

Anthony Comenga: [00:15](#)

Welcome everyone, to the first episode of Ideas in Progress, brought to you by the Institute for Humane Studies, affectionately called IHS. The IHS supports and partners with professors to promote teaching and research in the classical, liberal tradition, and to advance higher education's supposed core principles of intellectual discovery in human progress. Most of all, we at IHS try to ensure that higher education, whatever that looks like at the moment, is a thing or a place where classical, liberal ideas are regularly taught, discussed, challenged, and developed.

We value curiosity, accountability, responsibility. We seek a society that values every individual as such, where every person is treated with equal dignity, equal liberty, and equal respect. In support of this mission, we have developed and hosted many, many thousands of academic events with who knows how many thousands of scholars for almost 60 years. Since 1961, the IHS has been contributing to the humanities in an ever expanding capacity. And by today, it is a cornerstone in the classical, liberal community.

We support undergraduates, graduate students, and professors, with funding for their research, their travel to academic events, and their search for fruitful careers as liberal scholars. We design academic research seminars to workshop scholars projects. We host three different career development seminars for students at each stage of their graduate school experience. We do summer seminars. We host huge numbers of graduate students developing their research and presentation skills in our research workshops. There are dissertation workshops for those of you trying to turn your graduate project into a book. Paper workshops for faculty to shape up conference papers or articles. And manuscript workshops, for professors who are finishing important book projects.

And most importantly, for our purposes today, are our discussion colloquia. If any of you have ever been to a Liberty Fund event, you're well familiar with these. It's about 12-15 people, usually with some expertise in the topic at hand, discussing an advanced topic in classical liberal scholarship, or the humanities more broadly, based on a common reading list. I have to say, these are my absolute favorite programs that we do. Their Socratic style, which I love. They always include great readings. The topics are challenging. Everyone there really loves the subject, so they get into the discussion. People talk, and talk, and talk, all night at the socials, and it's always just such a fantastic time. I really do love our discussion colloquia.

And by the way, I'm your host, Anthony Comenga. I'm a historian by training. I finished my PhD in American and Atlantic History at the University of Pittsburgh in 2016, where I wrote the first and only history of the Loco-Foco Movement, and I'm sure there will be more to come on that. And I taught a bunch of different courses to one degree or another. After grad school, I worked at the Cato Institute for three years as the Assistant Editor for Intellectual History at Libertarianism.org. And thought Cato mostly does public policy, Libertarianism.org is sort of their history and philosophy wing. It's really fantastic, very high quality stuff, always interesting authors. They seriously do great work over there, and I highly recommend everyone check them out, especially all the gorgeous books they either sell for very cheap, or give away for free download online. And their fantastic line of podcasts.

Mainly, my job included a ton of writing. Mostly editing primary sources or some importance to the classical liberal tradition, and writing editor's introductions to them. Once we would get enough on a similar theme, I'd collect those into books. It was good stuff. As was my podcast, *Liberty Chronicles*, my favorite part of that job turned out to be doing my own show. And we made exactly two years of it before I came here to the Institute for Humane Studies.

Well, honestly, no one could have kept me away from the mic for long, and the good folks here at IHS were happy to oblige my idea for a show that chronicled all the amazing programs, people, and ideas that pass through IHS year after year. I know I absolutely loved my times at IHS events as a graduate student, and I would have been thrilled to hear as much as I could from our massive network of scholars over the years.

So now, here we are, *Ideas in Progress*, where we follow our scholars from graduate school, to exercising major influence in their fields, where we see their work develop from the stages where it's a fuzzy idea voiced in a discussion colloquia to a paper in a workshop, then a chapter in a manuscript, then who knows, maybe eventually, a Nobel lecture. Let's aim high people. Although, of course now that I say that, I'm certain there are higher goals out there than Nobel prizes. As a scholar, this is definitely a difficult path to pursue, and a high standard to reach, but that's why we're here, after all. And for now, I'll just leave it at this, go to the IHS.org for more and check it all out.

So, finally, let's get down to the actual subject for the day. The IHS recently hosted a discussion colloquia in Georgetown, Washington DC, on the role of women in the classical liberal tradition. The IHS's own president and CEO, Emily Chamlee-Wright acted as discussion leader. Now, our discussion leaders are supposed to remain neutral during the course of a program. Acting as Socratic facilitators for the participants to talk among themselves. So, to get Emily's point of view on the readings, we asked her to join us in the studio, the day before the event.

