



### Summary

*Prof. Wendy Brown discusses troubling legacies of western freedom and argues that these legacies were not part of the neoliberal vision; however, they unintentionally sprung by neoliberal reason. She argues that liberalism goes further by detaching freedom from both emancipation and democracy, rendering it instead as the protection of individuals against intrusions of political or personal power. She also discusses other troubling legacies of Western predicament of freedom especially in the struggle over racial, gendered, and ecological politics.*

### From the ruins of neoliberalism to where

*Prof. Wendy Brown*

Prof. Brown discusses troubling legacies of western freedom and the effects of liberalism and neoliberalism on freedom. She argues that the first troubling legacy is predicated on the vast unfreedom of the many and license to dominate and exploit this population - women, slaves, serfs, natives, etc. She thinks that freedom has never been weaponized and its hegemonic form in the West has always been saturated with the right to dominate and exploit. Indeed, while affirming liberation movements, challenging empire and colonialism, slavery and patriarchy, critical intellectuals in recent decades have also charted in detail the ways that freedom has hoisted and legitimated white male supremacy, colonial dispossession and entitlements of wealth.

Prof. Brown discusses freedom in the 21st century arguing that the world witnesses what may be the most undemocratic understandings and practices of freedom in modern history and that freedom is a contrivance by which already broken political and social orders are further dismembered and degraded. According to Prof. Brown, freedom is an auspice for flouting public health ordinances, refusing science and fact on disease and climate change, for aggressively ignorant proclamations in ostensibly scholarly environments. She also alleges that secular freedom is the auspice through which religious minorities are being persecuted and religious freedom is the auspice through which women and LGBTQ rights are being curtailed.

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She argues that because classical liberalism's stipulation of freedom as a private individual good ignores social powers that bear on its unequal enactment, today, anti-democratic, authoritarian liberalism is the political formation that converts freedom into a rabid defense of those very social powers. According to her, divested from popular sovereignty in particular, and democratization in general, animated by social disintegration generated by neo-liberalism, freedom within this form is more than anti-statist - it's anti-democratic, anti-political, antisocial, and at times, anti-life.

She thinks that while freedom widely signifies release from bondage in popular parlance, its iteration and practice in the West has been essential to securing and extending white, masculine, colonial and imperial entitlement,





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and essential to resisting challenges to this entitlement. White nationalists, religious patriarchists and ordinary capitalists draw on this legacy today as they rebuke every law of property regulation, equality, and social justice reform as a totalitarian infringement of their freedom.

According to Prof. Brown, it was slavery that secured ancient freedom and gave it its shape. She argues that freedom as a gendered and civilizational discourse of political theory is as old as Aristotle's ontological distinction between free propertied men on the one hand, and those by nature designed to be ruled on the other - women, slaves, workers. She thinks that modern liberalism contained its own version of the ontology in "On Liberty", John Stuart Mills' encomium to individuality realized through liberty, in which he frontloads a hard distinction between the civilized European and the barbaric rest of the world, where the former is not merely entitled, but morally obliged to govern and improve the latter. She alleges that since their birth, Western ideals of freedom have gifted their beauty and power to the dominant and to the cause of retaining that dominance and this is one major legacy of freedom that we need to grasp and transform.

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According to her, there are more troubling legacies of Western freedom such as the separation of emancipation, revolutionized social power from democratization and collective determination through shared rule which also means tearing apart of political, social and individual freedom. She argues that two kinds of power in particular constitute what might be called as freedom's scene: First, we alone among the creatures, construct, inherit and inhabit

relations and orders of power that escape our control. Despite being our own creation, which is Marx, Weber, Foucault, Fanon 101, these orders of power are often, but not always, invisible and unnamed. We alone among the creatures, engender our own domination through the interdependence, stratification and subjectification that these orders and relations entail, not only through exercise of physical strength or command, or control of resources. We alone struggle to craft individual and collective lives amidst the orders of power that we generate and reproduce, but which slip our grasp.

Today, this includes powers entailed in modes of production, exchange and consumption, finance and technology, culture and religion and subject constitution at the site of race, gender, sexuality, caste and ethnicity. Neither natural nor divine, emanating from, yet exceeding human intention, stewardship or consent, these orders of power generate hierarchies, exclusions, subjectivities and suffering, as well as conduct, potentials and communities. The more sophisticated and complex, the more global and invasive these powers become, the greater freedoms' challenges. This singular species generativity, this potential for collective subjugation through it, is one part of freedoms seen, one ignored by the figure of freedom that liberalism provides. Indeed, freedom conceived as an individual holding and exercised as personal choice, elides these world making powers through which humans are shaped, burdened and constrained.

She thinks that this illusion performed by liberalism and constituting modern liberal and especially neo-liberal formulations of freedom, radically narrow freedom's meaning and reach, as it locates liberty in the individual and identifies it with noninterference, whether from others or from the state. Liberalism, far from providing means to corral and handle these powers together, facilitates our surrender to them. Neoliberalism completes this surrender with its open preference for market rule rather than human rule.



