Orienting Neoliberalism

Illuminating Neoliberalism's Comprehensive Doctrine

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Abstract

How can we better understand neoliberalism as a political theory, and what does this reveal to us? The literature surrounding neoliberalism is not entirely clear on whether it should be understood as a specific political theory or an assortment of policies and legislation that promotes capitalism and markets. I build an interpretation of neoliberalism as a concrete political theory centered around markets and their operation, drawing from chief expositors such as Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek and secondary sources such as Thomas Biebricher. Invoking the distinction between "political" and "comprehensive" theories traditionally associated with John Rawls, I argue that neoliberal political theory's complex relationship to economizing conflict, to markets, and to the place of capital in politics renders it simultaneously political, and comprehensive, in different ways. For this argument it is helpful, if not necessary, to understand comprehensiveness as a spectrum, contrasting the common use of the idea. I draw parallels from neoliberalism to both Rawls and John Stuart Mill in order to showcase its duality and further argue that neoliberalism carries a comprehensive doctrine rooted in the competitive order that it employs through markets. Making this feature of neoliberalism transparent will, I hope, clarify political and scholarly conversation about neoliberalism as a political commitment.

Introduction

Nowadays it seems that the word “neoliberalism” is thrown around a lot, whether it be on social media, in the news, or in college classes. Often it is used in a negative connotation, at least in the circles of a senior in college, and in those circles, it is frequently understood as all the bad things in our life that are attributed to capitalism. These include the skyrocketing prices of healthcare, the increased influence of corporations in the American political system, and the idea that you can “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” amid the rising prices of housing and education. At the same time, it’s been very influential in promoting global markets and international relations, increasing the general quality of living in the US, and diversifying the job market to promote economic growth and wealth accumulation.

This research was inspired by a desire to analyze neoliberalism. This discussion begins by laying out what neoliberalism is, drawing from chief neoliberal thinkers to build a clear interpretation of neoliberalism’s political theory from the nebulous array of various definitions and understandings of the term. In addition, I detail numerous critiques of neoliberalism, some focused on the empirical and others on the theoretical.

In exploring neoliberalism, I ultimately arrive at a few important conclusions: it affirms and defends the market as the center of its political construction, it takes steps to distinguish itself from an idealized understanding of nineteenth-century liberalism, and finally, it posits itself as minimally comprehensive yet there is a deeper thread of comprehensiveness underlying the text which convolutes discussions surrounding neoliberalism.

The thesis proceeds as follows. After describing the major pillars of neoliberal thought, I articulate the distinction between comprehensive and political liberalisms. This distinction is

commonly used to categorize a theory on its aims and structure, delineating between one that asserts a deeper philosophy and one which focuses on reconciling many different philosophies on a common, political ground. I use John Stuart Mill and John Rawls, each in his own chapter, in order to provide clear examples of each of these categories. I argue against those who see "comprehensive" and "political" as a binary, and instead argue that these words describe a spectrum, from minimally comprehensive or political on the one hand to fully comprehensive on the other.

Finally, I explore how neoliberalism is both political, and comprehensive. As a political doctrine, I argue that neoliberalism fails at effectively building a common ground that does not draw on a more comprehensive philosophy. I also draw attention to the way neoliberalism's more comprehensive claims build a culture of competition that guides the interactions of individuals in their political and private lives. The lack of transparency about neoliberalism's status as a political, or comprehensive, political theory is the basis, I argue, for intellectual confusion and lack of transparency about the terms of this important political doctrine. I conclude this discussion with an analysis of the broader implications of this research and how it might provide an off-ramp for a committed liberal who is discontent with neoliberalism.

Chapter I:

What is Neoliberalism?

In the most general sense, neoliberalism is a specific strain of liberalism that emphasizes private property, individualism, a constrained government, and, most of all, markets. While these properties are closely related to capitalism, and while neoliberalism acknowledges capitalism as the best economic system due to its use of markets and strong right to private property, the two concepts differ in that neoliberalism builds a political order around a theory of the market while capitalism is an economic system. Milton Friedman, a foremost neoliberal expositor, sees capitalism as "a necessary condition for political freedom" but stresses it is not sufficient for freedom and that more is required to ensure liberty (1962, 10).

In addition to Friedman, whose *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) is a core text for neoliberal theory, Friedrich Hayek's *Law, Legislation, and Liberty* (1973) and James Buchanan's *The Limits of Liberty: Between Anarchy and Leviathan* (1975) are key pieces in neoliberal theory. I lean primarily on Hayek and Friedman in this analysis, but Buchanan is a key player in the creation of the theory.

In *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (2019) and *Democracy, Neoliberalism, and James Buchanan* (2021) Thomas Biebricher provides one method for finding a common denominator for the wide array of neoliberal perspectives: finding their shared problematic (2021, 39; 2019). As proponents of markets as the center of society, the neoliberal problematic is the question of what is "indispensable to the maintenance of functioning markets" and to what level the state can assist markets in running smoothly (Biebricher 2019, 26). In other words, the strongest constant in neoliberal theory is the goal to establish the social and political conditions

required for markets to flourish. This question is part of what blurs the line between neoliberalism as a political theory and neoliberalism as an economic policy because the question asks where the line between private and public is drawn in the economy. Despite common features exhibited by authors such as Friedman and Hayek, they differ on the specifics of their approach to solving the central question. In general, Friedman takes a more libertarian approach that is focused on preventing the concentration of power, while Hayek details the purpose of law and its relation to liberty.

It is difficult to use ‘neoliberalism’ as a catchall for every way it has been used. James Ferguson, an anthropologist who analyzes political development, points out that there is a distinction between neoliberalism as the doctrine promoting free markets and liberal individuality and as the “regime of policies and practices associated with or claiming fealty to the doctrine” (2010, 170). Biebricher also makes a distinction between neoliberalism as a theory and the empirical reality of that political theory (Biebricher 2019, 10). This distinction is important because many critiques of neoliberalism are focused on the empirical rather than the theory. For example, neoliberalism might inform national economic policy and foreign policy through the expansion of capitalism. However, because the theory constructs an ideal to strive toward, the empirical policies may not succeed in accomplishing their goals. Such policies might claim fealty to neoliberalism, to use Ferguson’s language, but are not equivalent to the political theory that is neoliberalism.

I will lean on Biebricher’s interpretation of neoliberalism, which I will detail in more detail later, to build a definition of neoliberalism as a political theory rather than the aforementioned regime of practices, to use Ferguson’s language. I work within the broad definition of neoliberalism that Biebricher identifies to highlight key features of neoliberalism

that are pertinent to my analysis. Similar to him, I focus on the neoliberal centering of the market, its relationship to the political system, and the different dimensions and effects of that relationship.

In the sections below, I lay out my interpretation of the fundamental features of neoliberalism using features consistently exhibited in an assortment of neoliberal works, with a focus on those of Friedman and Hayek.

Historical Context

One of the earlier uses for the term "neoliberalism" was as a criticism of the conditions people face under capitalism (Biebricher 2019, 5–6). However, it has grown past the critical use and now represents a line of thought deeply connected to capitalism and a global market economy. Neoliberalism arose in opposition to Communism and National Socialism/Fascism in the 1900s, and as such sought alternatives to centrally planned economies, turning to individualism and markets instead (Biebricher 2019). This attachment is connected to the historical era in which neoliberalism was developed. With its roots in the mid-twentieth century, neoliberal thought arose at a time when capitalism had been fully established in the Western world. Many nations, with the United States at the forefront, had well-established systems of property rights, large corporations, and a culture of competition. This is markedly different from liberal authors such as John Locke who wrote in a time before the entrenchment of capitalism as we know it.