Emily holds a PhD in Economics from George Mason University. She taught at Beloit College, and worked as Provost and Dean at Washington College. She's published six books. And has been leading IHS since 2016. It's an absolute pleasure and a thrill to kick off the show with Emily Chamlee-Wright. Emily, welcome, and thank you so much for joining us here on the first episode, our inaugural episode of Ideas in Progress. And I, I want to start by asking you, why this topic, women in classical liberalism? Why at this moment? And why in God's name would you volunteer to lead the discussion, when it's clearly so much more fun to just be a participant?

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [06:50](#)

Well, first of all, thank you for inviting me to be on this inaugural episode. I'm so delighted to be a part of it, and so, I'm so grateful that you're doing this project, Anthony, so I'm, I'm really psyched about it. So the topic is one that is close to my heart on women with the classical liberal tradition. We care a lot about liberty, and, uh, human beings have always had to, to really grow toward liberty, and elbow their way both, both in a, uh, political sense, but also elbow their way intellectually towards liberty.

Uh, and in that process, often times even the best minds left half the population behind. And so, it's really important that if we're focusing in on liberty, uh, uh, we need to make sure that we have a specific focus and lens on women who have so often been tangential or peripheral to that project. In terms of why this moment, I, I think, you know, uh, women around the globe, a lot of women around the globe, uh, still do not have the same equal rights as men. Uh, that's something that we need to keep our eye on, and, and make sure that we're part of advancing liberty for all human beings.

Uh, but even here, where we arguably enjoy, um, an incredible degree of autonomy and liberty, there's still deep interest in doing the culture work of obtaining equality and freedom. And I think that classical liberal voices need to be a

part of those conversations. And, uh, you asked me about, about, you know, why am I discussion leader, it's because, that's what I got asked to do.

Anthony Comenga: [06:50](#) (laughs)

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [08:30](#) And, like, I don't, I don't set the, the, the standards of who gets to be invited, so, um, I was just super, super lucky to be invited as discussion leader. And I'm super psyched to listen to really bright minds around the table think about these readings.

Anthony Comenga: [08:45](#) Well, you know, you mentioned, um, some heavy hitter intellectuals, nonetheless, leaving out half the population. And I, I sort of wanted to start, um, by taking issue with this concept that's introduced in one of the sessions, it's a familiar phrase out there of, "The three founding mothers of 20th century classical liberalism." And I, I really don't like this idea, that there were only three founding mothers. Um, I find it a bit patronizing.

To me, it's like saying that women are somehow genetically, or culturally programed to, to not really care about individual liberty, their emphasis is on something else. Something usually related to the "traditional role" of women in society, raising children, maintaining the household, or whatever. Individual liberty, uh, doesn't, um, strike a chord with women apparently in the way that it does men. And I think that idea is, is basically nonsense. Um, and I'm with someone like, uh, Nima Sanandaji, who says that, "Really, classical liberal principles are at the core of complex society."

Right, the way back through world history. The only reason we have complex societies is because there's at least some level of acceptance of these principles in practice. Um, and it really permeates society. You can't draw clear lines between men and women in this way. Women have always been, uh, participants in developing the ideas, and really the practice on the ground of, of classical liberalism. So, I, I think this idea that there are three founding mothers, Isabel Paterson, Rose Wilder Lane, and Ayn Rand, is just flat out wrong. But, I wonder, am I making too much of this?

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [10:34](#) I don't think you're making too much of this. I think it's really important to recognize that the history of freedom, is women have always been, um, an important part of the history of freedom. And also, within the classical liberal intellectual tradition as well. And it's probably, I, a misnomer, uh, to

identify, uh, three, uh, writers who really came, their, their, their, um, most important influential first works all came about in 1943, which is interesting in and of itself. That there was this coalesce.

Uh, but to identify them as the mothers, is, is misleading, because it really leaves behind the 18th century, and 17th century, uh, writers, uh, 17th century writers like Mary Estelle, Margaret Fell, Margaret Cavendish. These are some of the folks, also, that we're going to be discussing in the, uh, discussion colloquium. And so, uh, that's an important thing to be focused on, as well. So, uh, this, this, uh, common phrase of the founding mothers was a, I think, a, a, a, a good turn of phrase, as it struck someone as a good turn of phrase. But it's, uh, but it's historically inaccurate, for sure.