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The second order of power constructing the scene of freedom pertains to the domain we generally designate as political. As animals who neither roam solo nor herd together instinctively, humans are everywhere and always organized in part through arrangements of rule in contrast with the Marx-Weber-Foucault for non-analytics of power. This is the basis on which democracy - the aspiration to rule ourselves together so we're not ruled by others or apart - belongs to us humans alone among the animals. Powers of rule, whether concentrated or distributed, institutionalized or informal, differ in kind from our unique capacity to generate the social powers.

She argues that the third troubling legacy of Western freedom is climate crisis, which is a site of crisis in our time and concerns the consequential anthropocentrism. Pointing out to the relation between climate crisis and freedom, she argues that the climate crisis and other ecological tipping points epitomize our collective subjection at the hands of our collective generativity as well as our failure historically to govern or control the systematic powers we generate, mirroring both our enormous capacities to generate those powers, and our felt impotence before them.

In sum, Prof. Brown argues that there is, of course, the neoliberal disembedding of freedom. More than merely decoupled from democracy and society, within neoliberal reason, freedom is discursive, opposed to democracy and the very idea of society. It is anti-egalitarian and anti-statist, thus, wars against social justice, refuses democratic accountability and is so deeply privatized that it is wholly compatible with political autocracy or

authoritarianism. Hence, the contemporary possibility of autocratic liberalisms. There is also the rancor against the effects of globalized capital, its deracinations and destabilizations of so many millions. These effects are easily and frequently displaced onto other agents, especially migrants, religious minorities, feminists, progressives, even democracy itself, and create an angry, xenophobic populism as one of globalization's offspring.

#### **About the Author**

Prof. Wendy Brown at Princeton University is recognized as one of the leading political theorists. She completed her BA in Economics and Politics at UC Santa Cruz, her MA and PhD in Politics in Princeton University. Prof. Brown is known with her fresh and critical interventions in critical legal studies and feminist theory. Her research is oriented towards the study of democracy and sovereignty. She is the author of many books, including *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory (New Feminist Perspectives)* (1998), *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (2009), *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (2009), *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010), *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution (Near Future Series)* (2015) *Politics Out of History* (2018), *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (2019) and *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (2020).

Her four books were translated into Turkish. Professor Brown has published in many academic journals and has received several international awards.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

### Imagining A Common Horizon for Humanity and the Planet

The world is passing through an extremely troubled period in its history, with a seemingly new challenge encountered at every turn. Serious economic, social, cultural, environmental and political crises at a global level are exacerbated by those being felt in individual countries. The challenges we are facing take a variety of forms, from financial collapses to climate change, from international terrorism to regional conflicts, and from the refugee problem to xenophobia.

All of these crises are being aggravated by the impact of the pandemic, revealing the inability of humanity to tackle them collectively, and invalidating the romantic discourse of globalization. As history continues its march, we are reminded that the answer to the common problems of humanity cannot be found by becoming more introverted, polarized or prejudiced. No matter how severe our problems, our destiny should not be seen as unchangeable. The problems we experience are primarily a result of human activity, and can be overcome only through human effort, but we should remain aware that there are many different hurdles to be passed if we are to rid ourselves of the crises being experienced in many parts of the world.

Only through conscious, patient and collective effort can we overcome the problems of humanity. Now is the time for dignified people from the different cultures and geographies of the world to come together in solidarity. It is time to speak with full respect of human dignity, setting aside the importance we place in our individual identities. An alliance of people who see truth and justice as the major pillars of our kind, will be able to open the door to a new era of solidarity for humanity. A dignified future is possible. We believe that Turkey holds a special, if not privileged, position, based on its geographical, historical and cultural characteristics, and can serve as a host to this joint effort of humanity.

Our goal within the scope of this project is to bring together the leading thinkers of the world, to create an international intellectual platform that draws its strength from human dignity, and that aims to build for the future of humanity and the planet with a holistic synergy with a view to offering humanity a common horizon. As Cappadocia University, our vision in this regard is to provide an academic platform from where esteemed intellectuals from around the world can share their visions for a common future of humanity and our planet, and to comment on the challenges and opportunities they envisage.

You can find detailed information about the Project at <https://commonhorizon.kapadokya.edu.tr/en/>

Cappadocia University (<https://kapadokya.edu.tr/en/>) is a young foundation (private) university in central Turkey, Cappadocia. The main goal of the university is to raise generations of opinion leaders who can read the 21st century realistically, and whose views therefore carry weight and significance – go-to men and women who are highly knowledgeable in their fields, who are happy to share their knowledge, and who will thus be respected and trusted by others. Cappadocia University is home to a highly successful dual-pronged system of academic and vocational programs that act in support of each other.

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