This is important in understanding that neoliberalism has a fundamental contextual difference compared to older, more classical liberalisms such as Locke's. As a primarily Western liberal tradition, with roots in the US and Europe, neoliberalism is committed to capitalism in

part because it believes that it is the best economic system for freedom, but also because it was founded with roots in capitalist nations, cementing it as the norm to neoliberal expositors.

Individual Liberty

At the center of neoliberalism lies the commitment to individual freedom, cementing it as a liberal theory. Friedman, who constantly draws the connection between neoliberalism and liberalism, refers to the heart of liberalism as the "belief in the dignity of the individual, in his freedom to make the most of his capacities and opportunities… subject only to the proviso that he not interfere with the freedom of other individuals to do the same" (1962, 195). Friedman further states, "as liberals, we take the freedom of the individual, or perhaps the family, as our ultimate goal in judging social arrangements" (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 12). He later defines "freedom as the absence of coercion of one person by another" (Friedman 2017, 185), aligning with Hayek's construction of freedom as "a state in which each can use his knowledge for his purposes" (2012, 54). The focus on individual liberty directs the neoliberal approach, establishing the baseline for the construction of the government. Although neoliberalism understands the necessity of government intervention at times, Friedman explicitly argues that "[e]very act of government intervention limits the area of individual freedom," maintaining the liberal notion of government as negative (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 32). Hence, from a neoliberal perspective any taxation with the purpose to redistribute wealth, or any progressive income taxes, limit individual because the government is using coercion to take from some to benefit others, directly interfering with their freedom to accumulate wealth (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 174)

The value of freedom for neoliberals is separate from what people might do with this freedom, and instead lies in guaranteeing that people can do what it is they wish to. Friedman clarifies that freedom is only for the responsible citizens of a society, and paternalism is necessitated at times (1962, 33). Some people, including children, may be unable to make decisions for themselves and others may have to make those decisions for them. This is consistent with other liberalisms such as John Stuart Mill's, as without such qualifiers even parenting becomes a limitation of freedom because it is coercive.

At the center of the mission to guarantee freedom in relations for everyone lies a challenge that Friedman identifies: how can one reconcile the necessary interdependence of people in a society with the individual freedom that liberals are dedicated to (1962, 13)? It would be unreasonable to expect everyone to act entirely independently, especially in a growing world with increased access to others. In order to get anything from bread to cars, we have to depend on other people in our society, thus there needs to be some underlying framework to organize those relations.

Private Property and Markets

If there needs to be an organization of the many in order to protect individual liberty, neoliberalism posits a free market economy as the best way to achieve this. Friedman and Hayek highlight the importance of the market in securing individual liberty and economic freedom, a viewpoint consistent with a broad understanding of liberalism. Neoliberals see the market as the counterpart to an economy that employs coercion, which is "the technique of the army and the modern totalitarian state" (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 13). Whether or not this dichotomy is realistic is beside the point in this analysis, as neoliberals see voluntary exchange and

cooperation as a preferable alternative to any form of coercion (Hayek 2012; Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 13). Friedman explains an ideal market economy akin to a collection of families who can produce their own goods and services, and because they can always just produce for themselves, they never have to enter an exchange unless they directly benefit from it (1962, 13). The market, and the voluntaristic exchanges which are its hallmark, is the center of neoliberal theory as a whole, including the political branch. This is not to say that any political construction is permissible so long as it builds around markets. For example, an authoritarian government with a market economy is impermissible to a neoliberal because they fundamentally see markets as means to lessen governmental power so that the government does not accumulate power and use it to infringe or violate the rights of its citizens (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 2–3).

Neoliberals make strong claims on behalf of markets. Friedman claims that there is “no example in time or place of a society that has been marked by a large measure of political freedom, and that has not also used something comparable to a free market to organize the bulk of economic activity” (1962, 9). Neoliberals argue that the market prevents coercion of consumers or sellers, because there is a vast array of alternative consumers and sellers to choose from, making it so that every interaction is voluntary and there are always alternatives to being forced into a transaction (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 14). As a result of this protection, individuals are free to interact with each other without fear of coercion, allowing them to greater realize their freedom and pursue their needs through purely beneficial interactions. There is a measure of hopefulness in this construction and through its use of markets as a means to organize individuals, because by seeing every market interaction as fully voluntary the cooperation that markets create is strictly individual and to each party’s benefit (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962,

14). This is the central hope of the market, because mutually beneficial, freely entered interactions between individuals provides a capacity to solve problems quicker and better than a centralized, coercive form of organization such as the government.

Furthermore, Neoliberalism trusts that the market will provide more creative and flexible solutions to problems individuals identify and want to solve, such as providing faster and more accessible internet connection to people, because fewer people need to be convinced to finance a venture compared to under a centralized economy. All one needs to do is convince a few wealthy individuals to support the venture and then that avenue can be explored (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 17–19). For example, if a person wants to start a program to clean up ocean pollution and trash, or another wants to start an initiative to plant trees, rather than having to turn to the government for funding, they can turn to private individuals for funding. They only have to convince a few people rather than an entire bureaucratic organization, allowing a more dynamic and rapid process.

There is also plenty of historical evidence pointing to the fact that markets and the specialization of labor make it possible for many different careers to exist, further increasing the capacity of individuals to develop and pursue their goals. While neoliberalism leaves the idea of what a good life might be in the hands of the people by not asserting what they should do with their freedom, it does assert that freedom is an aspect of one. It places trust in the market and people's self-interest to take society to the point where everyone can best pursue their goals and "use their own knowledge for their own purposes" (Hayek 2012, 170).

Tied to the market economy is the liberal commitment to private property that remains relatively unchanged from more classical liberalism. Importantly, the neoliberal conceptualization of property rights extends past an individual's goods and services, but to their

capital as well (Hayek 2012). While this is not necessarily distinct from classical liberalism, ideas of capital have evolved outside the 19th-century conceptualization of it. Capital in this sense is anything that might provide benefit to its owner or just aids in production in general (Hargrave 2021). As what is considered capital has grown from property or means to produce goods or property to more modern concepts such as stock and cash flow, capital has been more ingrained and influential in our society. This expanded understanding of what can be accumulated in modern society plays a great role in the expansion of market society and the influence of the market order on noneconomic domains such as politics and social clout.

Importantly, neoliberalism does not push for entirely unshackled market economies. The government, with its monopoly on coercion, is the only actor who can provide collective or public goods such as roads or national security, because competitive markets will run into issues where they cannot effectively provide these goods because the individual interests of people obstruct the cooperation necessary for such goods (Hayek 2012, 384). However, just because markets are unable to work entirely independently and sometimes achieve imperfect outcomes is not a shortcoming in the eyes of Hayek, and neoliberals in general, because the ‘perfect’ market is highly improbable (2012, 404–6). Hayek is not arguing that markets are good from the perspective that the “ideal” or “perfect” market is guaranteed, nor are its outcomes. He says, “the setting of a wholly unrealistic, over-high standard of what competition should achieve thus often leads to an erroneously low estimate of what in fact it does achieve,” meaning the reason he, and other neoliberals, defend markets is not for the abstract ideal market but rather the tangible benefits, such as freedom that they provide (Hayek 2012, 405).