Anthony Comenga: [11:53](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [11:53](#)

Uh, and it also, as you say, uh, misrepresents the, the really important role that women have played in advancing liberty, uh, uh, um, across the globe, um, historically. But there's another element here that I think is important too, is, is that, uh, when we think about the role that reason plays in, um, the writings that we're looking at, that, that's powerful, because, uh, reason is reason. I- if you look at it from one respect, reason is reason, it doesn't have a gender.

And so, that's an important point to make, because that was the point that people like, Mary Estelle, and, and, uh, Cavendish, and Margaret Fell were making as well. Um, but with that said, uh, you know, again, um, um, men had for the most part, um, who had thought about liberty, had missed that point, had missed the point that, that women also reason. And so, I think it is important that, that we needed women in some respect to, um, play a part in making the case, uh, that women are in fact capable of reasoning, reason, that women are full human beings, full persons in this sense. So the fact that women were also articulating these arguments is an important piece of the intellectual tradition as well.

Anthony Comenga: [13:19](#)

Now, uh, y-, I think we're all well aware by now that, you know, women have been sort of scrubbed from history. That, uh, the men who have usually written history over the ages have not really cared to write women into the record, or to recover their participation in, uh, history's grand unfolding. Um, but, you know, and, and, the, the three founding mothers phrase, again, does a bit of that, uh, that, um, problematic work. But our, our

reader here includes documents, as you said, from the English restoration period, uh, just after the Civil Wars, our, our earliest selections are from Margaret Cavendish, uh, and Margaret Fell, and, you know.

Uh, so, from, from Fell, we have women speaking Justified, and from Cavendish, we have selections from her philosophical letters. I mean, she, she wrote a ton. I think something like 21 books worth of material. And, so, you know, again, clearly women are very actively involved in developing liberal ideas well before the 20th century. I wonder, what, what could you tell me, uh, about these readings? What sort of logic do you think was behind the choices to include these readings? And why was this period in the, the later part of the 17th century so important for the development of classical liberalism?

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [14:43](#)

Yeah, and you're going to be in a better position than I am, uh, as the historian in this conversation. I'm just an economist. Um, uh, i- to answer some of those questions, and I would, I would, you know, um, volley them back to you, um, if, if you've got insight on, on, uh, the answers to some of those questions. I w- I would like to hear them. Let me just say a little bit about Margaret Fell, um, in this respect, because that is a, a bit of history that I'm familiar with.

Uh, I was interested in Quaker history, uh, back in graduate school. It was one of the first serious papers I wrote, was on, uh, Quaker business history. And, um, Margaret Fell, was, uh, married to a Judge Thomas Fell, of Swarthmoor Hall, near Ulverston in England. And she was, uh, at the time, uh, she was a, she was a mother of eight. She was managing a very large estate. She was, um, it, it had going concerns in terms of a bakery and brewhouse, et cetera. Um, it was in, it was in this period, around, uh, 1652, that she met George Fox, who is, um, considered the, the founder of the Religious Society Friends, the Quakers.

Um, they didn't call themselves that at the time, but that's, uh, but, but the Quaker, um, movement really, really, uh, it takes root with, with George Fox. And so, uh, Margaret Fell meets fox in 1652. And, and it's important because Fox's theology is, is, is really radically egalitarian in this sense, um, that, uh, it's this idea that, um, uh, the light of Christ, um, contemporary Quaker's tend to say the light of God, or the spirit, um, but, but, in, in, in Fox's words, it was the light Christ, within every single human being is accessible.

And it is, that's all that's needed to, uh, connect to the, uh, diving, that you didn't need an intermediary, like a priest, or a pastor. Um, that it was, that you're connection to the divine was, was direct, because there was this light within every person. And he meant, literally every person. And so that has radical implications for, um, uh, uh, people of different races for example. It has radical implications for, uh, it's one of the reasons why Quakers were among the first abolitionists, because they recognize, well there's that of the light of God in every person, then you, you are enslaving God, if you are enslaving a human being, so we can't do that anymore.

