poverty-stricken neighbourhood, often starts life out with a serious disadvantage. Progressive liberals are aware of the hampering or stimulating effect a social environment can have on an individual. We share the wealth because we are indebted to others and society as a whole; we reward achievement because it is better for everyone. That is why we view the Basic Value reward achievement and share the wealth as a single progressive-liberal guideline: we reward achievement because it allows us to share the wealth, thus creating equal opportunities for people, which in turn enables achievement.

This essay discusses this progressive-liberal perspective on justice in terms of wealth distribution in three parts. Part 1 of this essay is about the individual and their freedom to make what they want of his life and to grow and develop in their own way. Our meritocratic ideal, in which merits are leading, can only be justified under the condition of (trying to achieve) equality of opportunity: an equal chance for the individual to

25 Progressive liberalism means, roughly, 'freedom in community' (libertas, liberty; societas, society).

become who he or she wants to be[26]. Part 2 places the individual within society. Individual effort, and the success that might result, contributes to the wealth of the group, and the group in turn contributes to individual success. It is because of this interdependence that we think it just to both reward achievement and to share the wealth. Those who are the most successful contribute more to society than those who are less so. Part 3 focuses on the role of the state, which enables both the rewarding of individual achievement and shares the wealth.

26 So, in a certain sense, this essay is also about 'social freedom'. For progressive-liberal ideas about *political* freedom, see: "Cherish Our Fundamental Rights and Shared Values" (The Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2015). 16 17

THE INDIVIDUAL

If you work hard, you deserve to be rewarded. But what if ill health prevents you from being able to work? Or a language deficit or a different skin colour leaves you with little chance of finding a job at all? Are there limits to enjoying the fruits of your labour? Or, conversely, to facing the consequences of terrible odds or bad luck in life? It is no surprise that, to progressive liberals, 'individual freedom' lies at the heart of the discussion about justice in terms of wealth distribution. We trust in the power of people to shape their lives in freedom.[27] Due to the fact that in public debate this freedom is often interpreted as 'doing whatever you feel like', it would be good to first clarify our understanding of the term. First, individual freedom is not an end in itself for progressive liberals. We want people to be able to improve the quality of their lives in the long term. Individual freedom is so important to us because no one can decide what 'quality of life' means for someone else. Secondly, to us, above all freedom means self-determination: the ability to decide on and have power over your own life. This means that we do not only embrace the freedom from interference from others, but also hold up the freedom to live the way you think best. This is why, alongside supporting the freedom of speech (freedom from…), we give so much attention to good education for everyone (freedom to…).[28] This way, individuals develop the skills they might need later in life. It is also why progressive liberals place such importance on good work for everyone; work contributes both to economic independence—and thus, self-determination—and individual self-actualisation.

27 See the essay about the Basic Value "Trust in People's Own Power" (The Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2009).

28 This distinction can be broadly characterized by the difference between the classical and the social fundamental rights. See also the essay about the Basic Value "Cherish Our Fundamental Rights and Shared Values" (The Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2015).

Reward achievement

Freedom as self-determination also means that what you do has to matter, that your own achievements and your own efforts determine your success in life. Hard work has to be rewarded. Not because people are not intrinsically motivated to do their best, but because history teaches us what happens to society when people are not allowed to enjoy the fruits of their labour (for example, whilst under communist rule). It demotivates people and stifles dynamism and creativity. So we think it just to reward achievement. That includes variance in pay, because achievements can differ. So you should get a pay raise because you did a good job, not simply because you have been at the company for another year, or because others are getting one. The reverse is also true: progressive liberals think it unjust when someone makes an effort—for instance, an unemployed person who starts his own business—and gets punished for it, for instance by seeing his benefits cut. Effort has to pay off!

> 'Having talent is not a virtue: using it well is.'

In the meritocracy that we favour, achievement takes centre stage: what you do and the effort you make. We are aware, however, that our 'own' achievements are not only the result of a combination of personal effort and hard work, but also innate talent, an opportunity-rich environment, and good old-fashioned luck. Having talent is not a personal accomplishment. Talent is largely determined by genetics; it does not require much on your part. It is a virtue, however, to take the trouble to discover what your talent is and then spend the hours to try and develop it. Getting rich by selling land you inherited from your parents is not necessarily a personal achievement, but having a good idea and running a successful business with the money you inherited from your parents can be. We believe that personal accomplishment should be rewarded, not luck, the right skin colour, rich parents, or innate talent. As such, we think there is an inextricable link between the meritocratic ideal and our pursuit of equality of opportunity.

Equality of opportunity is about minimising the differences which we believe should not matter (such as socio-economic background) and maximising differences that should (such as personal effort). By equality of opportunity we do not mean that everyone should achieve the same level of success or have the same talents. On the contrary! People are not the same; everyone is different, wants something different, has different talents and skills, and has different ideas about what makes life worth living. We should not fear these differences, but cherish them. After all, we are just as much in need of carpenters as we are of doctors. More to the point: every individual is allowed to do what they are good at, what brings them fulfilment, and what makes them happy. Even if this means that you do not want to do anything at all; as long as you do not expect to be paid handsomely for it. In our view, everyone ought to be given the opportunity to follow their own path in life, making their own choices along the way. People are not the same, but they are equal.

Share the wealth

Our pursuit of equality of opportunity is also why we want to share the wealth. We share the wealth so that everyone has an equal opportunity to make an effort and do well based on their talents and skills. This can be aided by, for instance, enabling everyone to enjoy a good education and have access to health care. Progressive liberals want to equip all people with both the means and the skills to freely shape their own lives. This follows the so-called capability approach advocated mainly by the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen and the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Amongst other things, they posit that (socio-economic) inequality is not so much a question of access to certain resources (such as wealth or education), but about the realistic possibility for an individual to realise his potential. A bicycle path does a person no good if they have not also learnt to ride a bike.

Equality of opportunity means that we give people the chance to discover who they are. The crucial question in this is: how far do we go in this? Does equality of opportunity mean that individuals without any talent whatsoever to become a doctor, for instance, can try endlessly to attain a medical degree using public funds? Should every individual's dream be

facilitated in the pursuit of equality of opportunity, or should we also consider whether a certain degree or profession is of use to society? In theory, the progressive-liberal pursuit of equality of opportunity ends where it would have to compensate for genetic predisposition. This is impossible, for one, but it would also nullify the power of differences in society. We share the wealth to create equal opportunities for individuals to make something of their lives, not to enforce equality of outcomes. Equality of opportunity means that every individual should have a chance to become a carpenter or a doctor, not that everyone can become one, or that the carpenter and the doctor have to earn the same wage. The 'value' of a certain profession or achievement is determined by society (see Part 2 of this essay).

> 'Most of the time, success is not purely a personal accomplishment and failure is not purely a personal failing.'

We also share the wealth for a second reason. Even if someone had a fair chance at, for example, becoming a nurse, they can still run into bad luck. After all, misfortune can befall anyone. One can be in ill health or lose one's job several times due to organisational restructuring. Good and bad luck are a part of life; accepting this is difficult in our 21st century meritocratic society, in which success is viewed as a personal accomplishment and failure as a personal failing. But it is because life is not perfectly malleable that we have to take care of each other. Progressive liberals want everyone to have a minimum subsistence level to fall back on. We trust in the power of people, but do not abandon anyone to their fate. Above all because we consider it unjust, but also because, in the end, everyone is better off if we take care of those who fall through the cracks.

Just and unjust inequality

So, on the condition of equality of opportunity combined with a basic minimum for everyone, progressive liberals accept differences in compensation. Exceptional achievement ought to be rewarded. We consider

this justified inequality.[29] Channelling American philosopher John Rawls's 'veil of ignorance'—a thought experiment in which you have to decide what is just while not knowing, for instance, where you were born, what gender you are, and/or if you are healthy—almost everyone considers it just for a doctor, who is responsible for saving lives, to earn more than a secretary. We think that rewards for accomplishments that are not 'personal' accomplishments are unjust, especially if others are bearing the cost of that achievement. In this light, we are critical about certain rewards given to, for instance, senior managers in the semi-public sector, traders at banks, or CEOs of big companies. Because to what extent was the reward truly earned? And is it not true that others foot the bill when something goes wrong?

We cannot answer this question without also looking at the individual's social environment. More than other liberals, progressive liberals stress the importance of this environment to a person's life. 'The individual is born into a society, and there they will dwell', the French philosopher Montesquieu said. This influences how we think about justice in terms of wealth distribution. That is what Part 2 of this essay is about.

29 This is different from inequality before the law. An infringement of the equality principle can never be just. See the essay about the Basic Value "Cherish Our Fundamental Rights and Shared Values" (The Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2015).

PEOPLE DECIDE TOGETHER

The definition of an achievement is decided in discussions people have among themselves in society.[30] Sometimes explicitly and clearly ('that salary is insane!'), but more often implicitly and in between the lines. This is how we decide together what the value of a certain achievement is, what kind of compensation would befit it, but also how it relates to a just distribution of wealth. In this debate, progressive liberals always link the freedom of individuals to achieve and earn to responsibility for and indebtedness to the society in which they live.

We have said in the first part of this essay that we consider rewarding achievement only when it is 'earned'; that is to say, when the achievement is based on personal merit and effort. We add to this that rewarding achievement is also just when the personal gain is in proportion to the benefits to society the achievement produces. Rewarding achievement can be very good for society as a whole; it can stimulate dynamism, creativity, and innovation, from which we all benefit. For instance, if someone brings a new product to market, it can lead to more employment, or it can inspire others to develop an even better product, which might produce even more prosperity. Conversely, we have seen in countries such as the former Soviet Union what happens when effort is not rewarded. The system becomes inefficient and grinds to a halt, and people start looking for ways to make a living outside of the established order. But not every achievement is equally good for society, and some achievements can even harm it. That is why the societal usefulness or added value of an achieve-

30 The extent to which justice in terms of wealth distribution is a matter of public debate is demonstrated by how differently it is viewed in American society. Here in the Netherlands, we think very differently about justice in terms of wealth distribution than ten or fifty years ago. See, for instance, how quickly and strongly the bonus culture has come under fire in recent years. Justice in terms of wealth distribution is time and place specific, and its meaning is subject to change. Oftentimes there is only an 'overlapping consensus', as the American philosopher John Rawls calls it, which is temporary and can always be contested.

ment is an important factor in deciding whether a particular reward is just.