Biebricher's Interpretation

In *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (2019) Biebricher distills a theory of what neoliberalism is as a distinct political theory in order to criticize it. He begins his analysis with historical context for the rise of neoliberalism, Biebricher highlights that neoliberalism was a theory built to revitalize liberalism in light of the growing collectivism and illiberal practices of the 1930s (Biebricher 2019, 21). Friedman, Hayek, and other neoliberals all stress that liberalism required a reinvention that modernized it both against classic adversaries of liberalism such as socialism and communism as well as perceived flaws of the older liberalism itself. Biebricher summarizes this viewpoint writing: "[i]n other words, the full field of adversity, against which neoliberalism defines itself, also includes wrongheaded strands of liberalism that developed over the latter half of the nineteenth century (2019, 22)."

Biebricher asks us to understand neoliberalism as a political theory that seeks to achieve the best social and political conditions for markets to thrive (Biebricher 2019, 26–28). He sees this construction as permitting a less one-dimensional critique focused on the neoliberal reliance on markets and greed, opening the door for a critique focused on the goal or approach of neoliberalism. Biebricher details four aspects of neoliberalism that are highly relevant to its goal of securing the conditions of functioning markets: the state, democracy, science, and politics (Biebricher 2019).

The Role of Government

The rule of law under neoliberalism serves to protect individual liberty and the rights of individuals, allowing them to pursue their own interests while interacting with others (Hayek 2012). Hayek clarifies that a key purpose of the government and rule of law is to guide the

interactions of individuals with one another, making sure that it limits negative actions toward others (2012, 97). What distinguishes te neoliberalk framework of a state from other liberal conceptualizations of government is that its duties do not stop at merely the prevention of coercion. Though the framework is largely negative and focused on the protection of liberty, there are still positive duties the neoliberal government must undertake.

While neoliberalism is closely associated with capitalism, that does not mean it supports unfettered, laissez-faire capitalism. Instead, it acknowledges that markets cannot effectively deliver public goods such as roads, national security, and a monetary system (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962; Ferguson 2010). The government's place in the economy under neoliberalism, is more present than the entirely negative, non-interventionist conceptualization but it is certainly still limited compared to socialist, communist, or even Keynesian economic systems. Examples of interventions neoliberals generally support include providing public security, preventing externalities or neighborhood effects,[1] preventing monopolies,[2] protecting contract and property rights with force, and upholding a monetary framework (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 26–31; Hayek 2012, 393–96). There is less unanimity when it comes to more specific policies. For example, Hayek is a proponent of some level of basic income to establish "a floor below which nobody need fall even when he is unable to provide for himself" (2012, 395). He is explicit that a basic income provided by the government should not be conflated with "the wholly different aims of securing a 'just' distribution of incomes" and to do so would "increase inequality beyond the degree that is the necessary condition of a functioning market order" by taxing some with the

[1] Externalities, or neighborhood effects as Friedman calls them, are effects that an action has on a third party that is not possible to include in the cost of the good (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 30). Examples include pollution, traffic, and the benefits people receive from city parks.

[2] Though Friedman is aware of the harm total monopolies can cause because they limit the options of individuals, he defends it in some cases. Friedman believes that, if the monopoly is tolerable, it can be more responsive to the rapid changes in society, so long as it is not a monopoly on an essential good (Friedman and Applebaum 1962, 28-29).

explicit purpose to redistribute wealth (Hayek 2012, 395), something Friedman is similarly critical of (1962, 174). Friedman, also advocates for government support of the poor and needy, though in a more limited fashion that "involves the minimum of interference with the market" and lists examples such as subsidies and trying to achieve a minimum income for people, but he stresses that there cannot be a minimum wage or subsidies for reasons other than poverty, as that would be an undue interference with market operations (Friedman 1951 [2012], 4). The acknowledgment of the necessity of government intervention is significant and requires that neoliberalism be more than an economic theory and construct a political structure to support its economic framework.

Shifting the role of government is a key distinction between nineteenth century liberalism and the more modernized neoliberalism. Neoliberals claim that the classically liberal, fully laissez-faire conceptualization of government "underestimated the danger that private individuals could [cause] through agreement and combination usurp power and effectively limit the freedom of other individuals" and that they substitute the *laissez-faire* practices out in favor of the competitive market order (Friedman 1951 [2012], 3). Both the competitive market order and *laissez-faire* promote markets and minimal government intervention with the economy, but Friedman's market order has a more present government to protect the people and reinforce the market's operations whereas the *laissez-faire* government could do only harm through intervention (Friedman 1951 [2012], 3). Friedman is speaking of the danger individual combination poses through monopolies, not an antagonistic dynamic between employers and employees. Friedman lauds the Sherman anti-trust laws for their influence in increasing the competition in the marketplace to this day, even though they were not "vigorously enforced," providing an example of the types of interventions he prefers (Friedman 1951 [2012], 4).

Rather than conceptualizing the role of government negatively where intervention can do only harm, neoliberalism places government in a role akin to a referee (Biebricher 2019, 34; Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 25). In this role, the government actively ensures that everyone within the framework is following the rules, preventing concentration of power, and yet the government is strictly limited in its role and it cannot move outside of it. This conceptualization confines the government to making and enforcing the framework for markets to function within, with a few key exceptions.

Hayek argues that the neoliberal government serves to prevent coercion, and in doing so it maintains a strictly limited monopoly on coercive power which allows it to both defend individuals and maintain its existence (Hayek 2012, 383). Neoliberalism embraces the ideal of a limited government that does not use its power of coercion except to aid the operation of the market or to solve issues that the market cannot, such as national defense, preventing externalities, and building roads, to name a few (Hayek 2012, 392–295; Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 27–29). In placing neoliberalism in the role of "umpire" it limits the power of the government to avoid the concentration of power, which it sees as one of the greatest threats to freedom (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 2–3). Neoliberalism disperses political power among the local and state governments to avoid as much broad, federal legislation as possible. This way, if an individual disagrees with actions their local government takes they can move to another area and avoid being coerced (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 3).

An issue, highlighted by Biebricher, with granting the government a larger role compared to the neoliberal idealization of the 19th-century *laissez-faire* government is that it quickly becomes complicated because there is no clear distinction on when the government should interfere. Friedman offers a potential solution in weighing the advantages and disadvantages of

any government intervention, with intervention always beginning as a disadvantage due to its impact on individual freedom (1962, 32). This approach steers the theory toward interventions based only on a calculation where the intervention must outweigh the limitations on freedom which neoliberals believe government intervention necessitates (Biebricher 2019, 37; Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 32). While this is a single example, it speaks to the fact that neoliberalism promotes a more present role for the government when compared to their idealization of older liberalisms.

Critiques of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a liberal theory, so its gallery of opponents includes illiberal theories ranging from collectivism and socialism to nationalism and dictatorial theories. This is because neoliberalism's origin is a direct response to the rise in collectivist theories in the 1900s (Biebricher 2019). However, neoliberalism also arose in an attempt to improve upon older liberalisms that were prevalent in the late 19th century. As a result, the many criticisms of neoliberalism come from both sides of the aisle, liberal and illiberal. That said, there are almost innumerable critiques of neoliberalism including feminist, nationalist, Keynesian, populist, and all those that critique liberalism as a whole (Vallier 2021), so it would be unproductive to go into detail on each existing criticism. Instead, I have selected pertinent critiques that I draw from in some way to build my own.

The most common critiques of neoliberalism tend to be those that are fundamentally a critique of capitalism. The two are closely related, as I've detailed previously, but not all of those criticisms are truly critiques of neoliberalism so the critiques below will include discourse on markets and market practices, but will focus more on their direct and indirect effects on society

when utilized. These critiques are important and address core aspects of neoliberalism taken as both the theory and regime of practices, but they are slightly tangential to the theory itself. Despite the slight distance between neoliberalism as a theory and neoliberalism in practice, the critiques discussed below will be of neoliberalism as a whole, though directed at the theory and its components.