Um, and similarly, uh, Fox, uh, prior to meeting Fell, had already, um, challenged this notion that women should not provide testimony, uh, or spoken testimony in church. And so he had a very, very different interpretation of, uh, the teachings of the Apostle Paul on this, in this respect. And, uh, I needn't go into the details here, but he was, you know, sort of already on the record of, um, of challenging these very traditional notions of women with respect to the church.

So, he meets, uh, Margaret Fell, and quickly, uh, Margaret, you know, joins up with the Quaker movement. She becomes what, um, uh, many refer to her as the nurturing mother of Quakerism. Um, her husband never converts fully, but he's sympathetic. And so Swarthmoor Hall becomes a hub for the movement, uh, for the Quaker movement. Um, it, it provides, um, uh, hospitality and a place of, of, um, uh, a destination for travelers, and for people who are seeking refuge from the legal system, uh, that was putting them in prison for not adhering to, um, not paying tithes, uh, not paying tithes to the Church of England, not, um, uh, not swearing oaths to magistrates.

Not removing their hats in front of, uh, dignitaries, because they, "Why would I remove my hat in front of you, that means that, that I'm suggesting that you're, um, more important or different than I am. I, there's no reason for me to remove my hat." Right? So, these are the, um, the, uh, interesting quarks of, of, of Quaker tradition that lands them in a lot of trouble. And so, Judge Fell helps them out, including, uh, his own wife in some respects.

So, so he dies in 1685, and, uh, 11 years later, she marries George Fox. And so, um, Margaret Fell is really swept up into this, this incredibly, radically, egalitarian movement. And, um, and part of that work is in her writing. She, herself, was in prison when she was writing a lot of this work, um, around the,

um, um, rethinking, re- the interpretations of Apostle Paul's, uh, guidance, and saying, "No, that's not what it's about. It's, it's, uh, that every, every human being, as long as their connected to the light of Christ, uh, is, um, uh, absolutely someone we need to be hearing from."

And Jesus, himself, she walks through all of the scripture, and it points to all the examples in which Jesus is relying on women, and, and listening to women in their spoken testimony. So this becomes a, a defining feature of, of, of Quaker tradition. And so when we ask about what are, what's going on within the culture at the time, um, some of these radical re-thinkings of religious traditions is certainly a part of that.

Anthony Comenga: [20:25](#)

Yeah, you know, some of my favorite figures from the 17th century, from early American history, are people like Ann Hutchinson, in Massachusetts, and the, the, uh, Antinomians, and for those who don't know, Antinomian, uh, comes from the Greek words for roughly something like against laws. And they believed, um, in quite radical fashion that, uh, there was no obligation, there was no obligation for individuals to follow manmade laws if they conflicted with what the individual saw as their direct line to God through, you know, individual interpretation of the scripture.

So, if manmade laws conflict with what you feel God is telling you in your heart, you simply don't have to follow those laws. And it got Ann Hutchinson banished from the colony, um, and, uh, mainly because she was, she was discouraging people from enlisting in the militia, and, uh, fighting the Indians to take their land. So, you know, uh, it's, it's interesting to me that Fell lives from 1614-1702. It's, it's pretty much the whole scope of the 17th century-

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [20:25](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Anthony Comenga: [21:35](#)

... which is tremendously radical. That, that period of the English civil wars is just incredible. Uh, because as, as many historians and contemporaries noted, it, it seemed like the world was turned upside down during the, the period of the civil wars. And, you know, I think there's a lot to that phrasing, uh, especially for women's history, because we do see some pretty severe cracks in the patriarchy, if you will, forming during this period. And, and people like Fell are sort of on the front lines of that. I mean, she's one of Quakerisms, uh, valiant 60s, they were called, the, the first generation of, uh, proselytizers, spreading the, the word of Quakerism, uh, to people

throughout England and, and, uh, I believe she spent some time in the Americas, too, for a short time. I know Fox did for sure.

Um, but now, it does strike me, uh, that both of these writers that, that we're talking about now, Margaret Fell, and Margaret Cavendish, lots of Margarets going around here, um, they're two very different writers, with very different perspectives. Cavendish is a scientist, and Fell is definitely a theologian. And her work is packed with, with, uh, theology and references to the Bible, spiritual beliefs that are very much different from the kind of things Cavendish is focusing on.