What the market cannot do

In this light, progressive liberals are critical of the market, or, more aptly, of the market principle, based on supply and demand. To be clear: to us, market forces are a valuable and useful mechanism for generating efficient outcomes, provided that certain conditions are met, such as contestability and transparency[31]. The market principle can also provide a handhold when it comes to determining the value of a certain achievement. After all, someone makes a lot of money (gets a high price) in the market if he or she is offering something unique: a unique talent[32] (low supply) or a popular product (high demand). From this perspective, it is fitting that a hired consultant makes a lot of money to save an ailing company, because his or her abilities are scarce and they have substantial responsibilities. On the other hand, the salary for a public maintenance worker is low, from this perspective, because many other people are also able to do this job.

A difference in salary may be an efficient outcome, but it says little about a situations' justice in terms of wealth distribution. This is something the market cannot address. The market mechanism is amoral.[33] That is to say, the market does not distinguish between good and bad (or just and unjust); it only rewards scarcity. A buyer or market can be found for anything, no matter how unjust or worthless and regardless of the costs the achievement incurs. Consider child labour, for instance, or human trafficking, or environmental pollution. Even 'Pareto-efficiency' in the market, in which a certain allocation of resources at least leaves no one off worse, says little about the justice of the allocation[34]. Justice is a quintessentially ethical and moral issue, to which the market cannot provide answers. Morality can be found in the individuals that operate in the market, or in the restrictions and regulations that we as people impose on the market through the state (see Part 3). In this, progressive liberals hold to the fundamental principle that one person's freedom may not harm another's:[35] one person's achievement may not come at the expense of another, now or in the future.[36] Moreover, progressive liberals emphasise the free individual's responsibility in all this; in other words, when personal gain is out of step with the good of society, we believe there is a reason for concern from the perspective of justice in terms of wealth distribution.

People influence each other

Progressive liberals are aware of the impact free individuals have on one another in society. What you do has an influence on others and on society, and of course others influence your life in the same way.[37] This leads us to acknowledge that your own achievement is hardly ever completely and solely yours, but is enabled by others and by society as a whole.

> 'The market mechanism is amoral. Only people can decide what is just'.

Because to what extent is your great job purely to your own credit? What about your encouraging parents or that teacher in secondary school who

31 See 'Ordering in order: beyond a discussion on market and state' (Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2014). It is good to emphasize that the market can only exist in the context of government regulation, and thus benefits from a well-functioning state and market regulator (see also Part 3 of this essay).

32 As said: talent is not a personal achievement, and talents are not equally and fairly distributed. The market can never correct for this injustice, no matter how open and contestable it is.

33 With this, we are not saying that the market is immoral and thus by definition bad. The market principle is amoral in the sense that it is neutral.

34 Oftentimes, people acknowledge that the market can produce unjust outcomes, but they regard it as a necessary evil. They believe that the cake has to grow first (by rewarding achievement) in order to be divided at all (sharing the wealth). This line of reasoning runs counter to our progressive liberal principles, in which the self-determination of the individual takes centre stage, not necessarily economic growth, which in itself says little about the extent to which opportunities are distributed in a society, and if it generates just (or unjust) outcomes, does so only by accident.

35 This is the so-called *harm principle*, which was advocated most famously by the English philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill in his best-known work, *On Liberty*.

36 The see essay on the Basic Value "Work Towards a Sustainable and Harmonious Society" (2013).

37 Of course, this mutual impact also extends across national borders. See the essay on the Basic Value "Think and Act Internationally" (2014).

explained everything so well? And on the other side: is it really completely your own fault that you cannot find a job? Is the economic crisis hitting your industry the hardest, or have your parents encouraged you to pursue the 'wrong' degree or profession? In the meritocracy of the 21st century, success and failure are seen as the result of a person's own merit or failing, respectively. But this is not always, or almost never, true. Of course what you do matters, but you need other people; in many visible and invisible ways, they shape your life. This idea is also well-suited to a liberal political ideology that puts the free individual front and centre, but it does not relieve people of their responsibility. We believe that free individuals are particularly aware of the consequences of their actions and of how much we need others to shape our own lives.[38]

Because of this shared fate and mutual influence, we think it is logical and just to share the wealth. After all, we all make our contributions to society, big or small, and everyone benefits from it. We do not redistribute wealth out of a Robin Hood-type conviction that the rich have to give their money to the poor. We share the wealth, and believe that those who are most successful ought to contribute more, because it makes life safer and more liveable for everyone. A progressive tax system in which those in higher income brackets pay more taxes (see Part 3) is a logical policy consequence of this. This principle also applies to, for instance, health care. Healthy people contribute to the health care expenses of sick people because it makes us all, both literally and figuratively, better off. Countries in which wealth is redistributed to a relatively high degree score well on entrepreneurialism, innovation, and dynamism.

We believe that this sharing of the wealth due to interconnectedness can also be applied to rewarding achievement, especially when it comes to bonuses. In the services industry, it is common for the waiting staff to share their tips with the workers behind the scenes—the chefs and other kitchen staff. But a CEO of a large company will not be so quick to share their bonus of millions with the company's other employees. A just remuneration system is based on the idea that many people contribute, in larger or smaller ways, to the final achievement.[39] Not just the manager of the company, who cannot deliver an optimal performance without the people on the work floor.

A just bonus also conveys appreciation for the often less visible but equally important achievements that are sometimes more difficult to express in concrete figures: a welcoming reception for visitors, or a well-functioning computer system.

In the public debate about justice in terms of wealth redistribution, progressive liberals include people's interconnectedness in their assessment. We consider it just to reward people for activities that benefits society as a whole and the individuals within it. We also think it just for others to share in the benefits of this success. When reward, achievement, personal gain, and societal benefit are out of step with one another, we think there is reason to intervene. Especially when the wrong financial incentives lead too few people to invest the time and money to, for instance, become a judge, because it is much more lucrative to become a banker. Or when the salary of a cleaner no longer bears any relation to the importance of a clean living environment for the economy and society. In our view, this is where the role of the democratically legitimised government as a keeper of both individual freedoms and the general interest begins. That is what Part 3 of this essay is about.

38 See Hendriks, C. ea. (2014), *Van opgelegde naar oprechte participatie: de mens en zijn verbindingen in samenleving, economie en staat*. Den Haag: Boom Lemma.

39 John Rawls, one of the most important justice theorists of the 20th century, followed a similar line of reasoning with his 'difference principle': the least fortunate should share in the rewards for outstanding achievements by the few.

THE STATE

Should the state be allowed to place restrictions on the highest incomes? Or can this be left to the market? Should the state ensure that everyone has a basic income or pension, or is this people's own responsibility? And come to think of it: is it just to hand over up to 50% of your income to the internal revenue service.

Contrary to what is often believed, the state plays a crucial role in any form of liberalism, including in the welfare state. Especially when it comes to securing justice in terms of wealth redistribution[40]. There is a reason that liberal thinkers and politicians founded many of our social laws and provisions, such as the Law on Child Labour, or the Disablement Benefits Act. In the progressive-liberal view, the state is the guarantor of individual freedom. Not of a single individual, but of all individuals, and with them, the common good.

The state as market regulator

Rewarding achievement, personal effort, and hard work is in the individual and the common interest, as we have already noted earlier in this essay. At least, to the point where personal gain and societal benefits do not drift too far apart. For instance, the state cannot legislate which salary is justified for which profession, or what bonus befits what kind of achievement. That is to say, not when it comes to achievements in the private sector. However, as the market regulator, the state can ensure that effort is justly rewarded. It is often said that government intervention, by means of rules and regulations, disrupts the 'natural' market processes and hinders private effort, which makes government intervention inefficient. However, it is an illusion to think that there is such a thing as a market outside of the state and outside of regulation. The market exists by virtue of the state, if only because of the basic necessity of contract enforcement, which is fundamental to a good, efficient market. An efficient market is a contestable and open market, which requires active maintenance by the state, for instance in the prevention of monopolies and unfair competition. So the question is mainly which rules are needed to make the market function properly and to have it produce just outcomes.

Contestability is an important condition in this: the market must be open to new ideas and new people. This is not only efficient, but just as well, because it also allows market outsiders—people who are on the sidelines—a chance to start a business or find a job. This is why, for years, progressive liberalism has been advocating for the relaxing of the rules on dismissal, which increases job mobility and thus the job chances of people who are just entering the labour market (young people), are close to leaving the labour market (older people), or people who have been looking for a job for a long time. Contestability also means that new businesses with new ideas have to be given a chance to succeed. For instance, the financial sector should not be dominated by a few powerful companies; new banks should also be able to easily enter the market. As the market regulator, the state can stimulate those achievements (and the people involved) that benefit society or restrict rewards for harmful activities.

Basic material security for all

The state not only plays a role in stimulating private effort, but also in sharing the wealth. Although progressive liberals naturally applaud the sharing of the wealth by individuals, out of charity, empathy, or any other sentiment, we believe that ensuring basic material security for individuals is, in the end, up to the government. There is nothing wrong with food banks, but they are not a just substitute. For progressive liberals, the self-determining individual takes centre stage, and that individual should not be socially or economically dependent on others. Giving or receiving aid is fine, but what if this leads to a person no longer daring to criticise that aid because they are afraid it will be discontinued? Furthermore, charity can lead to arbitrariness; whomever tells the saddest story receives—often rightly—help from others. But what does this mean for people who do not seek publicity? Is that just bad luck for them? Or better yet, is it their own fault because they did not ask for help? The state

40 See 'Ordering in order: beyond a discussion on market and state' (2014).

is in a perfect position to shape justice in terms of wealth distribution by sharing the wealth. After all, rules and regulations apply to everyone who meets certain objective criteria[41].