Inequality

A common critique of neoliberalism focuses on the different levels of inequality it permits through pursuing a market-oriented government. Even within this category, the critiques range from socialist critiques on the accumulation of power to liberal critiques focused on the distinction between types of inequality and the spheres that they form in, justifying some while critiquing others (Davies 2017). It is a feature of markets to create inequality, regardless of sort, by virtue of competition and increased specialization of the economy. The accumulation of capital which neoliberalism defends also plays a great role in the growth of inequality, because the more capital an individual has, the more they can accumulate. Specialization leads to a higher demand for some work compared to others, so the value of work differs and therefore the outcomes of people in different careers differ. Without coercion to enforce an equal, just, or any other patterned distribution of resources, inequality in outcome is an inseparable effect of markets, and one challenged by scholars concerned with egalitarianism like John Rawls. Rawls's concerns include the suffering that vast economic inequality can have on the well-being of individuals; the power dynamics that such inequality can create in people's private lives; and the impact of inequality political participation (2001).

Economic or Distributive Inequality

Hayek and Friedman are both clear that the value of markets is not the outcomes that they lead to, but rather the freedoms and opportunities that they afford to people who live in a market society (Hayek 2012, 404–6; Friedman and Appelbaum 1962). Not only does inequality exist under neoliberalism, but neoliberal policies focused on "deregulation and the opening up of domestic markets, including financial markets, to foreign competition" and "privatization and limits on the ability of governments to run fiscal deficits and accumulate debt"- have been shown to increase economic inequality (Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani, and Davide Furceri 2016). Many people critique this effect of neoliberalism and capitalism which permit unlimited wealth accumulation, ultimately increasing inequality because the more capital one has, the more they can accumulate it, ultimately widening the gap between the wealthy and the impoverished. Such economic inequality is not just damaging to the individuals who end up on the bottom of the distribution, but also to the larger economic productivity as diminished spending power, in turn, diminishes the growth of the economy (Jonathan Ostry, Prakash Loungani, and Davide Furceri 2016).

In addition to its broad effects on the economy, the negative effects on the well-being of individuals suffering from economic inequality are colossal and difficult to overcome. Economic inequality has negative effects on the mental and physical health of individuals as well as their social wellbeing and status (Pickett and Wilkinson 2015). Critics of unregulated markets tend to argue that there should at least be some protections in place for the worst off in society or it becomes nearly impossible for people to escape the economic position they end up in (Rawls 2001).

Political Inequality

Although democracy is a core aspect of neoliberal theory (Biebricher 2019), its focus on preserving property rights and individualism may in fact undermine that commitment to democracy. Neoliberalism's extension of market techniques into the political sphere leads to an increased impact of private citizens in the form of corporations on our political institutions. Neoliberalism argues that the economic and the political are intimately related and that economic freedoms are means to the end of political freedoms (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 4). This contrasts a popular notion that economics and politics are separate, or at least the idea of economic freedom and political freedom are separate, and draws the political and the economic under one umbrella.

Ferguson identifies that in order to form the necessary framework for markets, or economic freedom in neoliberalism's eyes, neoliberalism uses market techniques in the sphere of the state:

> Rather than shifting the line between state and market, then, neoliberalism … involved the deployment of new, market-based techniques of government within the terrain of the state itself. At the same time, new constructions of "active" and "responsible" citizens and communities are deployed to produce governmental results that do not depend on direct state intervention. The "responsibilized" citizen comes to operate as a miniature firm, responding to incentives, rationally assessing risks, and prudently choosing from among different courses of action (2010, 172).

Ferguson details the neoliberal government as subcontracting core functions of the government to private enterprises or being run akin to a business by seeking to maximize profits as a firm would (2010, 172-173). This builds an environment where because the government is operating akin to a firm, the people beneath it operate similarly. While Ferguson's account of the "responsibilized" citizen may sound extreme, it exemplifies a possible result of extending the economic into the political.

If the government operates akin to a firm, there will be few protections in place to mitigate inequality, which critics stress permits accumulation of not only economic capital or power, but also political power. Without a certain level of wealth or capital, it becomes difficult to properly enjoy the liberties that liberals hold so dearly (Vallier 2021). The inequalities allow for a concentration of power among those with more capital, pushing economic power to the forefront of politics and allowing those with capital to have a larger say in governing a nation than those without much capital due to mechanisms such as lobbying, the high cost of advertisements, and political action groups, which allow greater interactions with policymakers for those with capital. Lobbying is a result of neoliberal practices and ideology, and the impact of wealthy corporations lessens the impact of individual citizens with less capital (Brown 2017).

This dimension of inequality is arguably more important in terms of political theory than the economic dimension, despite the close relation of the two, because it is likely that any organization of the economy will have some measure of inequality unless specifically designed from the offset as Rawls would have. For neoliberalism to permit inequality that has the potential to undermine the core rights it values greatly is seen a serious issue for neoliberalism from perspectives such as Rawls's. Neoliberals defend inequality despite its negative effects on liberty, participation in the political system, and well-being, which critics believe poses an issue for the theory as a whole.

Exploitation and Power Dynamics

Karl Marx (1867) and Elizabeth Anderson (2019) both critique capitalism for the power dynamics it creates between the capital owners and the workers. Insofar as neoliberalism shares in the capitalist values they target, their criticism is highly relevant. Marx is, of course, the most

common name when it comes to critiques of capitalism and he highlights the disconnect it creates between a worker and their labor, "alienating" them and separating them from the value of their labor and ultimately exploiting them by extracting labor from them by paying them less than what their labor is worth (Marx and Engels 1988). This dynamic is said to be fundamental to capitalism, and it separates workers from the very purpose of their being, alienating them and subjecting them to the capitalists.

Anderson's critique is similar, addressing the workplace interactions between employers and employees, and how employers act as private governments with oppressive control over the private lives of their workers (2019). She highlights the persistent pressures that employers are able to place upon employees even when they are not physically at work. Employers can force employees to act a certain way, police their interactions online, and much more, forming an ever-present framework similar to how the government is always present in our lives even in non-political spheres. This power dynamic extends past the workplace and ends up forming a difference in political power on top of the economic difference that is innate between employee and employer under capitalism. The market techniques that neoliberals employ are unable to combat this inequality in power, once again challenging the neoliberal acceptance and defense of inequality through highlighting its creation of insurmountable differences in power that are ingrained in the institutions upheld by neoliberalism.

Increasing the Role of Government and the Welfare State

A core aspect of neoliberalism is its concession that there is a place for the government to have an increased role in the economy both in securing public goods for people and maintaining the market framework to prevent the accumulation of power. Neoliberals are not unified in

where they draw the line for government intervention, and some (such as Friedman) lean toward the libertarian side of neoliberalism, but even he still acknowledges that there is a necessary level of government intervention.

This acknowledgment directly opposes more classical liberalisms and libertarians, who desire a fully laissez-faire, minimal state. One such critic is Robert Nozick, who strongly opposes any type of government intervention in the economy outside of protecting the property rights and transactions of individuals, claiming that patterned distributions are unjust so any government action that redistributes wealth is condemnable (Nozick 2013). Such critics see any form of paternalism from the government as unjustified and restricting the freedoms of individuals and limiting the options they have to choose from. In addition, the government providing funding for education or even basic income is seen as outside the duty of the minimal state which Nozick details (2013, ix). To Nozick, the state should solely act as a “night watchman” that protects the individuals from force or fraud in transactions as well as provide a national defense (2013). Anything past these duties, even taxation, is seen by such libertarians as a violation of the natural rights of individuals and is condemned.