Cavendish had to convince people she's not an atheist.

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [23:01](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Anthony Comenga: [23:02](#)

You know.

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [23:02](#)

Right.

Anthony Comenga: [23:02](#)

And, uh, Margaret Fell, meanwhile, um, is, is all about the word of God, uh, in her, again, her individual interpretation of it. But it, it strikes me that both authors, and many of the others on our, our list of readings, they do still seem to buy into some kind of patriarchal essentialism. Um, so for Margaret Fell, she says that God instilled certain essential characteristics in women, um, but she does this clever shift of saying that instead of damning them for, for nature's defects, Jesus makes use of them, for Godly purposes, just like he does all sorts of sinners, right?

Um, and, I mean, she says, "Sure, the, the Catholic church is the mother of harlots." And she uses, you know, condemnatory phrases like that, uh, uh, they're sitting there on anti-Christ throne trying to rule the world, but now that we've had the Protestant revolution, a free woman will be able to take over, uh, that position and promote positive change, uh, in the new millennium. And for somebody like Cavendish, uh, she says that, "It's in the nature of women as a sex to express more vanity than wit, more ignorance than knowledge, and more folly than discretion."

So, what, what do you have to say sort of in defense of, of these early, uh, classical liberal women, who, nonetheless, seem to buy into so much of the, the ideology of their age?

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [24:36](#)

Mary Estelle, you could add to that list, uh, as well, that there is this acquiescence to the notion that the virtuous woman is the modest and obedient daughter, the chaste wife, the nurturing mother. These are the, these are the roles that are ascribed, these are the, these are the sanctioned roles. And, but, I would say though, that it's writers like Estelle, and Cavendish, and Fell, who worked in, in this, in this, uh, this formula. This formula... The formula is that to get to virtue, you need wisdom, therefore, you needed education. And to get to wisdom, you need reason.

And so this sort of reason, wisdom, virtue, uh, uh, triangle here, it works in through the, um, th- through the knitting of the, of this, of this, um, uh, of this formula, it works in a ton of agency. And so the way I look at, um, intellectual growth, uh, the, um, intellectual advancement, it's, it's a little bit like ascending a rock face, and that's an imperfect metaphor, because when we ascend something like a mountain, we know when we're at the summit, we know at the top. And when, in intellectual work, we never know when we're at the top, right?

Anthony Comenga: [24:36](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [26:03](#)

So, it's no- it's not a perfect metaphor, but it kind of works here, uh, for the following purpose, that when, if, if you're imagining your, your climbing up this very steep slippery rock, you've got a toe hold here, a toe hold there, a finger grip going on, and you're just groping for the next toe hold or finger grip. Now, anything that helps you move upward is good. And so, there maybe, and, and you may be, if you imagine yourself on this very sheer rock, you may be able to imagine that, that there may be other toe holds that are better than the one you're on.

But, if you don't know that it's there, well, it's not accessible to you. And even if you know it's there, it might be 200 yards, uh, to the right, and you can't get there. Right? So, you work with what you've got, and you work with the toe holds and the finger grips that you've got right accessible to you. And think of that's, that is the nature of the intellectual work of people working within this context.

Now, it calls into question a, uh, the question of, of as these thinkers are thinking about the role of reason, it also calls into the question: what role does convention play in how reason unfolds, or how argument unfolds? And what's the tension between reason and, um, convention or custom? Are we locked into convention and custom, even in our thinking? Even as we

are articulating the importance of reason, we might be somewhat bounded in our rationality, we might be bounded in our arguments, because of culture conditioning, for example.

Uh, John Stuart Mill was, was, uh, very clear about the dangers of convention and custom in this respect. Um, and so I'm really interested and curious about the- about this challenge of, of, um, kind of false consciousness in our argumentation. I think it can be a real thing that we do need to contend with. At the same time, I'm, I'm skeptical of there being a perspective list, perspective. I'm skeptical of us being able to immediately jump to the most optimal spot on the rock face that allows us to climb that rock in the most efficient fashion that doesn't allow for any missteps, um, uh, or levering, uh, sort of antiquated, unnecessary troupe, cultural troupes.