The standard method for sharing the wealth is through taxation. Oftentimes, taxes are viewed as a negative thing, but generally speaking, people are perfectly willing to give up a portion of their income to 'the collective'. After all, we all benefit from it, and we want to live in a society in which certain things are taken care of. In this area, it is good to dispel the misapprehension that the welfare state, through relatively high taxes, gets in the way of achievement. Or that its many social provisions make people lazy. The fact that countries with a well-developed welfare state see an especially high rate of volunteer work is illustrative here. Just like the fact that these countries also have high productivity and competitiveness.

'A market cannot exist without the state'.

In our view, a solid material and immaterial foundation in life brings out the best in people, because people who have a basic level of security are not afraid to take risks, and because it sets a good example. We think that the rules surrounding certain provisions often cause problems or give the wrong incentives. An example is the Dutch four-week waiting period to apply for unemployment benefits. This could cause people to not accept temporary work because, at the end of their contract, they are again faced with the four-week wait, and with it, another four weeks without an income.

The state shares the wealth in order to create conditions under which individuals can make decisions about their own lives and to enjoy equality of opportunity. The state does this by organising good education and health care that is accessible to all, but also by offering a certain degree of basic material security. The state protects our individual freedoms, perhaps paradoxically, by also restricting our freedoms. Think, for instance, of compulsory education. The state obligates a young person to

41 See for an extensive analysis 'Ordering in order: beyond a discussion on market and state' (Hans van Mierlo Foundation, 2014). 48 49

go to school, regardless of their own preference, with the purpose of increasing their opportunities in life, and with them, their future freedom. Or consider mandatory pension saving, because people—due to their 'bounded rationality'[42]—do not always set money aside for their retirement. These obligations can be a nuisance sometimes, but giving up certain freedoms in the service of other freedoms is a part of the 'social contract'[43] that we have agreed on together in order to make our society possible in the first place.

Increasing freedom or making improvements?

The crucial question here is: how far may the state go in limiting freedoms in the service of the individual (now or later), other individuals, or the common good? For instance, can the state obligate the self-employed to buy disability insurance to protect them from a drastic drop in income in the case of illness? Can the state require companies to hire more women for top jobs? To progressive liberals, stimulating self-determination by means of the welfare state is a constant balancing act between 'preserving freedom', 'increasing freedom', and 'making improvements'.[44] Most of all, progressive liberals want to 'increase freedom'. This stems from the conviction that an emphasis purely on so-called negative freedom ('preserving freedom') can lead to only the strongest coming out on top. However, the risk of our desire to 'increase freedom' is that we also want to 'improve' people, and that we start to prescribe what people should do with their lives. That is why progressive liberals must always take care not to lose sight of negative freedom. After all, no one has all the answers, especially not the state, on what constitutes a valuable life. The line between increasing freedom and making improvements is not always easy to pinpoint though. Requiring a recipient of unemployment benefits to do something in return for their monthly government cheque may increase

42 The term *bounded rationality* is part of the decision-making theory formulated by sociologist Herbert Simon. Because of a shortage of information and time, among other things, people do not always make optimally rational decisions.

43 Thinking in terms of a 'social contract' between citizens emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries and was furthered by political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

44 With thanks to Rutger Claassen for permission to use this terminology.

their chances of finding a job because they learn certain skills ('increasing freedom'), but how far do we take this? Which skills do we consider important ('making improvements')? And what if the individual feels differently about this?

Our emphasis on 'increasing freedom' also means that we want to welcome differences in society; individuals are free to shape their own lives, each in his own way. In the Netherlands, historically, the goal of justice in terms of wealth distribution goes hand in hand with the goal of equality. Equality of outcomes, that is, but we stress equality of opportunity. We cannot say exactly how much income (in)equality is just. Or, in economic terminology: we cannot say if a Gini coefficient of 0.35 is more or less just than a coefficient of 0.55.[45] Even (or especially) perfect income equality says little about the level of equality of opportunity, just as income inequality also says nothing on this front. So, for a good assessment of the level of justice in terms of wealth distribution in our society, we have to look beyond the numbers on income (in)equality.

45 The Gini coefficient is a method for showing inequality. It is a number between 0 and 1, in which 0 reflects perfect equality (everyone earns the same) and 1 reflects perfect inequality (one person earns it all).

CONCLUSION

Rewarding achievement and sharing the wealth are two sides of the same progressive-liberal coin. Based on our ideals of individual freedom and self-determination, it makes sense to reward people for their achievements. When people are free to enjoy the fruits of their labour, they can be truly free to lead their lives as they see fit. At the same time, an individual achievement is never completely the result of individual effort. Talent is bestowed at birth, we all benefit from good education, and great accomplishments are not possible in an environment that does not meet the right conditions. Progressive liberals always view individuals in connection with each other, and the same goes for individual accomplishments. Every individual is indebted to the influence of their social environment.

This social environment can also limit an individual's achievement potential. Based on our conviction that every human being is equal, we believe that every individual should have equal opportunities to fully participate in society. Here, equality of opportunity means minimalising the differences that should not matter between people, such as socio-economic background, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. This does not mean that we want to erase all the differences between people. People have different ambitions, make more or less of an effort, and differ in how much they are willing to make use of their talents. Inequality between people on the basis of effort and merit is therefore not unjust. Justice in terms of wealth distribution does not mean enforcing equality of outcome but guaranteeing equality of opportunity.

Especially because of this equality of opportunity, it is important to share the wealth. To give everyone a chance to discover their talents and to use them as best they can, as a society we have to invest in a good education system, accessible health care, and a strong social safety net. Only then will every individual have the chance to be the best they can be. Even when they receive a dose of bad luck in their lives.

Justice in terms of wealth distribution is a moral question that people have to answer between themselves. It is not a matter of numbers, statistics, and economic models. We decide the value of certain accomplishments, and how they should be rewarded, together. Only together do we decide what a just distribution of the wealth is. We cannot leave it to 'the market'; the market is amoral, after all, and makes no distinction between good and bad or just and unjust. Nor is 'the government' able to decide what is just in terms of wealth distribution. That distinction can only be made by people among themselves. That is why, most of all, justice in terms of wealth distribution requires a structural, adult public debate and a political translation of it. This essay offers a number of starting points and a call to progressive liberals to enter into this public debate.

The central values of our society are freedom and equality for everyone, regardless of belief, religion, sexual orientation, political views, or ethnicity. Physical safety, non-violent solutions to conflicts of interest, and the respectful exercise of freedom of expression, as well as good governance and the rule of law, form our core values. These values are universal and paramount. We defend fundamental rights, both at home and abroad.

CHERISH OUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND SHARED VALUES

INTRODUCTION

A caliphate in the Middle East, authoritarian capitalism in China, an illiberal democracy in Russia and even inside the European Union (EU), in Hungary: all over the world, alternatives are on offer to liberal democracy, which safeguards the decision-making prerogative and rights of individual citizens. New systems challenge the old consensus economically, diplomatically, and politically. In the Netherlands, too, it is sometimes remarked that democratic governance is really a recipe for incompetence and ineffectiveness, and that perhaps rights should not apply to everyone.

Underneath all this, an old battle rages about why liberal democracy is better than the alternatives. Should individual citizens have legal protection from the state? Should everyone be equal in the eyes of the law? Can state power be used to impose a vision of the good life on citizens? This is not a clash of cultures or civilizations, although some people would have us think it is; this is a battle of ideas.

Cherish our fundamental rights and shared values—this is one of progressive liberalism's five Basic Values. In this essay, we explore why progressive liberals cherish fundamental rights and shared values. What shared values are we talking about? And which ones are we not talking about? Do fundamental rights apply to everyone? Why do we have fundamental rights? What are the arguments behind this? And what is a typical progressive-liberal perspective on fundamental rights and shared values?[46]

A fundamental goal progressive liberals pursue is (safeguarding) the personal freedom of the individual. We want a society in which people decide 'truth, beauty, and goodness' for themselves. Progressive liberals are convinced that when individuals have this freedom, most of them will enjoy it in connectedness with others. And, as all liberals believe, this starts with self-determination: the freedom for people to develop and

46 Much is what is described in this essay is a schematic, ideal type representation. For instance, the parts about politics, the state, and the citizen do not describe the exact makeup of the current Dutch state. Instead, they give an impression of how and why certain things could be.

flourish. That freedom can only lead to just outcomes if there is equality of opportunity. In the end, talent and effort should be the only factors that determine an individual's success. Not their nationality, origin, religion, or the wealth, position, or education of their parents. To us, however, freedom and equality of opportunity are not enough. When everyone has flourished, it does not end there. Based on our connectedness, we want justice in terms of wealth distribution. So if someone drew the short straw with regard to talent, or he has taken a tumble in life, we do not leave that person behind. In this, we do not only look at the people in our direct environment, or even the people alive today. Our connectedness extends beyond national borders and also includes generations after our own. That is why we need to make choices that are future-proof.[47]

Fundamental rights and shared values create a space in which individuals can be free to differ. In this essay, we focus on the so-called political rights, which safeguard justice by guaranteeing equality[48].

> 'Fundamental rights and shared values create a space in which individuals can be free to differ'.

This essay consists of three parts. In our liberal frame of reference, values, shared values, and fundamental rights are given meaning primarily through individual values, reflection, and actions. People are not islands though, and that is why, in the second part, we will examine how values manifest between people and how they deal with shared and unshared values. Fundamental rights are a codified version of shared values, and they are often safeguarded by the rule of law. The third part of this essay deals with the relationship between the citizen and the state.

47 For an explanation of 'future-proof' and a progressive-liberal perspective on intergenerational freedom, see: "Work Towards a Sustainable and Harmonious Society", Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2013.

48 Progressive liberalism also offers a vision of justice in terms of wealth distribution, which is characterized by a just level of inequality, fair compensation, and the conditions under which individual effort can flourish. For more on this, see: "Reward Achievement and Share the Wealth", Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2016.

THE INDIVIDUAL: FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND SHARED VALUES IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

Every human being is an individual with his own values and ideas about right and wrong. At the same time, our shared humanity produces shared fundamental values like freedom of speech and respect for bodily integrity. Cherishing these shared values allows us to not have to share all values.

To progressive liberals, the individual is the 'foundation stone' of society, and the individual is free to make his own choices. All people are different, and everyone has their own idea of the good life. At the same time, we are all human, with like minds and bodies. That is why the freedom of all is such an important goal for progressive liberals.

