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A portrait of John Locke, an English philosopher, is the central focus of the cover. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark, heavy coat over a white shirt with a ruffled collar. He has long, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the left of the viewer. The background is dark and indistinct.

# The Fortunate

*Ten great writers highlight  
how we created free and  
affluent societies.*

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Bastiat Read Hayek Mises McCloskey Ridley King Haidt Wheatley Murphy

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# Introduction

Life's good. Much better than it was for my parents and my grandparents. Apparently, lots of people have been beavering away to create the free and prosperous world I now enjoy. I'm one of the fortunate. But I am not alone. Indeed, there are millions of us all over the world.<sup>1</sup>

One hundred years ago, my grandparents raised four children in a 100-square metre weatherboard cottage in Geelong West. There was a dunny in the backyard, a rainwater tank to catch drinking water and a Coolgardie safe to keep food fresh. Wood provided the energy needed to run the household, including a wood stove for cooking, a wood-heated copper pot for washing clothes and a small wood fireplace in the parlour.

On a separate suburban block adjacent to the house, my grandfather grew vegetables to serve the family's everyday needs: in season there were potatoes, onions, tomatoes, broad beans, cabbages, lettuces, carrots, parsnips, swedes, pumpkins, marrows, zucchinis, peas, beans, silver beet, spring onions, rhubarb, parsley, mint and basil. Grandpa used a Daisy air rifle to scare the sparrows off his strawberry patch. There were apple, pear, apricot, quince and walnut trees. At the back of the block, a chook shed housed a few hens, which produced eggs for the family. There was a large family Bible but few other books. Grandpa was a barber and rode his bike to work. The family generated its own entertainment. The boys kicked a football on nearby Baker's Oval, and Uncle Doug went on to play for Geelong in the Victorian Football League.

Compare our own experience. Even on the coldest morning, Jill and I wake to a warm home that is centrally heated. Our toilets are inside; no early morning walk in the chilly, half-light of dawn is required. Our food is stored in a refrigerator. Fresh fruit and vegetables are in plentiful supply from the local supermarket. We wash our clothes in an electric washing machine - saving 10 hours of housework each week.<sup>2</sup> We travel in comfort by car, protected from rain and wind, while listening to the radio or our choice of music, guided by voiced satellite navigation. We get our news and information from print newspapers, magazines and books, as well as online via the internet. We watch news and current affairs, sport and drama on television. We can even watch sport live from around the world – Olympic Games from Tokyo, Grand Slam Tennis from Wimbledon, World Cup Football from Abu Dhabi. Moreover, National Theatre Live enables us to experience the London stage from our local cinema.

The personal computer has let us become authors of our own content in digital form. We communicate frequently and inexpensively by phone, email and social media. Video calling enables us to enjoy live family events with relatives in Sydney, Chicago and Corseaux on Lake Geneva, or we can send them photos taken on our mobile phones. In the twenty-first century, our work is less physical and more productive, so we have more time for pleasant pursuits. We attend concerts and visit art galleries. We socialise with our friends in cafés and restaurants, at the movies and at clubs where we play tennis and golf. At public sporting events we mingle with tens of thousands of our fellow citizens. We fly interstate and overseas for business and holidays. One hundred years ago, my grandparents had none of this.

Today, Australians are safer, wealthier and live longer than ever before. In the last hundred years, homicide rates have fallen from 2.6 to 1.0 per 100,000, gross domestic profit (GDP) per capita has risen from \$7,828 to \$49,831, and life expectancy has risen from 61.0 years to 83.4 years. Similar changes have occurred in other countries, some even more dramatically. More people were lifted out of poverty in the past one hundred years than in the entire history of humankind.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I. One hundred years of growth worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> Pinker (2018) p. 251

Worldwide, GDP per capita rose from \$2,241 to \$15,212. <sup>3</sup>

*Though it is easy to sneer at national income as a shallow and materialistic measure, it correlates with every indicator of human flourishing... Most obviously, GDP per capita correlates with longevity, health and nutrition. Less obviously, it correlates with richer ethical values like peace, freedom, human rights and tolerance... The citizens of richer countries have greater respect for "emancipative" or liberal values such as women's equality, free speech, gay rights, participatory democracy, and protection of the environment.* <sup>4</sup>

What has changed over time to give us this delightful, comfortable, and more civil modern life? Why are we so lucky? Will it last?

Renowned economist and management consultant Peter Drucker advised, "You can't add a cubit to your span, but you can extend your reach by standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before." <sup>5</sup> Let us follow his advice and examine what the great minds of the past had to say about these matters. If we can understand how our free and prosperous society came about, we may be able to enjoy it without feeling guilty, and we can learn how to maintain it against forces that might unwittingly destroy it.

What follows is collection of essays by some of my favourite writers. Here, you will find Frédéric Bastiat wittily demolishing protectionism; Leonard E. Read describing the miracle of the price mechanism; F.A. Hayek analysing sound economic decision-making; Ludwig von Mises explaining how life changes when 'the customer becomes king'; Martin Luther King Jr dreaming of a United States in which its founding principles will apply equally regardless of race; Jonathan Haidt, Meg Wheatley and Peter Murphy warning us about disturbing trends in our society; Matt Ridley reviewing 100 years of communism; and Deirdre McCloskey explaining how the Great Enrichment came about due to a change in rhetoric about liberty and human dignity.

There is a joy in knowledge and a self-confidence that comes with understanding. I hope you find these ideas stimulating, and that you will debate them with your friends and colleagues. If reading them whets your appetite for more, I shall have succeeded.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.ourworldindata.org](http://www.ourworldindata.org).

<sup>4</sup> Pinker, S. (2018) p. 96

<sup>5</sup> I think he may have been reading the Bible at the time. King James version (KJV), Matthew 6:27

In *The Fortunate*, Peter Fenwick discusses the history, economics, and philosophies that underpin our modern world – the Lockean Revolution - highlighted by essays from some of his favourite writers.

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The philosophers of the Enlightenment told us that liberty works and that prosperity flows from it. Two hundred years of history has shown us that this is true - that it works in practice. Moreover, it applies, not just in the Anglosphere or in the developed world. The concepts are valid universally.

Societies which have embraced liberal democratic principles – individual rights, private property, the rule of law, and representative government – have thrived. Now everyone can live happy, prosperous and meaningful lives if they and their leaders choose to build their societies on these principles.

We should be proud of our heritage, confident in our achievements, and prepared to fight against forces that might unwittingly seek to destroy them. We are the fortunate. Let's keep it that way.