That's the world we live in, is that we're, we're embedded socially and culturally. And we are operating, when we're exercising our faculties of reason, we're always operating within the context of a particular historical period, particular cultural context. And we're doing the best that we can in that context. And so, I'm looking at every step they're making as being a positive move forward, despite the fact that we can, now that we're on, you know, we're at a much higher level, we can now scrutinize the ground that they were operating from, and say, "Oh, that, they really got that piece of it wrong."

Well, they were doing the best they could. Uh, so I think that we need to make sure that we're, uh, maintaining a sense of intellectual humility, even though we're in a kind of superior position, um, intellectually because we have the vantage point of, of being able to look at the past.

Anthony Comenga: [29:27](#)

Yeah. And I mean, geeze, talk about doing the best they could. I mean, these are Margaret Fell and Cavendish, in particular, uh, lead quite storied lives, where they accomplished quite a lot. I mean, Mar- Margaret Fell, herself, spent some time in jail, as I understand, maybe about a year and a half in total, on two different occasions. And, geeze, Cavendish's resume is, is massive. I mean, she's one of the earliest science fiction writers. She was the first woman to attend a meeting of the Royal Society of London.

(laughs) Contemporaries called her Mad Mag, which, you know, I think you should always be measured by the insults your enemies want to hurl at you.

Ideas in Progress, Episode 1, Women and the Classical Liberal Tradition

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [30:06](#)

[inaudible 00:30:06]. Yes.

Anthony Comenga: [30:06](#)

You know? Uh, at least as long as they're the right enemies.

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [30:09](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Anthony Comenga: [30:09](#)

But, you know, I do, I do sort of have a, an issue with, uh, the sort of kingship of reason, uh, and the enlightenment as a movement, and a kind of crowning reason as the be-all end-all, because, I, you know, I, I do s- take sort of a post modernist line on the enlightenment as a concept, or, uh, a period in history. Um, I think there are lots of problems with it. Uh, just like with the founding mothers issue, I find it a little patronizing to say that sort of before elite men started collecting together in coffee shops, and salons, and then finally invited women, or tolerated their presence among them, that there really was no women's involvement in intellectual life.

You know, certainly, somebody like Ann Hutchinson, uh, uh, 100 years before you could say the enlightenment is in full force, you know, she, she, uh, played a very deep role in the intellectual life of early America. And, uh, our two Margarets from the English civil wars, already show the lie here too. You know, they, women's involvement doesn't start with the enlightenment either.

Um, and, you know, reason was, I think, more often than not employed to push women back down, you know, from a lot of the, uh, growth or climbing up the rock face that we did see during something like the civil wars, where the world's turned upside down. The enlightenment tries to turn it back on its, back on the right end, uh, and just put the most reasonable, rational people in charge.

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [31:38](#)

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Anthony Comenga: [31:39](#)

But of course, the definition of reason and rationality is always dependent upon the person doing the talking, right? Um, so, you know, what, if anything, and I assume you think there was something, uh, special about the enlightenment, what was special about this point in history that allowed women to punch through and really start developing what we know is feminism today?

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [32:02](#)

Well, I do think that there is power in this idea of, of reason in its, in its purest sense that, um, I'm, I'm with you in terms of the, the critique of, of reason with a capital R, then becoming its

own form of religion, uh, then becoming, uh, fostering a sense of hubris, and, and eliminating intellectual humility. That's where we take a wrong turn. And F.A. Hayek for example, you know, points out this, um, this problem of reason, um, inappropriately understood.

But, for a moment, let's go back to the early part of the 17th century, and, and, and talk about the power of Cartesian thinking here, where he, in his meditations, he separates reason from the body. Reason becomes disembodied in its, in its pure sense. Um, so if reason is disembodied, that opens the door for a very radical notion. And that's that it has no gender, for example.

Now, this idea is, is, has got all sorts of potential for then being abused, just as you point out, right? That, that then we think that because we have reason, we think we can control very complex processes. That we think that we can engineer society. That's where we take a wrong turn, for sure. But, think for a moment, though, about this notion that reason is something that we all can exercise, um, and that it has really nothing to do with the physical, the particular body that we're in.