> 'We cherish the shared values, so that we can disagree about other values'.

Our shared humanity produces a set of shared values. No one wants to be face charges over something they said, an opinion, or a conviction. No one wants to be incarcerated without knowing why or being able to mount a defence. No one wants to have an opinion they do not hold imposed on them, be violated in their bodily integrity, or have their possessions taken from them. No one wants any of this to happen to them, regardless of their culture, origin, or religion; it is universal.[49] These types of antipathies lead to shared values like the equality of all people, free speech, respect for bodily integrity, peaceful conflict resolution, and the sharing of power. To us, these shared values are experiential truths. As

49 It is important, therefore, not to label universal fundamental rights as 'Western'. The concept of fundamental rights and the rule of law may have come to philosophical fruition in the Western world, but the ideas behind it are universal, in the sense that they assume things that are true of every human being, no matter their culture.

the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 says: 'we hold these truths to be self-evident'. Fundamental rights are based on these shared, universal values.

Freedom in connectedness

Because we are all human, we emphasize the equality of people. Because we are all different, we pursue freedom for every individual. Human beings are capable of distinguishing right from wrong, changing their opinions, and disagreeing with others.

Also, progressive liberals recognize that human beings are not purely rational creatures, but at the same time we know that people are undoubtedly able to use their ability to think and reflect to channel desires and urges.[50]

Progressive liberals recognize that human beings are social beings. We acknowledge that people forge bonds with other people, and that they are connected to their environment, whether they want to be or not. For progressive liberals, the pursuit of freedom for every individual leads to freedom in connectedness—people choosing to shape their freedom together. Despite the differences between us, we share a common humanity. This is not self-evident to everyone; there are many people who prefer to emphasize our differences. Sometimes it seems like people do not want to take 'the other' into consideration at all, ignoring the fact that people cannot be reduced to a single identity. People are more than just their ethnicity, gender, religion, race, or the sum of these things. By principle, our pursuit of freedom excludes no one.[51]

Fundamental rights as a guarantee of diversity

50 Mankind's irrational side causes conflict, but it has also inspired magnificent insights and works of art. Many people see a contrast between desires/urges/instincts and reason/reflection/consideration. Progressive liberalism tends much more towards the view that these aspects of the human condition can complement each other. Just following your emotions often leads to ill-considered, poor solutions; using only your reason results in distance and coldness. In 2011, Phillipp Blom gave the Marchant Lecture about this for the van Mierlo Foundation under the title 'the paradox between reason and instinct'.

51 For more on our pursuit of freedom across national borders and on multifaceted identity, see "Think and Act Internationally", Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2014.

It is a paradox: we have fundamental rights, which are based on shared values, precisely because we are all different. Fundamental rights guarantee everyone's right to have an opinion, and thus our right to disagree with one another.

Fundamental rights ensure that state institutions cannot force people to share all values. The rights exist to enable us to argue about non-shared values, about ideas we do not have in common. After all, individuals have to be free to find their own way in the world, to form their own ideas of good and evil, and to change their opinions on this as well. Fundamental rights safeguard this individual freedom, and that is why liberals believe they are so important. We cherish the shared values, so that we can disagree on other values. But cherishing them also means practicing restraint when it comes to the politicization of fundamental rights: as soon as a party or political philosophy begins to claim fundamental rights as its own, it undermines the right's shared foundation.

Two types of freedom

Progressive liberals plead for two types of freedom: freedom from and freedom to an opinion.[52] Fundamental rights guarantee that every individual is free from interference (by the state) and so is not limited in forming his opinion (negative freedom). In addition, people also have to be able (i.e. have the skills) to form an opinion (positive freedom). They should not only be free from oppression, but also be free to develop themselves.

In the end, the free individual establishes their values in the private sphere. In the public sphere, the individual tests their values when they collide with those of other people. And in the political sphere, values and societal norms become laws. The public and political spheres will be discussed in the upcoming section.

52 These two forms of freedom are also called *positive* and *negative*. These terms were made famous by the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin in his essay 'Two concepts of liberty' from 1958.

Personal morality, role morality, and public morality

Values are not timeless and unchanging. Every individual determines his or her own values, reflects on them, and adjusts them. We believe that this skill is latently present in every individual, but people are not born with the ability fully developed. That is why a progressive-liberal party thinks education is so important.[53] Morality, the touchstone for our own behaviour, is a personal affair for liberals. Values should not be imposed on a person by his social environment, family, or church. As a political philosophy, liberalism does not offer advice on what values a person should embrace—that is, we advocate for the framework of shared values that primarily provide space and freedom for people, but not for any specific direction to take within it. That is a core belief behind our political philosophy: people have to be able to decide for themselves what their values are. But a person never forms his values in a vacuum. From birth, values are imparted through, for instance, upbringing, social environment, and education.

Over the course of a person's life, however, they do not just develop a personal morality; they also form a role morality: the mores that go with a certain belief or profession, or with a subculture or group of friends. A civil servant, for instance, has a different role morality than a plumber or a doctor. Role morality and personal morality can differ: when we are "on the job," we sometimes act differently than we would "at home." But role morality and personal morality cannot be strictly separated. People often make their choices based on a combination of both. Incidentally, it is possible for role morality to completely overshadow personal morality. This risk exists, for instance, in extraordinarily tight-knit groups. And then there is also public morality: those values that, on average, society considers to be good or normal—much broader than what we are calling shared values in this essay. Public morality covers those things we think we are allowed to confront others over. Personal morality can conflict with public morality. For instance, public morality can stipulate that every-

53 For more on this, see: "Trust in People's Own Power", p. 20ff. Hans van Mierlo Foundation/ Permanent Programme Committee D66 2009.

one is free to love whomever they want and live accordingly: at the same time, someone can, based on their personal morality, believe that homosexuals should not be allowed to marry. In the case of wedding officiants (civil servants) who refuse to perform a gay wedding, there is even a collision between personal morality (against gay marriage), role morality (civil servants have to obey and execute the law), and public morality (the entire electorate as represented by the legislator). Within the shared values that are safeguarded by fundamental rights—equality, freedom of speech, etc.—personal morality should always be free, in the liberal view. Every person faces the challenge of dealing with the tensions that can exist between their personal morality, role morality, and public morality. This does not mean that people will always do the right thing. But people should be free to form their own opinions and act accordingly.54

54 This is an important reason why liberals place such a high value on personal responsibility. The freedom to form our own opinion also comes with the responsibility to do so. This is the foundation of the term *citizenship*—more on that later in this essay.

PEOPLE AMONG THEMSELVES: FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND SHARED VALUES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Progressive liberals cherish shared values so that they do not have to share all values. As such, it is essential to know how to deal with values you do not have in common with others. Often, this happens in a public conversation. Sometimes it requires rules we set in a political conversation. There does not always have to literally be a conversation—it can also serve as a metaphor for reflection and an exchange of ideas in the public sphere.

Individuals' moral convictions are built on the foundation of personal morality, but this morality only acquires meaning when we come into contact with others, when the morality is tested by actions and choices, in other words: by the reality of people interacting with one another. People establish (shared and non-shared) public values among themselves.[55]

To progressive liberals, fundamental rights and shared values are preconditions for a life of freedom for all individuals. The pluralism that results from cherishing shared values is an expression and guarantee of individuality. In a pluralist society that is open to a diversity of values, it is crucial that everyone is able to deal with dissenting ideals and opinions: so with non-shared values.

55 Not all values that are shared in a society become political fundamental rights. These are only the values that enable us to disagree with one another. Other societal consensuses become 'regular' laws, if they are turned into legislation at all. Most shared values in society consist of implicit values and norms.

Dealing with non-shared values

A pluralist society is good for our pursuit of individual freedom, but living in a pluralist society is not always easy. What do you do, for instance, when someone uses fundamental rights to argue against another person's freedom? How tolerant should we be of intolerance? Liberalism fights for the freedom of the individual. At the same time, liberalism stresses the importance of fundamental rights, which deny an individual the right to limit someone else's freedom. What is a liberal response to intolerance?

The horizontal and vertical applications of fundamental rights

When thinking about a liberal response to intolerance, it is good to differentiate between two perspectives. First, there is a rule-of-law dimension to the question: what should the government allow? And conversely: should legislation and the courts be used to curtail the freedom of an individual, and if so, when? Here, we are talking about the 'vertical application' of fundamental rights (more about this in Part 3 of this essay). However, in the public sphere of people among themselves, a different perspective applies: the way in which (legally equal) individuals deal with differences of opinion. Here, the 'horizontal application' comes into play. When I am utterly convinced that someone else has bad convictions, as a liberal, I am confirming his (legal and moral) right to have those opinions. The government should not suppress those views. After all, you do not have to agree with people to think they have a right to their opinions. But people can disagree with each other and enter into a conversation, dialogue, or debate—because they both believe the other is wrong and because they wish to marshal arguments to that effect. From the perspective of fundamental rights, one individual cannot deny another the right to have his own opinion—they have no formal power over each other. The freedom of speech works mainly vertically and not horizontally. There is a fundamental difference between the police arresting a cartoonist over unwelcome drawings and a dispute between two people in which one refuses to hear or accept the other's opinion. In the latter case, there is no freedom of speech issue in the legal sense. Liberals will be hesitant to ascribe a horizontal application to fundamental rights.

The right to differ

There is a fundamental humanity that unites us all, regardless of our differences. The belief that everyone has a right to freedom and thus laws that protect freedom is the result of this observation of a shared humanity, as well as on the equality, reciprocity, and connectedness that flow from it. Moreover, the importance of equality, reciprocity, and connectedness[56] is based on the idea that no one can dictate what constitutes a good life—people have to be able to decide this on their own. Different interpretations of the good life inevitably spring from this freedom. And we believe that differences give colour to life. We want every human being, regardless of their background, worldview, gender, or sexuality, to be equal and have the freedom to be different. We pursue this freedom because we are all different. Intolerance that disregards this essential fact and appeals to a higher truth as a justification for curtailing the freedom of others should, by people among themselves, be questioned and challenged.