While pure libertarianism is not the most prevalent political theory in America, this critique against government intervention and the broader welfare state is common, especially among more conservative thinkers, politicians, and voters. As such, this critique is one that is not solely academic but also echoed in popular opinion as a broader critique of government intervention or control.

Formation of the Economic Individual

Neoliberalism is not a prescription on how life should be lived, but rather a prescription for conditions that ensure the government and economy operate properly as it is a political theory at heart. Though the theory itself is not an ethos, Neoliberalism lauds markets as the premium measure of organization, which critics argue builds an underlying mindset of competitiveness that surrounds all interactions under it. Jessica Whyte (2019), Wendy Brown (2017), and others highlight this feature in their critiques of neoliberalism, constructing a notion of neoliberalism as a theory that constructs society around the market and transactions between individuals. These theorists argue that neoliberalism promotes a mindset of individual competition and the practice of self-marketing even outside economic spheres.

Ferguson and Brown argue that neoliberalism makes it nearly impossible to separate oneself from the economic world (2010; 2017). The individual freedom one might enjoy in his personal life is necessarily tied to the market economy under neoliberalism, creating a precondition for participation in the political sphere. Ferguson claims the daily life of the citizens under neoliberalism becomes economized, and their interactions are guided by market ideals.

Moreover, Brown sees this conjoining of the economic and the political is not just a relationship of the political and economic becoming intertwined, but one where the two shape one another and spread beyond their respective spheres, economizing the formerly non-economic (Brown 2017, 93). This is a distinctive feature of neoliberalism, and the dynamic of economization is unique to neoliberalism because of its employment of market techniques in the non-economic spheres. Another feature of this dynamic is that the political does not control the economic nor the other way around. Rather, the two are intertwined and shape one another,

constantly interacting and creating a governing rationality that puts forth a normative doctrine focused on specific market values and "involves remaking, in economic terms, the form, content, and conduct of heretofore noneconomic domains" (Brown 2017, 94).

Brown (2017) further articulates a neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* that is unappealing as an expression of human flourishing. Firstly, Brown argues that neoliberals see the individual as an economic person at all times (Brown 2017, 95). The second aspect of the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is that it "takes its shape as human capital" (Brown 2017, 95), pushing the notion of humans being in a state of competition and the need to strengthen their position within society. Lastly, the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* is not just human capital in the economic sense, but it seeks to strengthen its position in all spheres of life, social, political, and beyond (Brown 2017, 95). According to Brown, the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus* differs from past such character-types in the pervasiveness of how the "values of the firm" affect their entire lives. The neoliberal individual is transformed into someone who operates like a miniature firm in not just their economic world, but also in all the other spheres in which they interact with others. By expanding this conduct into all spheres, "values of the firm" shape not only the individual but also all of the non-economic spheres they exist within (Brown 2017, 95). Brown argues that this economization is not an explicit part of the governing principles that neoliberalism suggests, but rather an implicit ethos that is both pervasive and subversive (Brown 2017).

Undermining Democratic Institutions

According to Brown, the neoliberal economization of the individual has the potential to undermine core democratic institutions that America holds dear. Neoliberalism employs capitalist market techniques in the political sphere, shaping law around market ideologies. In

doing this, the relationship between the fundamentally political (rights, voting, etc) and the economy becomes closer and the two less distinguishable (Brown 2017, 93).[3] This is not an effect of any explicit measures that a neoliberal government might take to protect markets and their functionality, but instead it is due to the economization discussed above. The governing rationality that Brown identifies as permeating our private lives and forming a distinct, neoliberal self, further transforms interpretations of the Constitution and the "fundamental elements of political life" (Brown 2017, 96).

One of the starkest examples of this is the 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* that lifted restrictions on corporate donations and expenditures to political campaigns, embedding pro-market and pro-corporation principles into our rule of law. While it certainly exhibited the "unleashing of market forces" it also represents the dynamic where law and politics shape and reshape one another, building a "political life as a market with market rules" (Brown 2017, 97). Brown's perspective is that the normative aspect of neoliberalism directed individual interpretations of the Justices on the court toward a decision that ultimately undid precedent in place to mitigate the effect of corporations on our politics. This decision was grounded in the construction of corporations as natural entities, and that is a common critique of it, but Brown identifies a deeper issue at the core of the decision: it renders speech as capital (2017, 99). In doing so, the court knowingly or not, draws on the market notions surrounding capital which frame the government as the enemy to the free flow of any such capital. As a result, the government is made to be the opposition of speech, and all people (and corporations) are potential victims of the enemy. Brown argues that this construction leads to the inversion of

[3] Of course, the economic and the political are often related insofar as political practices have economic dimensions and are used to organize the economy in many situations. However, this relationship is not one of control or organization, but one of conjunction into one sphere.

the democratic process and the influence of corporations in our political systems. While this is but one example Brown uses, she believes that neoliberalism carries the potential to subvert the democratic foundations of our government, and hollows the meaning of those foundations.

Features of neoliberalism may constrict the democratic process because the ethos it perpetuates requires acceptance of markets and that which comes along with them. While it is true that people in a market society can advocate their beliefs that a socialist society might be better (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 16), the fact remains that the structure of a neoliberal society makes such a transition nearly impossible because the entire system is built around capitalism and markets. These are structural necessities rather than a philosophy that permits alternative means of pursuing it, making neoliberalism constrictive in ways other systems may not be.

Privatization of Essential Services and Failing Industry

Lodge (1986) and McGregor (2001) both highlight areas in which neoliberal policies have been inadequate. McGregor focuses on healthcare reform and how the increased privatization of healthcare has limited the social policy of America, making healthcare far more difficult to obtain. Lodge similarly points out increasing rates of unemployment, failing industries, and diminishing economic growth to highlight the fact that America has difficulty fulfilling the claims it makes about its greatness, pointing out cognitive dissonance. Together these serve to show that the implementation of neoliberalism and its conception of rights has left important aspects of life to markets and competition, highlighting where that approach has struggled to provide for the people. Neoliberals grant the government the power to engage in the economy in order to secure the provision of public goods and those that run into collective action

problems, but critics claim that there are other goods or services that may not necessarily run into collective action problems, but they still are not allocated sufficiently by markets either. These examples, such as healthcare to McGregor, showcase the inability of neoliberalism to allocate necessary services in an affordable manner, which is crucial to just distribution.

Colonialism, Forced Market Economies, and Globalization

Finally, Jessica Whyte argued that neoliberal practices have been colonialist and strong-armed toward developing countries (2019). Citing Whyte (2019), Patrick Deneen (2019), and Nancy Fraser (2017), Vallier (2021) summarizes these veins of criticism to detail that neoliberalism strong arms developing countries into adhering to neoliberal market ideology even if it comes at the cost of their national culture.

Underlying the act of strong-arming developing countries into adhering to neoliberal market ideology is the notion of globalism and global economies. The neoliberal consensus spread by the developed countries is not just a result of the perceived superiority of market economies but also stems from the capitalistic and neoliberal desire for global economies that invoke practices such as free trade, open borders, to build a global consumer and producer base, tying international economies together. Vallier details that some critics take issue with this, fearing detrimental effects on the developed nations that lose out on production and worry about the degradation of their national culture (2021).

Chapter II:

Comprehensive Versus Political: Mill's Perfectionism

In order to properly orient neoliberalism, it is important to first understand the distinction between "perfectionist" or "comprehensive" liberalisms and "political" ones. These terms are crucial to understanding this discussion, especially before detailing Mill's or Rawls's liberalisms. With them established, I can launch into an exploration of Mill's liberalism and how it exemplifies perfectionist liberalism.