This opens the door for some of those early thinkers. That said, then, but Cavendish also recognized that, um, we come in these bodied vessels, and so, uh, it is, it, the person looking at, at you, the first thing they encounter is not the quality of your mind, they're encountering your physical presence, and then there's all sorts of things that go along with that. So, issues of beauty, beauty, femininity, femininity, and, um, uh, and our role as, as mothers, and nurturers, and all of that that goes along with that.

So much of our experience is connected to our bodies, that it's really hard to disentangle the thinking from the embodiment of, um, of our form. So, there's, so there's some really contemporary feminist themes also coming through in these early thinkers as well, which I find kind of exciting to discover, and to, and to see some of the threads that we think of as being part of the post-modernist critique, they're actually there, right in some of these early thinkers, too.

Anthony Comenga: [34:43](#)

Hm. What's your, uh, favorite reading from the whole list?

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [34:47](#)

Uh, that's so hard. That's so hard. Um, but I'm really pleased that we included something from Elinor Ostrom.

Anthony Comenga: [34:54](#)

Hm.

Emily Chamlee-Wright: [34:55](#)

Because, she is, um, you know much closer to our, um, you know... She is a contemporary. She was, uh, though she's passed away, uh, it's been relatively recent. And as, um, the first, uh, female to win the Nobel Prize in Economics, she looms very large in, in my world as an economist. Um, and it, and it brings to the foreground the question, does it matter that she was a woman? I mean, you know, in one sense, no. She... Good work is good work. Good economics is good economics. Good field work is good field work.

Um, but, uh, I do think that there is something to the point, um, that she was a person who lived a life in the world, and she also lived a person, as she was not just an academic, she was a woman academic in, in a male dominated discipline. Uh, you know, she was, uh, denied entry into the PhD program in Economics in UCLA. I think, I hope that they're kicking themselves now, uh, for making that decision.

But even when she was accepted into the political science, uh, program, um, there was an active conversation that said, "You know, why would we give up a spot in the PhD program to a woman who is not going to get a job?" Right? So, so they, they were very explicit about the calculus that, uh, that they thought it was a risk to, and it was a missed opportunity that, that, that, that was a slot that could have gone to someone who would be, who'd go on to, to be a successful academic. And clearly she was not.

When she was, when she was recruited, or when Vincent Ostrom was recruited to, um, Bloomington, to Indiana, um, you know, she was the trailing spouse. And she taught Introduction to American Government on Saturday mornings at 7:30 in the morning, because that was how she could work. So, I think about those realities and think that, that's a person who figured out how to make stuff work. She figured out that the word doesn't work according to a script. And she starts to put in place the, um... She starts to really work out, uh, Vincent Ostrom's ideas, um, around polycentricity and the polycentricity of governance.

And she starts to recognize, you know, the usual formulations that we have, that solutions are either wholly government solutions, or wholly market solutions. She's saying I think it's more complicated than that. I think there's a lot of other forms of ways of getting things done that are worked out on the

ground in, and, you know, I think that there's some principles behind it. But, but it's not just these obvious two, uh, paradigms. That there's something more complicated that can happen as well when you let people engage in governance from the bottom up. They can discover ways of getting things done that aren't obvious, um, from a distance.

And so, she started really investigating from the ground up. Uh, the way in which communities were solving all sorts of really complex and complicated problems that related to, um, common pool resource problems. And, the usual solutions that people would always come up with, which was either has to be a market mechanism, or a state government mechanism. She really turned on its head. And it was that ability to sort of think outside of that hyper-rational, uh, economic man that dominates thinking within economics.

That ability to think around that, and I'm not saying that she was the only one, or it was only women, who challenged, uh, that, that hyper-rational notion of economic man. But I do think it was her life, lived in the world as a woman, as an academic woman who really had to, to work around all of these constraints that a lot of her male counterparts did not have to work around. That, I think, leads someone to be open to seeing possibilities around the corner, and under rocks that otherwise just aren't obvious.

Anthony Comenga: [39:01](#)

Next week, Emily Chamlee-Wright joins us once again, this time, after wrapping up the discussion colloquium. We'll catch up with her about the discussion, more on the readings, and some final reflections on women in classical liberalism. So be sure to subscribe now, and while you're at it, go ahead and rate us on iTunes. That's absolutely the best way to help a new show get more traction, and you'll have my undying thanks. See you next week, and keep the progress coming.