> 'Intolerance should be challenged by people among themselves'

People who want to restrict the freedom of others should be challenged to offer arguments for this higher truth that should apply to everyone. So far, in the history of mankind, this has not yet been done irrefutably. That is a liberal way to deal with intolerance in the public sphere.

Knowing and justifying your own values

The fact that we can disagree on things does not mean that 'there is no such thing as truth', or that 'other people's convictions are just as good as mine'. Acknowledging that everyone has a right to their opinion does not make all opinions equally valid. Public dialogue, debate, and arguments examine exactly that: which opinion is (temporarily, intersubjectively, but

56 In the essay "Think and Act Internationally", these principles are further clarified, p. 19ff., Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2014.

nevertheless) the best one?[57] You can only have a conversation like that if you know your own convictions well. Cherishing shared values and recognizing other, non-shared values produces a (moral, not legal) responsibility to carefully examine and justify your own values and beliefs. To make sure you see the difference between facts and opinions. Every person has this responsibility; it is a prerequisite for the realization of everyone's freedom.

Acknowledging that fundamental rights require a willingness to have the discussion does not mean that they need to be invoked in every conversation. There should be no, or at most only very cautious appeals to fundamental rights in a debate about everyday non-shared values. This is also a form of cherishing. A discussion about the duration or size of unemployment benefits, or about the construction of a new motorway or windmill matters to a great many people, but cannot be directly related to fundamental rights. Those who want to use fundamental rights as an argument in an "ordinary" political debate run the risk of eroding their support base and legitimacy.

Dealing with cultural differences

An inescapable part of individual freedom and a pluralist society is accepting cultural differences. Again: we cherish fundamental rights, which are based on shared values like freedom of speech and the moral equality of all people, so that people can express their culture in freedom and, in that way, be different and individually free. So fundamental rights are the foundation for a discussion about how people of different cultures can or should live together, not the point or content of that discussion. That is, unless people reject the values on which fundamental rights are based.

A person has to be free to, for instance, embrace a culture that emphasizes the differences between men and women, as long as this does not lead to the denial of fundamental rights for other individuals. From a liberal perspective, everyone is, paradoxically, free to personally reject

57 Even when you accept that no one has all the answers, there is such a thing as a 'fact'. In a philosophical sense, the knowability and truth of a fact may be questioned, but in the intersubjective world of people, a difference can be made between a fact and an opinion.

individual freedom, just not for other people. Simply put: people cannot be forced to, for example, accept the homosexuality of their brother or sister.[58] They are free to cut a gay family member out of their lives—however unjust or unsympathetic others may find this. But they also cannot force their sibling to feel or act differently. In the public sphere of people among themselves, people can debate one another on an equal footing. The result of such a conversation does not automatically have to lead to government action—in fact, preferably not. If people experience a lack of individual (horizontal) freedom in their social context, it is primarily their own responsibility to change this.

Power dynamics

We cannot deny that, in the dynamic of people among themselves, there is more involved than merely an exchange of ideas. Relationships of, for instance, employer to employee, trainer to pupil, and club board to club member also contain a clear element of power. As such, the convictions of the more powerful can have direct freedom-limiting consequences for the less powerful. As a consequence, it is not always possible for the less powerful to enter into the discussion or, as individuals, extract themselves from that power. This creates a grey area in the relationship between people in which, on rare occasion, very carefully and in moderation, the state has a part to play.

The state can foster facilities such as battered-women's shelters in order to safeguard the horizontal freedom of one individual in relation to another individual. The state can enact legislation to protect people who (wish to) change their beliefs. And the state can serve as a guardian of (vertical) individual freedom and protect against (horizontal) physical threats. But, from a liberal perspective, the state may never force someone to adopt open-minded, progressive beliefs. At the same time: values such as freedom of conscience and freedom of belief can only survive as fundamental rights if enough people cherish, defend, and propagate these values. People among themselves have to question each other's convic-

58 This line of reasoning only applies to adults. When it comes to children, things are a bit more complicated. There, parents' freedom to raise their children as they see fit and pass on their own values conflicts with the child's rights to make his or her own life choices.

tions and behaviour—peacefully and in freedom. For instance, if someone badly wants more people to have a progressive worldview, he has to personally engage in conversations with conservatives. This does not always result in easy or comfortable conversations. Freedom in connectedness is not all ease and comfort. But it is the right thing, based on our fundamental conviction that every human being has to be free. That is a good in and of itself, without even needing to have any positive effects.

Tolerance

> 'Tolerance is the acceptance of other people's right to be different, not the acceptance of their ideas'.

Especially in a pluralist society, in which many different value systems hold sway, it is important to be tolerant with regard to non-shared values.[59] Tolerance is sometimes wrongly interpreted as 'embracing that which you reject'. That is not what the word means, and it stands in stark contrast to the freedom of the individual. Tolerance means abiding and putting up with another view of life. It is the acceptance of other people's right to be different, not the acceptance of their ideas.[60]

Rights for groups or for individuals

Other political theories, those more focused on the community, often advocate pluralism based on groups. In that view, the emphasis is on group rights, and the individuals within the group are less empowered to make their own choices. So what if individuals hold a vulnerable position within their social context? Think of children, but in some cases also women or homosexuals. Liberals generally believe that the freedom of the individual is paramount and that people have to be able to leave a group without fear of violence. No matter how tight-knit the community.

59 See also: "Trust in People's Own Power", p. 24, Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2009.

60 Polarization is the counterpart of mutual tolerance. By polarization we mean the mutual rejection by groups that have different cultural and/or political ideals. Vehemently disagreeing with someone and expressing it is not directly polarizing, or intolerant.

From opinions to rules

The public debate between people among themselves can lead to a call for rules. Rules can restrict individual freedom. A liberal vision holds that rules can only be created after a democratic discussion about values and goals. As such, the creation of rules calls for politics. In a certain sense, politics is an institutionalized conversation between people among themselves about fundamental choices, possibly leading to the creation of rules. This makes every citizen a politician.[61] Politics has to serve as a connection between people among themselves and state institutions. The political conversation about rules manifests in the legislative power.

Politics is not the government

We have to realize that politics (the 'conversation about rules') is at heart something fundamentally different than public administration and the government (the implementation and enforcement of those rules). Politics is people expressing their views on the public interest and on how the organs of the state (the government) should act accordingly. So, ideally, politics should be about opposing views of the common good, not about conflicting personal interests. In practice, it turns out that the fewer people are actively involved in politics, the more formalized and government-run society will become.

At that point, politics becomes a part of the government, when it is really politics' job to direct and correct government. In other words: the political conversation about rules then becomes a matter of effective civil ad-

61 What we mean by *citizenship* in this essay is the interpretation from classical political theory: the legal relationship between an individual and the state. For a progressive-liberal view of a broader interpretation of *citizenship*, participation, etc., see: 'From imposed to genuine participation' (Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2014). In a political context, people are sometimes referred to as voters, sometimes as *citizens*. Voter only refers only to active suffrage, meaning the right to vote for a representative. An important element of democratic citizenship, however, is passive suffrage, which gives everyone the right to run for office. This right enables citizens to be the ruled in one instance and rulers in the next. The term *citizenship* implies that everyone is a potential politician.

ministration. This shows once again that the people's representatives are in no way civil servants. They do not work for the executive power, but have to monitor it critically, think outside the box where necessary, and create or adapt the rules the executive has to apply.

Political association

However, an individual citizen does not have a strong position in today's complex political power dynamics. Particularly the large scale at which modern society is organised requires that we embed the political conversation in institutions—to make sure that arguments are truly heard and that the most powerful person or group does not automatically win. That is why people (should) organize in order to focus their political energies. Historically, this is precisely what a political party is: an association of likeminded citizens who unite in order to influence public administration on the basis of shared values. Better yet, all political parties are associations.[62] It is very important to a democracy's vitality that these associations are open to input from (possibly new) members. At the same time, political associations also have to show political newcomers the ropes. A democratic public dialogue should be open, critical, and equal. That way, existing power imbalances and privileges are not reaffirmed, and marginalized and unconventional voices are heard. This enables everyone to participate equally in political decision making.

62 The Party for Freedom (PVV) is also an association, although it only has one member.

CITIZEN AND STATE: FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND SHARED VALUES IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

Fundamental rights apply to the relationship between the citizen and the state. People are all equal, but the state has means of power it can apply to everyone. In the liberal view, the state has those means in order to, paradoxically, safeguard people from oppression. But the state itself must also be kept in check. That is why the rule of law and democracy are so important to progressive liberals, in addition to strong citizen participation. Historically speaking, liberalism has always been an outspoken advocate of state power limiting often hereditary, uncontrolled, vast private power in order to safeguard individual freedom. So, contrary to the widely held belief, liberalism is certainly not by definition an anti-state philosophy.

Shared values such as freedom of speech; peaceful conflict resolution; bodily integrity; and the fundamental equality of all people, regardless of gender, skin colour, worldview, background or sexuality, translate into a number of rights that supersede other laws. Fundamental rights and human rights are often described as universal. By this we mean that they apply to everyone in all cases. As such, this is not a claim of timeless or religious truth, which shows that promoting human rights is not a form of cultural imperialism. Important fundamental rights are the right to life, the right to free speech, the right to free association, the right to freely choose one's own religion, and the right to equal treatment. These rights are also called liberty rights and equality rights. They protect the individual from the power of the state. This makes them classical political fundamental rights. In many countries, they are laid down in a constitution and are therefore not easy to change.

Fundamental social rights

Over time, fundamental social rights were added to these classical political fundamental rights. These are, for instance, the right to education and the right to health care.[63]

The fact that fundamental rights were added over the course of history shows that fundamental rights are not carved in stone or timeless truths. They reflect a (shift in) underlying shared values. A hundred years ago, it was not yet broadly accepted that women should have the same rights as men. And after the passage of women's suffrage, it took until well into the 20th century before the constitutional equality between men and women had permeated all aspects of the law.

From a progressive-liberal perspective, this development reflects a refinement of fundamental rights and a more consistent implementation of principles that were already widely subscribed to, not an introduction of entirely new principles. The principle of equality was at the root of the first classical fundamental rights. However, in the beginning, it was not yet considered to apply to women, those who did not own property, and people of a different ethnicity. That they were granted the same rights in the end is a consistent implementation of the principle of equality.