Perfectionist Versus Political Liberalism

Within liberalism, there are two broad categories: perfectionist and political. They offer a way to categorize liberal theories based on what they aim to do. A "political" liberalism makes a distinction between the values that structure society and the values that might be associated with a specific outlook on life (Waldron 2004, 91). Such liberalisms attempt to reconcile the vast diversity and disagreement between the outlooks that people hold while still establishing a liberal society. A comprehensive liberalism instead seeks to build a liberal society around a singular idea of what is good, making no distinction between the structural and personal values; in order to establish a liberal society comprehensive liberals invoke deeper values that are associated with an overall philosophy (Waldron 2004, 91). Comprehensive in this context means a theory that asserts values or principles that appeal to some deeper philosophy, which necessitates a level of conformity to that set of principles. These two categories are by no means monolithic, a feature which motivates my construction of comprehensiveness as a spectrum, but having two broad categories is helpful in understanding the aim of a liberal theory in the broad sense.

Beginning with a broad analysis of perfectionist liberalism I turn to Martha Nussbaum who, drawing from Charles Lemore, defines perfectionist liberalism as:

> a species of a genus of liberal views that might be called “comprehensive liberalisms,” liberalisms that base political principles on some comprehensive doctrine about human life that covers not only the political domain but also the domain of human conduct generally (2011, 5).

In other words, perfectionist liberalisms build political doctrines off of a conceptualization of a good life. Perfectionist liberalisms, such as that of Mill, offer a controversial account of what makes life valuable, or “comprehensive doctrines” as Rawls calls them (2001, 32), and argue that said value should be at the core of a liberal society and that political systems should be built around them (Nussbaum 2011, 11). Often this means the theorist is firstly making an argument for why their value is one to be desired and then following that defense up with a construction of the social and political order based upon that value. This is not to say that they ignore politics, but rather they focus on how a government might ensure that said conception of the “good life” is upheld for everyone (Nussbaum 2011).

Perfectionist liberalisms are comprehensive, but that does not mean that all comprehensive doctrines are perfectionist. Nussbaum references theories such as astrology, which guided societies in the past as comprehensive but not perfectionist because astrology asserts that our fates are tied to the heavens rather than asserting an ideal of the good life (Nussbaum 2011, 5). However, for the sake of this discussion I will use comprehensive and perfectionist as synonymous because although there are some differences in literature discussing them, they have largely similar goals and approaches, and I am discussing varieties of liberalism.

Building a political system around one account of the good life, such as that of Mill which I discuss below, can lead to perfectionist liberalisms being incompatible with other

doctrines, such as various religions, though it is certainly not a requirement. Some perfectionist liberalisms subscribe to the notion of pluralism, believing that there are multiple valuable though incompatible conceptualizations of the good life, and either offer one of those doctrines or establish a framework that allows these to coexist within their society. According to Rawls, regardless of coexistence between individual doctrines within a society, the structure of the political society cannot be built around multiple entirely comprehensive doctrines, as entirely comprehensive doctrines cover “all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system” (1993, 13). Here Rawls is talking about fully comprehensive doctrines, meaning that those doctrines provide an all-encompassing account of how to live one’s life.

That said, it may be possible for an individual to subscribe to multiple doctrines in reality because tensions between the doctrines that exist in the abstract will rarely come up in actual life, but on a societal scale, tensions are bound to arise. The workings of social or political orders are drastically more complex and more likely to encounter situations, however rare, where comprehensive doctrines conflict. Such conflict would be minimal in importance in the life of an individual, but when those conflicts arise on the scale of a political order, the lives of countless individuals are affected by the tension and those tensions are more likely to arise. As a result, the empirical reality of whether a person can subscribe to multiple fully comprehensive doctrines or not is disconnected from Rawls’s argument that a political order cannot affirm multiple of such doctrines. Below I detail both Mill’s and Rawls’s theories to further highlight the dynamic and differences between these two.

Mill's Perfectionism

To construct the idea of a "comprehensive" liberalism I utilize John Stuart Mill and his works *On Liberty* (1859), *Consideration on a Representative Government* (1861), and *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy* (1848).

Mill offers one of the most compelling and uncontroversially perfectionist liberalisms in his construction of a representative government that promotes individual growth. Mill centers self-realization through growth, and argues that growth requires freedom. Not freedom in a vague sense, but instead, Mill argues that "the only freedom which deserves its name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way" (2002, 12). An important reading of Mill is that for him, freedom is a means to achieve the greater good, or as some call it, 'the first order good,' of self-development. The value which Mill constructs his entire political theory around is that of self-cultivation, discovery, and growth, or put simply: growth as a person.

Grounding his theory in a first-order good, or the largely uncontroversial claim that it is a good thing for people to cultivate themselves and their character, allows Mill to spend less time justifying this value because many people understand it as good. Instead, he spends much of his time detailing the requirements to secure this good and why they are needed for that securing. This is a common strategy in perfectionist liberalisms, as the debate over whether the goal is desirable is less controversial and it shifts focus onto the structure of the theory and how said structure is justified.

Mill on Individualism, Freedom, and Liberty

A foundational aspect of Mill's perfectionism is his construction of the individual as one who seeks growth and development. Mill is scathingly critical of those who do not think for

themselves, claiming that "[h]e who lets the world… choose his plan of life for him has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation" and "one whose desires and impulses are not his own has no character, no more than a steam engine has a character" (2002, 56–57). He believes that those who do not seek development are not individuals; that they have no character and they are simply being led as one of the mindless many. Mill's remarks come from his belief that being contrary, eccentric, and questioning are all ways in which the individual becomes themselves. In *On Liberty*, Mill passionately defends nonconformity, which he sees at the heart of self-realization. Self-realization is done "by cultivating and calling [uniqueness] forth" which allows a person to truly become themselves rather than falling into conformity (Mill 2002, 60). In other words, individuality only exists through development, and that development must be driven by the individual and their journey to improve.

The ideal Millian individual is one who is constantly seeking to improve themself and be the best version of themselves that they can be. They do not lie down and subscribe to an idea simply because it is popular, and they do not limit their intellectual curiosity simply because they are going against custom. Mill laments what "the world loses in the multitude of promising intellects combined with timid characters, who dare not follow out any bold, vigorous, independent train of thought, lest it land them in something which would admit of being considered irreligious or immoral," (2002, 32) highlighting that individuals must not fall into the "'deep slumber of a decided opinion'" (2002, 41). So critical is Mill of custom that he regards it as despotic, and claims that "the despotism of custom is everywhere the standing hindrance to human advancement, being in unceasing antagonism to that disposition to aim at something better than customary," or in simpler terms that custom stands in the way of progress by leading

people to not questioning the status quo (Mill 2002, 67). Mill believes custom forces conformity in the population, and when the people cease to question it, they cease to possess individuality.

To be an individual Mill requires self-development, and individuals require certain liberties that allow them to do so. A necessary fact of development is that it is impossible to achieve without freedom. In fact, Mill sees development as a primary reason why freedom is even important, and he gives three liberties that he believes are necessary for a society to be free:

Firstly, liberty of the "inward domain of consciousness," meaning total liberty of thought and feeling in addition to freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects (Mill 2002, 11). These liberties are required for the individual to develop their thoughts and opinions in an environment where they have to constantly defend their beliefs against other conflicting beliefs because each individual is free to hold their own. Practically inseparable from this liberty is the liberty to not only have free thought, but to express it publicly (Mill 2002, 11–12). There is far less value in being able to hold our beliefs if we cannot express them to others. Being unable to express though publicly further hinders the development because we will interact with fewer other viewpoints and beliefs. This interaction is critical in developing one's own beliefs, because without something to compare beliefs to, an individual has no basis on which to question their beliefs.

