

# Foreword

Can our ideals be achieved, and our dreams given reality?

That depends of course on what they are. It also depends on self-knowledge and an understanding of how the world works. With such understanding we can test the realism of our objectives and can plan to achieve them. Without such understanding, our efforts will likely prove futile.

But does anyone understand human nature and how the world works? Are the cynics right when they identify the selfish pursuit of status, wealth and power as the keys to success, or is there another way?

Human lives through most of time have been consumed with efforts to survive in a world of selfish power-seeking, and the lives of countless individuals have been collateral damage as the few have succeeded at the expense of the many. Even religions that have sought instead a world of love have frequently been dragged into the maelstrom of power-seeking, and seen their ideals abandoned along the way.

Yet in the last few hundred years humanity seems to have set out on a different path, and the apparent inevitability of poverty, sickness and lawless power has been replaced by a world that is succeeding in abolishing poverty, creating wealth, vastly improving health, and restraining lawless power. Selfish power seeking has not ceased, but a way to the achievement of the ideals and dreams of the many, rather than of the few, seems to have opened before us.

The reason for this step-change in human opportunity is the growth in understanding about how the world works, and in human self-knowledge. This new understanding has empowered the many and made possible the restraint of the selfish few.

Peter Fenwick, in this wonderful collection of short readings, has brought together some brilliant historic and recent contributions that illuminate the understanding that has lifted human institutions and policies to the new plane.

His focus is not on the advances of physical, natural and medical sciences, but on the advances in knowledge, gained through experience and logic, of how lawless power may be restrained, poverty abolished, and wealth created, and how human dignity has been advanced as a result.

The most remarkable and fortunate discovery about how the social world works, made in this recent period of history, is that institutions securing extensive and equal human freedom can lead to unparalleled cultural, social, political and economic advance. The old idea that a small number of the powerful, imposing their will and limited understanding on others, can secure peaceful progress for all, has been shown time and again to be false.

The readings collected by Peter Fenwick are designed to explain why this is so, and they provide an overwhelming case for organising society to maximise the contributions of every person, to welcome and honour the variations in talents and ambitions that exist, to acknowledge and utilise the vast pool of knowledge and values dispersed among the whole population, recognising and understanding the implications for peace and prosperity of the enormous web of relationships in which we are all embedded and live our lives. Only a world guided by the principle of equal personal liberty and peaceful co-ordination by free and informed exchange can fulfill hopes of peaceful progress and avoid oppression.

Peter Fenwick has provided classic essays and modern contexts to illustrate the principles that

have been learnt, and the need to keep learning from experience. That it is necessary to continue to work to understand these principles shows that they are, to many, counter-intuitive, and that our immediate environments can readily mislead us down paths that end in the failure of good intentions, and if applied to the wider world, oppression. Truths about human beings and human relations, discerned by experience, careful thought and disciplined research need to be understood.

Anyone who wishes to understand our world and be effective in action will benefit from this excellent volume.

David Kemp  
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David Kemp is an Australian politician and academic. From 1990 to 2004 he was a member of the federal parliament, and from 1996 he was a minister in the Howard government overseeing portfolios including Employment, Education and Environment. Before entering parliament, he was Professor of Politics at Monash University and after leaving parliament was Professor and Vice-Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Melbourne, president of the Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division) and a fellow of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government. He is the author of *Australian Liberalism* - a five-volume history of Australia.