> 'Fundamental rights can never be merely a matter of formal safeguards; the values they represent also have to be reflected in the public sphere'.

The fact that fundamental rights can change may lead to the idea that individual fundamental rights can be abolished if society's shared values point in that direction. Consequently, someone can use the political space

63 The fundamental social rights are, as mentioned in the introduction, not the subject of this Basic Value. For a progressive-liberal view of justice in terms of wealth distribution, see: "Reward Achievement and Share the Wealth", Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2016.

to advocate exactly that. In the domain of people among themselves, it should certainly be possible for someone to share this opinion. Hopefully, the arguments in Part 2 of this essay offer enough food for thought with which to have this discussion and defend why individual fundamental rights should not be abolished. In the Netherlands, it is possible, theoretically, to repeal fundamental rights. But because fundamental rights are viewed as vital and thus deserving of extra protection, they are anchored in the Constitution. A feature of a constitution is that it is difficult to change because it contains a country's most important rules. Fundamental rights can never be merely a matter of formal safeguards[64]; the values they represent also have to be reflected in the public sphere, so that their base of support holds firm.

Rule of law

So a constitution is the ultimate formal way to cherish fundamental rights and shared values. To make sure a fundamental right is respected, it is important that state power does not fall into the hands of a single person, group of people, or body. Different institutions have to balance each other out to make sure the state abides by its own rules. That is the rule of law: a 'government of law, not of men'.

From a liberal perspective, the rule of law is important because it keeps state institutions from imposing a particular truth on people. The rule of law has a monopoly on force: force can only be exercised by certain civil servants (the police, the Public Prosecution Service, and the military). Not only that, but it can only be used in cases envisaged by the law (so with the approval of 'the political, democratic conversation'). And finally, the use of force is monitored by the courts. Violence between people among themselves will always exist, but it is condemned and prosecuted. The monopoly on the use of force is not a description of reality, but a principle about who has the authority to use force against others. At the root of this is the value of peaceful conflict resolution: because the state

64 The constitution of the Soviet Union contained all the fundamental rights. In practice, they were completely ignored.

has the monopoly on the use of force, citizens have to resolve their conflicts without the use of violence.

The only 'truth' contained in fundamental rights is that it is up to every individual to decide for themselves how they wish to live.[65] From that perspective, it is not surprising that in the United States, for instance, the Supreme Court (which safeguards fundamental rights) enforces individuals' right to marry whom they wish. Opponents of gay marriage argue that, in these cases, the Constitution is being abused to score political points, that the (unelected) judge is interpreting the Constitution in a subjective and ideological way. From an individualistic perspective, that objection does not hold.

Separation of powers

As early as the 18th century, the French thinker Montesquieu argued that the legislative, executive, and judicial powers should not be in the hands of the same person or group. This 'separation of powers' is an essential feature of the rule of law. Everyone has their own mandate; no one is all-powerful. The legislator sets the rules, the government executes them, and the courts hold sway when the rules are broken. At the same time, the legislature monitors the government and can change rules and decisions. We cherish fundamental rights in a concrete way by respecting and protecting this separation of powers. That is why politicians have to be careful in commenting on individual court rulings, unless a ruling illustrates that a change of the rules is needed. In the same vein, judges should not get too involved in political debates.

Church and state

Besides the different state powers, the separation of church and state is an important principle underpinning the rule of law. There are two sides to this separation: on the one hand, churches and religions are protected against government interference. On the other hand, secular law, not

65 This is not a factual truth but a conclusion drawn from the notion that no one who wields worldly power can establish a truth for someone else, not can a belief be imposed by state institutions.

religious law, is considered the highest authority. Once again, this comes from the notion that no one can decide for anyone else what is true or what constitutes a good life, and so that no one can use the power of the state to impose any religion on people. What form the separation of church and state takes in each individual case will always be a subject of debate. It varies between and within countries. Some go far and reject any influence of religion on the public debate. Liberals draw the line at the invocation of religious arguments as conclusive in a political debate. And liberals are tolerant, at the very least, of a religious influence on society.[66]

It goes without saying that an autocracy is incompatible with these principles. On no ideological basis is an autocracy, religious or secular, acceptable to progressive liberals. Nor can it be legitimized by a majority decision or a referendum, since we believe that majority decisions must also be imbedded in the democratic rule of law, which respects the fundamental rights of every individual.

Some feel that the separation of church and state ought to also mean a separation of religion and society (separation of church and street). It is argued that religious convictions ought to remain private and have no place in the public sphere, nor in the political sphere.

Of course, people are allowed to believe this, but there is no liberal argument for depriving people of the freedom to publicly express their religious convictions. Liberals do protest, however, when religion is used

66 It is often claimed, incorrectly, that liberals are anti-religious, but in principle, liberalism and belief in God go well together. As long as individual freedom is guaranteed, everyone can believe or not believe in anything they want—including liberals. After all, in the Netherlands, it was open-minded Christians who came together politically in a precursor to D66: Free-thinking Democratic League (de Vrijzinnig Democratische Bond).

as a decisive argument to influence the behaviour or choices of others by means of state power.[67]

Democracy

The rule of law ensures that fundamental rights are enforced, thus serving as a safeguard against state hegemony. Considering individual freedom in connectedness, however, it is not only important that the state abides by its own rules. People should also have the ability to decide who governs and what those officials do (and they have to be able to become officials themselves). That is why a democracy is so important to liberals. No matter how many safeguards a democracy that upholds the rule of law builds into the system, it can never entirely ward off all misfortune. Sometimes, expectations seem to be too high: democratic decisions are not automatically good decisions, democratic governance is not necessarily effective governance, and the separation of powers does not always produce justice. However, all these safeguards do offer the possibility of correction, repair, and adaptation. It is not always justified to ask an official 'what are you going to do about this?' in the case of adversity. Bad luck is a part of life; that is no different in a state that upholds the rule of law. Which types of bad luck are acceptable and which are not is matter for discussion in the public sphere.

'A democracy is more than majority rule'.

Institutionalised conversation about the common good

Historically speaking, the least important (but still considerable) advantage of a democracy is that it features peaceful changes of power. In ev-

67 There are those who take this notion further and argue that there is no place at all for morality in government. This sometimes causes people to lament that a country would be better off having a 'neutral', technocratic government. This is often based on the misconception that the common good can be calculated by some formula or set down in a policy brief. However, questions like 'what is good, fair, equitable, or just?' cannot be objectively or definitively answered; that is why we need democracy. The judgement of a highly-trained specialist on these matters is not necessarily better than that of a layperson. Of course, the execution of policy should be done by skilled professionals. Politics ought to be democratic; the implementation of its decisions technocratic.

ery other political system, changes of power are almost always accompanied by violence and upheaval. A functioning democracy avoids this. That alone is an achievement to treasure. The previous part described politics as an institutionalised conversation between people among themselves about the possible creation of rules by the state. Democracy is an excellent tool by which to make sure that non-state powers align themselves with the common interest.[68] As early as the 1960s, D66-thinker Jan Glastra van Loon spoke of the need to 'dig channels to power'. That is why, besides the earlier-mentioned classical political 'liberty rights', we also need participation rights: the right to information, the need for transparency, and most of all, active and passive suffrage.

Majority and minority

To a liberal, democracy is not just the organisation of elections, enabling the majority to rule. Even without elections, a majority can impose its will on a minority. No, democracy is a way to make sure that individuals are not oppressed. After all, a person can belong to the majority in one instance and to a minority the next. At one moment, the fact that someone is a woman may take centre stage (majority), when in the next, her cultural background matters most. It is because of this multi-faceted identity we all have that we believe that democracy is more than majority rule. And for this, fundamental rights are essential.

'The state does not serve those in power; it serves its citizens. They own the state'.

Citizen involvement

The rule of law and democracy are empty shells when citizens are not involved. Democracy and the rule of law are also a form of culture: it is not just about rules and institutions but also about how people behave within them. When rulers obey the letter of the law, but break the spirit of it, it erodes democracy. And citizens have to keep reminding their

68 How the common good is to be served, exactly, is not clear beforehand, of course. This is precisely what politics should be about.

leaders (and each other) of this. Even if all the laws are perfect and rights are formally protected: fundamental rights and shared values, so crucial for the progressive-liberal pursuit of freedom in connectedness, mean nothing if citizens do not get involved in their governance and if those in power do not behave democratically. The central idea is that the state does not exist to serve those in power, but to serve its citizens; they are, in a sense, the owners of the state. And ownership does not only come with rights but also with obligations: cherishing fundamental rights and shared values.

Measures to increase the political involvement of citizens cannot and should not emerge only from state structures. Citizens are involved in the shaping of their society to a large degree, which cannot be measured merely by election turnout. From its inception, D66 has focused on increasing people's influence over their own lives and over how and by whom they are governed. This has always involved a broader approach than merely direct democracy. Increasing citizens' sway over education, pensions, and on the work floor has also always been a priority.

The Netherlands has an executive power that is only indirectly democratic.[69] Here, citizens do not choose their government. It turns out that, in the public consciousness, the parliament and the government are often seen as the same thing. The most important functions of the parliament are joint legislation and monitoring the government. But, in the execution of these functions, parliament is dependent on what the government provides, what the coalition majority requests, and what the media demands.[70]

69 Not all ideal-type features of the rule of law and democracy are anchored in the Dutch system. The separation of church and state is not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution. In addition, in the Netherlands, the Constitution does not function as a final check for fundamental rights. And it is not the citizen who is the core of the Dutch constitutional system, but the monarch.

70 In the Netherlands, the balance of powers is fairly uneven: the executive power (the government, ministries, the civil service, etc.) nationally employs over 139,000 people full-time (that includes people who work at independent governing bodies). The judiciary has just over 3000 full-time employees, and the legislature (the Senate and the House of Representatives) employs less than 400 people in total (Jaarrapportage Bedrijfsvoering Rijk 2014).