Secondly, liberty of tastes and pursuits, to frame one's life according to their desires and character, "without impediment from our fellow creatures" (Mill 2002, 12). So long as what an individual does to develop themself does not actively harm others, then they are free to do so. To Mill, "the same things which are helps to one person toward the cultivation of his higher nature are hindrances to another," so it is necessary that people be able to live their lives as they wish because it allows them to best find the method of cultivation that fosters their development (Mill

2002, 65). For example, a spartan, minimalist lifestyle might be the best way for one person to develop. However, for another it could be a depressing and cold lifestyle that lacks the vibrance and pleasure that motivates them to grow as a person. In simplest terms, each person needs to be free to pursue their life as they desire, or else they may not be able to properly develop their character. In this regard, Mill fulfills the ideal of "perfectionist liberalism" because his openness to many different ways of flourishing and development permits excellence in many different aspects of life rather than just one; to develop as individuals, it is crucial to have various opportunities and passions that allow one to cultivate all aspects of their lives. He explains why liberty is good: it allows individuals to follow different and often conflicting paths without being forced down any one of them.

Thirdly, Mill claims that, following from the other liberties, individuals must have the freedom to combine and gather for "any purpose not involving harm to others"[4] (2002, 12). In a similar way to how it is critical to development to be able to freely express your beliefs, that development is not possible without being able to gather with others to discuss beliefs and ideas.

These liberties are critical to freedom for Mill because he is concerned with the "increasing inclination to stretch unduly the powers of society over the individual both by force of opinion and even by that of legislation" (2002, 13). He argues that without such liberties, this inclination only grows and grows in power unless there is a "strong barrier of moral conviction" that can be raised against the growing tide to prevent its growth (Mill 2002, 13). With this concern at the core of his argument and structure, Mill is committed to best structuring the government to promote individual development without asserting a singular way to pursue that development to avoid an oppressive custom. Mill desires a government which is limited in scope,

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[4] So long as those individuals are not forced or deceived and that they are full adults (Mill 2002, 12).

but he believes government should guide and advise the people in order to best foster their development, because at the end of the day “the worth of the State… is the worth of the individuals composing it” (2002, 113).

Mill’s Representative Government

In *Considerations on Representative Govt,* Mill builds a system of representative government that exemplifies his application of his liberalism on the societal level. He evaluates a government’s worth as the worth of the people underneath it, and if the government helps the citizens become better individuals, then the government itself improves (Mill 1873, 46). He further elaborates that “to judge of the merits of forms of government most eligible… an ideal must be constructed of the form of government most eligible in itself, that it, which, if the necessary conditions existed… would, more than all others, favor and promote, not some one improvement, but all forms and degrees of it” (Mill 1873, 57). Mill applies his concept of improvement as the purpose of an ideal government.

A government being of and for the people requires three conditions for Mill (Mill 1873, 11–12):

1. The people for whom the form of government is intended must be willing to accept it, or, at least not so unwilling as to oppose an insurmountable obstacle to its establishment.
2. They must be willing and able to do what is necessary to keep it standing.
3. And they must be willing and able to do what it requires of them to enable it to fulfill its purposes.

These conditions show that Mill believes a government cannot just represent the people abstractly, but the people must actively work to maintain it and allow it to function properly, and

if these conditions are not met then representative government is unsuitable for the population and another form must be utilized. A common reading of Mill is that here he justifies colonialism as one alternative method of government due to his writing during the era of British imperialism.

A certain level of character is required to be able to accept this type of government, a character that understands laws can be for the good of the people, and the representatives must be moral and not sell their vote, or else they are simply partaking in misgovernment and are failing to act as proper representatives of the people (Mill 1873, 15). Instead of serving as a buffer or shield from misgovernment, morally bankrupt representatives lead the government astray. To ensure that this moral bankruptcy is avoided, Mill believes that the representatives must be moral exemplars as they will have the practical power in the representative government (Mill 1873, 110).

Though it is true that the representatives must be the best of society, Mill does not say that the actual lawmaking and enforcement should be personally overseen by those representatives (1873, 110). He says "there is a radical distinction between controlling the business of government and actually doing it," pointing out that some duties of the government can only be done by a group of individuals, while others are not suited for groups (Mill 1873, 111). Mill argues that the representative body should "control all the operations of government," but that it also needs to consider "what kinds of business a numerous body is competent to perform properly" (Mill 1873, 111). Rather than dictate legislation or craft policy, Mill instead claims that the place of the representative body is to serve as a "place of adverse discussion for all opinions relating to public matters, both great and small," and to more generally serve as a space where public opinion is mirrored and elevated to discussion among the educated and intellectual representatives (Mill 1873, 131). The representatives discuss policy and ideology in

the abstract, and then experts serve to draft and enact the legislation; it does not perform the daily duties of the government, instead justifying and criticizing the actions of the government through a reflection of public sentiment. The experts are selected by the representative body so that the body maintains control, but they restrict the duties of the representative body to those which it can properly fulfill: those of discussion (Mill 1873, 131–32). The results of the discussion had by the representative body is passed to the experts who craft policy as it is the will of the representative and thus the people (Mill 1873, 131).

Mill is deeply concerned with such a government falling to the whims of the numerical majority. He argues that democracy cannot stand alone because it allows for the numerical majority to render "all but itself to political insignificance" by outvoting all other groups (Mill 1873, 189). He is clear that this issue cannot be reconciled by excluding certain people from voting with no way for those people to achieve voter status, because it does them a disservice by preventing their learning and interacting with policy and the community politics includes (Mill 1873, 192). Furthermore, such exclusion asserts the domination of policymakers over the lives of the excluded, which Mill believes degrades all people in the society whether they can vote or not because of the assertion of the ruling over the ruled (Mill 1873, 193–94). Mill argues that the problem of rule by a non-deliberative numerical majority cannot be solved by prohibiting individuals of full age from voting if they desire the ability to do so.

However, Mill argues that it is acceptable to restrict the vote to only those who can read, write, and do basic math (Mill 1873, 194). It is the duty of a Millian representative government to ensure that the education required to achieve these conditions is available to all, and therefore those who cannot achieve these conditions cannot do so of their own volition or laziness (Mill 1873, 194). Following a similar vein, Mill arrives at another solution: granting the votes of the

educated and developed more weight (1873, 201–3). To Mill this is drastically different from excluding the votes of some, because they still get a say in the but the opinions of those who are better informed are simply given more attention (1873, 202). The more educated a person is, the more their opinion should be weighed, as they undoubtedly know more about the situation if it affects them. Mill does not make this distinction lightly, nor does he think that making this distinction opens the door for giving people's opinions more weight based on other factors. Instead, Mill says "[t]he only thing which can justify reckoning one person's opinion as equivalent to more than one is individual mental superiority" to cement this distinction (1873, 203).

Mill's ideal government is composed of the most educated people, and they discuss and debate politics as a reflection of the beliefs of the people. Their debates amongst each other improve the representatives, who in turn select experts to actually draft and enact that policy. The core purpose of this government is to foster the development of the people, and Mill constructs the government around that aim in every aspect.