This has caused the emphasis of the parliament's work to shift towards co-governance. And at other levels of governance, local and European, there are also many challenges for the working of and the base of support for democracy.[71]

There are a number of basic principles that have to be safeguarded in every democracy. Every vote has to count. The object and subject of decision-making have to be two sides of the same coin (such as in the case of active and passive suffrage). There has to be contestability (that is why the rule of law is so important for a democracy). And democratic structures have to monitor public power and hold it to account. A democracy is always a work in progress, both when it comes to rules and structures and when it comes to support from the population. In cherishing fundamental rights and shared values, we should always be reminded of that.

71 For a progressive-liberal view of European cooperation, see: 'Europe: a prerequisite for freedom', Hans van Mierlo Foundation 2014.

CONCLUSION

We cherish shared values because we do not share all values. We cherish fundamental rights so that people can decide these non-shared values for themselves. We cherish both, so that people can shape their freedom together.

Fundamental rights and shared values are essential to the progressive-liberal aspiration of freedom in connectedness. They form a basis upon which the other four Basic Values can be pursued. But cherishing fundamental rights and shared values is not just a progressive-liberal enterprise. The fight for fundamental rights and shared values should not be exploited for political gain. The rule of law can never become a point of political contention, about which people have to take a side. We have to wage that war with as many allies as possible.

The way we deal with non-shared values, as opposed to shared values, is much more strongly influenced by our progressive liberalism. We defend others' right to have a different opinion. At the same time, we feel a responsibility to know our own ideals well and to share them in conversations with others. We can doubt our convictions without this having to lead to indecisiveness. This is an attitude that allows people to shape their freedom together.

Cherishing fundamental rights and shared values happens in market squares, at dining tables, and within political parties, but also on television and in the newspaper, or at international negotiation tables. It is vital to have the central arguments for fundamental rights at our fingertips. Because whether someone aspires to a theocracy, a dictatorial technocracy, or illiberal capitalism: they are tossing the moral equality of all people overboard, together with every person's freedom to pursue the life he chooses. This is not a battle between morally equal structures or intellectual opinions, but a matter of political philosophy, individual freedom of choice, and justice. That is the heart of the issue, and it should not be treated lightly—that is what we mean by cherish. Despite the lack of decisiveness and the possible ineffectiveness of a democracy that upholds the rule of law, fundamental rights are the best guarantee of a free life for all.

'Fundamental rights are the best guarantee of a free life for all'.

In order to make sure that fundamental rights and shared values are respected, they have to be cherished at all three levels described in this essay: Individuals have to know their own ideals and the arguments for fundamental rights. Among themselves, people have to give each other space, but at the same time critically question one another. And in the political sphere, politicians have to be extremely careful about fundamental rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

WALK TOGETHER: DECALOGUE OF PROGRESSIVE LIBERALISM

By Aurora Nacarino-Brabo (Ciudadanos, Spain)

Between 1808 and 1814, Spain waged a war of independence against Napoleon's France, which gave rise to two of the concepts that the Spanish language has bequeathed to humanity: guerrilla and liberal. This may seem banal, but it helps to understand the uneven trajectory that liberalism has suffered in my country.

The first liberals claimed national sovereignty in the face of the absolutist monarchy and foreign invasion. This remains one of the fundamental pillars of the doctrine today: the defence of a nation of free and equal citizens, where no man, no woman, is inferior to any other, and this principle has been extended to the outskirts of the European Union thanks to the integration of the states.

Those liberals promulgated in 1812, in the city of Cadiz, the first Constitution of the country, and one of the most progressive in the world in its time, the rule of law is perhaps the second element, after proclaiming a sovereignty of free and equal individuals, which defines liberalism: the need to design a law that serves as a democratic umbrella for all citizens, a law that equals us in rights and duties, in freedoms and responsibilities.

The principle of citizenship and the rule of law provides necessary architecture for a representative democracy. For liberals the institutions of the representative democracy are the best way to reflect the variety of opinions and interests that exist in any society. Unlike those who support collectivism or social homogeneity, liberalism defends social diversity.

It does so because one of its fundamental values is pluralism. That is why liberals reject the nationalism and populism that is sadly extending throughout Europe. They reject these ideas because they believe that politics should focus on citizens, and not nations, regions or tribes. Supporting pluralism means understanding that a society is made up of individuals with legitimate different points of view. And trying to solve our differences involves respecting others and discussing issues within the constitutional frame work.

Also, liberals are committed to the idea of progress. The conservatives are paralysed by the fear of change, the social-democrats are unable to provide answers to the challenges of post-industrial societies, and popu-

lists propose an exclusive project that does not offer solutions either: they take advantage of social dissatisfaction. In contrast, liberals maintain the possibility of finding innovative solutions to the challenges of this century in order to improve peoples's lives.

In this search, liberals are guided by confidence in the market as an instrument for transforming individual liberties and diversity into economic growth and progress. When protectionism rises, we defend open economies. In a Europe where we have seen states close their borders, liberals strongly support globalisation. Because without economic growth redistribution of wealth cannot take place.

However, being in favour of free markets does not mean to be against the State. Liberals believe that it is necessary to overcome the debate about the ownership of the means of production, public or private, and to focus on the goals. We must choose the means that allow us to achieve our objectives in each situation. It is not about the size of the State but about how we can guarantee better prosperity and welfare to citizens. Sometimes it will take more input from the private sector and sometimes it will take more state intervention to correct the many faults of the market, to fight against monopolies or to protect the environment.

Also, the state has to play an important role in providing equal opportunities. Liberals must rebel against the notion that birth can determine one's social and economic future. Merit and talent should decide the destiny of citizens and not their origins. In that sense, John Stuart Mill, who is one of the most important liberal theorists, pointed out the importance of public education. Mill believed that only educated people could be autonomous, and therefore free.

And freedom is the key of our project. Liberals believe that the measure of our society is its individuals, its citizens. And we believe in a system that protects individual freedom, not to be confused with selfishness or isolationism. On the contrary, we think that cooperation, innovation and solidarity flourish best in the societies that respect individual rights.

Apart from the need to guarantee the correct functioning of the market and competition, equal opportunities and freedom, states have an

important role to play in protecting the environment. The market needs regulation to protect the environment. Progressive liberalism promotes economic development that is responsible for the environment and looks after the world we will leave our children.

Lastly, progressive liberalism considers Europe the best framework to develop these values. The European Union is not only the integration project that allowed us to overcome World War II, but also a project for the 21st century. In a moment of rising nationalism, populism and protectionism, Europe should be a stronghold against reactionism. It should be a melting pot and a community of belonging and caring. It is the responsibility of the member states to work every day to renew this common obligation. Europe is not a place in the past nor a remote destination. Europe is our path forward. Let's walk together.

About the author**: Aurora Nacarino-Brabo is a political scientist serving as an advisor to the Ciudadanos party in the Spanish parliament.**

PROGRESSIVE LIBERALISM IN CENTRAL EUROPE: WHAT TO FIGHT FOR?

By Josef Lentsch (NEOS Lab, Austria)

In the early 21st century, liberalism has come under immense pressure in Central Europe and beyond. Progressives, I argue, need to address three central challenges:

Freedom of our societies

Progressives need to courageously defend past progress against the backlash of reactionary forces - nationalists, populists, but increasingly also a centre-right that adopts parts of the populist approach and policy platform. In countries like Austria, Hungary, Poland or Slovakia, populists have already made it into the Government. They are working to dismantle the supporting pillars of liberal democracy – separation of powers, rule of law and fundamental rights.

In this battle, political start-ups like Momentum, Progressive Slovakia, Nowoczesna or NEOS act as freedom fighters against an often corrupt political establishment. As this fight is not limited to one particular country, it is all the more important they do this together, and in formation with all the other liberal parties across Europe.

What they fight for is a strong and united Europe that guarantees peace and prosperity on the continent. Policy-wise, this means a stronger integration of security, defence, foreign policy and migration on the European level. Protecting European borders is not a contradiction, but a requirement of progressive liberal politics.

Independence of the individual

Free societies are built, and protected, by free citizens. Therefore, progressives need to continue their fight for empowerment of the individual through education: too many citizens still lack basic capabilities like reading, writing and calculating. In times of disinformation campaigns, the ability to critically assess sources should also be counted as one of them.

But improving basic education is not enough to secure the independence of the individual. Fear of the future has arrived in the middle class. Status anxiety has begun to undermine social cohesion. Progressives therefore need to work to future-proof skills. They need to further develop ad-

vanced training to a system that foster genuine life-long learning, where regular unlearning and relearning are standard.

People, however, need jobs to apply those skills. This is why fighting for a thriving and inclusive economy remains at the heart of progressive liberalism.

Sustainability for future generations

Since the end of WWII, there has been almost uninterrupted progress from one European generation to the next. In some dimensions, we now see a reversal of that trend – and we have to admit that our own actions and those of our forebears are causal for that. Liberalism sometimes puts a too narrow focus on the present individual, and too little focus on externalities of actions and systemic sustainability. But the idea that freedom ends where the freedom of others begins also applies to future generations. To secure their freedom, and protect generational justice, progressive liberalism need to fight for sustainability – where exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are all aligned to enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.

This applies first and foremost to ecosystems in the context of climate change. But it similarly applies to the sustainability of our social systems – by reforming pensions and health systems. And, as Ralf Dahrendorf pointed out with his concept of "life chances", it applies to the sustainability of our economic systems – by lowering public debt, incentivizing innovation, and keeping tax systems in line with a globalised economy.

Finally, sustainability for future generations applies to liberalism itself: Robert Dahl once said that the democracy of our successors will not and cannot be the democracy of our predecessors - nor should it be. Why should liberalism? To future-proof liberalism, and make it withstand the current populist wave, progressive liberals need to practice a politics that is more participative, more inclusive, and more innovative than in the past.

For some countries, this may mean founding progressive political start-ups from scratch, as I have shown in my book "Political Entrepreneurship", which will be published by Springer in Autumn 2018. In other countries, this may mean reforming existing liberal parties from within. Either is easier said than done. In our trying times, both are worth the fight.

About the author**: Josef Lentsch is the director of NEOS Lab and board member of the European Liberal Forum.**

REFLECTIONS FROM A NORTHERN EUROPEAN (NORDIC) PERSPECTIVE

By Ola Alterå (Centre Party International Foundation, Sweden)

Liberalism in the world

The essays on five Basic Values of progressive liberalism are certainly worth publishing for an audience outside the Netherlands. Not only are they well elaborated and written. As stated in the foreword, in a world of globalisation, where we face similar - and shared - political challenges it is increasingly important to share and discuss the political ideas and perspectives that guide our understanding and response to those challenges.

It seems like the world in many aspects is moving in the direction of the ideas of progressive liberalism, towards a stronger emphasis on individual rights and values, secularism and self-expression. But that does not mean convergence. Rather, the whole global value spectrum is moving, and values are changing faster in high-income countries than in low-income countries.[72]

Maybe the present rise of populism and anti-establishment movements also indicates that such socially based value differences increase within countries. It has been suggested that what we perceive as a rise of nationalism, protectionism, racism and extremism is rather a counter-reaction to a world that on the whole is moving towards more of internationalism, openness, tolerance and liberalism. Not everyone is onboard, and the pace of change can be frightening or seen as threatening to the order we are used to.

Value systems in the Netherlands and the Nordics

When extending the discussion on the five basic values to an international context it should be remembered that such general principles, even thoroughly explained, will necessarily be read, interpreted and implemented differently in different social and economic environments.

The Nordic countries, and especially Sweden, together with the Netherlands are extremes on the global value scales. According to the World Values Survey secular/rational values are very strong in these countries as compared to traditional values (emphasising religion, parent-child ties,

72 See the World Values Survey, www.worldvaluessurvey.org

and traditional family values), and self-expression values (emphasising tolerance of individual differences and gender equality) are strong as compared to survival values (emphasising economic and physical security).

Especially in Sweden the welfare state is built strongly on the relationship between the state and the individual, freeing the latter from the dependency of family, clan or religious fellowships. Progressive liberal ideas have had a strong influence even if pronounced liberal parties for long periods of time not have been strong in terms of election results.

This means that most progressive liberal political parties and individuals in the Nordics probably feel quite comfortable and "at home" with how the Basic Values are described in these essays.

Having said this, a few comments can be added, without any claim to be comprehensive:

People's own power

The text about Trust in People's Own Power discusses this value in terms of relations between people among themselves and between people and the government. However, it makes no distinction between the state and other levels of government, such as regions, provinces or local municipalities.[73]

For some progressive liberal parties in the Nordic countries, that discussion has been essential, emphasising decentralisation of power "to the people", or closer to people, also as manifested in regional and local government. It has sometimes been expressed in terms of federal ideas where the lover level of self governance should delegate power upwards only when deemed beneficial for the lower level, rather than a top down perspective of a state delegating power to regional and local levels.

73 That perspective is only briefly mentioned in the text on sustainability, *Level of scale - globalisation and regionalisation*.

Internationalism

This discussion also reflects on the basic value of Think and Act Internationally. As described in the text an internationalist view is not necessarily the same as always maximizing supranational decision-making. There is a debate within and between progressive liberal parties in the Nordics about how far the European integration should reach. Should the obvious shortcomings and criticism of the present EU be met by faster and stronger integration or rather by carefully choosing the areas were supranational decision making adds value, strengthen those areas but also decentralize other powers to member states, regions or "people's own power".

Based on historical experience it has also been less obvious for liberals in Sweden and Finland to argue that membership of a military alliance like NATO is a given consequence of this value. But that seems to have gradually changed in recent years, as the geo political situation in Europe has changed.

Sustainability

The sustainability perspective is very strong in the Nordic liberal discussion. The Swedish Centre Party, for example, was among the first in the world raising parliamentary motions on environmental policy, as early as in the late 1960's. In today's situation, where humanity is stretching the planetary boundaries that keep the earth hospitable to the modern civilization, it is easy to agree to the final progressive liberal limit testing: For government, unlike citizens, it is not enough to put in its best efforts on something like climate change. If the desired result is not achieved, then the rules of the games have to be changed more profoundly. The viability of the planet's life supporting systems can not be balanced or traded for other goods, neither between us or with future generations.

Looking forward

Even if progressive liberal values seem to have been growing successively stronger over a long time, it is obvious that there is a counter reaction of conservatism, nationalism and different kinds of extremism sweeping over, and polarizing, Europe and large parts of the world. We see this

even in societies were liberal values traditionally are strong, such as the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. At the same time, climate change and new technologies will drive transformative change of our society in coming decades.

In such a time the five Basic Values are a good starting point for the important discussion on what progressive liberalism means for us today. But it is the next step that really counts – how those basic values can translate to narratives and concrete political reforms that can give people courage, hope and tools to meet today's challenges and shape our common future.

About the author: Ola Alterå is the chairman of the board of the Centre Party International Foundation in Sweden.

CONTRIBUTORS

European Liberal Forum

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the foundation of the European Liberal Democrats, the ALDE Party. A core aspect of its work consists in issuing publications on Liberalism and European public policy issues. ELF also provides a space for the discussion of European politics, and offers training for liberal-minded citizens, to promote active citizenship in all of this. ELF is made up of a number of European think tanks, political foundations and institutes. The diversity of the membership provides ELF with a wealth of knowledge and is a constant source of innovation. In turn, the member get the opportunity to cooperate on European projects under the ELF umbrella.

The European Liberal Forum works throughout Europe as well as in the EU Neighbourhood countries. The youthful and dynamic nature of ELF allows to be at the forefront in promoting active citizenship, getting the citizen involved with European issues and building an open, Liberal Europe.

> **www.liberalforum.eu**

NEOS Lab

NEOS Lab is the political academy of the liberal grass-roots movement NEOS, and an open laboratory for new politics. The main objective of NEOS Lab is to contribute to enhancing political education in Austria by providing a platform for knowledge exchange and liberal political thinking on the key challenges and pathways of democracies and welfare states in the 21st century. Particular emphasis is placed on the core topics of education, a more entrepreneurial Austria, sustainable welfare systems and democratic innovation. NEOS Lab conceives itself as a participatory interface between politics and society insofar as it mediates between experts with scientific and practical knowledge on diverse policy issues and interested citizens.

A network of experts accompanies and supports the knowledge work of the diverse thematic groups and takes part in the think tank work of NEOS Lab. Additionally, NEOS Lab provides several services, such as

political education and training, workshops and conferences and a rich portfolio of inter- and transdisciplinary research at the interface between science, politics, economy and society. NEOS Lab is the successor of the Liberal Future Forum, which was previously a member of ELF.

› **lab.neos.eu**

Mr. Hans van Mierlo Stichting

The Mr. Hans van Mierlo Stichting works as a broker of knowledge, expertise and ideas for the Dutch progressive liberal Party D66 (Democrats66). The main focus of its work is to deepen and develop our liberal democratic thought. The Foundation was originally founded in 1974 when it served as a traditional research centre. At the turn of the 20th century, its approach changed to that of a broker, but the aim has remained the same: to spur debate and develop ideas that strengthen the intellectual profile of D66. In doing so, the Foundation tries to maintain a long term view, placing political issues in a broader (ideological) perspective.

Nowadays, the organization employs dozens of volunteers, working on projects varying from policy advice to fundamental studies of the basic social liberal principles. They also publish a quarterly magazine called 'idee' (Idea). Furthermore, the organization acts as secretary to D66's permanent program commission, which is responsible for drafting (preliminary studies for) the party manifestos for both national and European elections.

› **www.vanmierlostichting.d66.nl**

Stichting International Democratic Initiative (IDI)

Stichting IDI is an important pillar in D66's international work. In 1989, IVSOM, the Central and Eastern Europe Foundation of the D66 party was founded to support democratisation and economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. In October 1997, IVSOM was renamed the Stichting Internationaal Democratisch Initiatief (Stichting IDI). The

Foundation is independent but also forms an integral part of the political party D66. Its office is located at the D66 Party Bureau.

Over the years IDI's field of operation was expanded to include countries outside Central and Eastern Europe. Nowadays, the IDI Foundation is mainly active in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Furthermore, the IDI Foundation maintains and develops relationships with likeminded political organisations in many countries around the world. IDI cooperates with liberal democratic parties and organisations that respect human rights and the rights of minorities.

Democratic movements and progressive or social liberal political parties are natural partners for the IDI Foundation. The relationships are mutually beneficial. On the one hand, IDI offers practical knowledge for political partners in the project countries. On the other hand, ideas and experiences from abroad deepen and strengthen the liberal concept D66 adheres to while at the same time D66 learns from the tactics and strategy employed by likeminded parties. The Matra and Shiraka Political Party Programmes of the Dutch Ministries of Foreign and Home Affairs financially support most IDI projects.

› **www.internationaal.d66.nl**

Centre Party International Foundation

The Centre Party International Foundation, CPIF, is a Swedish Party-Affiliated Organisation established in 1995 by the Swedish Centre Party. It shares the same core values as the Centre Party, a social-liberal, green party with a strong emphasis on sustainability and decentralisation. The mission of the Centre Party International Foundation is to strengthen democracy and human rights, with a focus on gender and environmental issues, in collaboration with political parties and organizations working to strengthen liberal values and local democracy, also outside large population centers.

The Centre party International Foundation is one of seven Party-Affiliated Organisations (PAOs) in Sweden. The specific objective of PAO

development assistance is to promote human rights, democracy and good governance. To achieve the overall objective of this strategy, PAO activities focus on two interdependent areas: (1) support for sister parties and affiliated political movements and organizations, with the goal of ensuring well-functioning democratic political parties and (2) support for multi-party systems, with the goal of ensuring well-functioning, democratically based multi-party systems.

› **https://www.centerpartiet.se/lokal/cis/startsida**

Cuidadanos

Ciudadanos (Citizens) is a Spanish progressive liberal political party. Founded in 2006 in Catalonia, the party attended the Catalan elections in the same year and won three seats. In the following elections in 2007, 2010 and 2012, the party kept growing in Spain. In 2014, Cs was voted into the European Parliament with two seats. In 2016, Cs ran for the first time nationally, winning 13.1% of the votes (32 seats) and in December 2017 Cs won the Catalan elections with more than 1 million votes.

› **www.ciudadanos-cs.org**