Mill on Competition

Mill is committed to a society in which individuals have multiple paths and opportunities to improve on themselves. He is critical of the lazy and apathetic, and he argues that incentives are crucial and effective to preventing indolence stagnation (Mill 2018, bk. IV p. 64). Mill is confident that competition, though not necessarily "the best conceivable stimulus, … is at present a necessary one" because it is indispensable to progress and makes the lives of the people better by protecting them from monopoly, lowering the cost of goods, and protecting them from idleness (Mill 2018, bk. IV p. 63-64). He sees competition and markets as a necessary means to

achieve well-being. For Mill, competition establishes contextual advantages for individuals which allow them to achieve self-development, but he also acknowledges that it is capable of harm and justifies competition by saying that it prevents greater harm to individuals (Mill 2018, bk. IV p. 64-65).

This defense of competition is closely tied to Mill's philosophy surrounding the duties of an individual and a good life. He believes that competition provides both an incentive to grow—because the better an individual is the more likely they are to win competitions—as well as increases their quality of life so they can focus more on improvement. The empirical reality of competition that Mill defends is less important than how he assesses competition based on its benefits. In doing so, Mill is not merely defending competition as an end because it is good to have individuals compete against one another— in fact he is against laborers competing directly (Mill 2018, bk. IV p. 63)— but rather because it benefits the well-being of individuals.

In setting up competition as a necessary condition for freedom and self-development, it may seem that Mill is tying himself to markets. However, he adds qualifiers to it in saying that it currently prevents greater evils and that it is increasing the well-being of individuals. Mill does not center his theory around competition, rather it is one of many means to the ultimate end of self-development.

Mill fully embraces the idea of perfectionism. He establishes that a good life is one where people can and do pursue their self-development and mental superiority, and the government's role is to support them and create an environment to foster that development. This government is composed of elected representatives who are mentally superior and it discusses policy at an intellectual level and then passes it to experts who then execute said policy. Each person has the right to vote so long as they meet a minimum level of intellect, but the more mentally developed

a person is, the more their vote counts. The environment this government cultivates is one open to many different ways of life, passions, and as such it provides many opportunities for individuals to pursue their own ways of life to develop themselves as well as possible. One of the means to achieve this that Mill identifies is competition because of the incentives and benefits it provides to the people, which spur them to better cultivate their mental capabilities.

Chapter III:

Comprehensive Versus Political: Rawls's Political Liberalism

In *Political Liberalism* (1993) and *Justice as Fairness* (2001), John Rawls offers an alternative to Mill's liberalism, highlighting where he thinks Mill and other comprehensive systems are lacking. The political society Rawls builds provides for the people is the securing of primary or fundamental goods (Rawls 1993, 203). In securing these goods, the political society "guarantees the essentials of persons' public recognition as free and equal citizens" which is the fundamental basis required to be able to follow one's comprehensive doctrine (Rawls 1993, 203). He believes that the political society makes it so that the fundamental needs of each member of society are met because the primary goods can be agreed on by all reasonable doctrines and therefore the political society is guaranteed to provide these goods. Rawls does not believe that comprehensive societies are guaranteed to secure these fundamental needs, so by explicitly requiring these fundamental needs his political liberalism is preferable, in his eyes, to any comprehensive system.

Rawls's Political Liberalism

As Rawls describes it, political liberalism constructs policies separately from any conceptualizations of the good life so as to not affirm a singular idea of the good life. Rawls states that "political liberalism does not say that the values articulated by a political conception of justice … outweigh the transcendent values (as people may interpret them)- religious, philosophical, or moral," and that if it were doing so, it would be going beyond the political (Rawls 2001, 37). Translating this into more understandable language, Rawls is saying that the

political foundation of justice as fairness is not given more importance than any singular doctrine's moral values. Rather, Rawls's construction attempts to build a framework around a neutral value so that many comprehensive doctrines can agree on the political without conforming to a universal value system that is incompatible with other doctrines.

Rawls further elaborates this position using the overlapping consensus, or the idea that reasonable[5] conflicting comprehensive doctrines can find common political ground on which they justify themselves, to highlight that a political system can be built that does not swearing fealty to any particular doctrine (2001, 32). In this way, Rawls's conceptualization of political liberalism is "neutral" to any comprehensive doctrines (so long as they are compatible with the notion of equal basic liberties), but neutral in this sense does not mean it lacks any specific value or that it is impartial. Rather, Rawls takes neutrality to mean the political conception he drafts seeks to find common ground among the permissible comprehensive doctrines and aims to build institutions that are not designed to favor any specific doctrine (Rawls 1993, 191–94). These neutral values are indeed moral values, but they are not rooted in any specific doctrine; they apply directly to the foundation of his society to ensure that other doctrines might flourish (Rawls 2001, 182). He believes that this consensus is possible because the reasons people from each doctrine might agree to this system are not all the same, but they all seek to attain certain goods for themselves through society and will understand that no specific doctrine is favored by this construction.

In other words, the consensus, or political conception, they arrive at may be a part of each comprehensive doctrine for various reasons, but "it is not a consequence of the doctrine's nonpolitical values" (Rawls 1993, 155). For example, a Calvinist and a Satanist have undeniably

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[5] Reasonable in Rawlsian means those which are compatible with a liberal government and which can coexist with others in such a society because they agree on the ideas of basic liberties for all citizens.

conflicting doctrines when it comes to their nonpolitical values, but Rawls believes two (or more) such doctrines can come together and agree on a political system that each can justify for their own reasons. Rawls constructs a system that he believes can serve as a framework for a consensus between the many reasonable comprehensive doctrines, and he does so by attempting to find the basis on which people from opposing comprehensive doctrines might be able to speak in common terms toward a common goal. In finding this basis, Rawls draws heavily on the idea that humans are rational, meaning they have a plan for a good life and factor their needs and the needs of others into that plan (1993, 176–77). He believes that people have some rational plan of life that guides them in pursuing the various goods that their comprehensive doctrines affirm (Rawls 1993, 177). This is the quality that guides people towards finding common political ground even in a context of disagreement about comprehensive doctrines. Rawls elaborates that rational people who subscribe to reasonable comprehensive doctrines can find a shared idea of the political good that confers them an advantage in pursuing their idea of good (1993, 180–81). Rawls details five specific political goods that he believes will be a source of agreement between reasonable comprehensive doctrines (Rawls 1993, 181):

1. All citizens have certain basic rights and liberties that are applied equally.
2. Freedom of movement and occupation within a diverse set of choices.
3. The powers of offices with responsibility in the political structure, or the opportunity to hold such offices.
4. Equal opportunities for income and wealth.
5. The social bases of self respect, understood as the social conditions needed for individuals to accept that they are accepted and worthy of respect.

These goods are not specific to any one doctrine, and although Rawls requires that a doctrine within the system he constructs adhere to the concepts of rationality and free and equal citizens, which he believes leads them to this list of goods, the goods are compatible with a great many doctrines. In addition, rather than these goods being what constitutes a good life, these goods are simply contextual necessities for anyone to achieve a good life. A very important distinction is that Rawls's use of the term "primary goods" does not mean that he is using these goods as first-order goods to justify his theory, but rather he means primary as in they are fundamental needs to assess the principles of justice that he lays out (Rawls 1993, 76). This means that he is once again using principles and goods that he conceives as neutral to any specific doctrine.

In a way similar to Mill, Rawls believes that these goods allow people to best pursue their concepts of the good life, and the political system is designed in some way to allow this to flourish. This is a similarity that cements both as liberal, because even though Rawls seeks to build a non-comprehensive political system, he still affirms basic rights and liberties, granting them priority and establishing them as good (Rawls 1993, 175). In fact, Rawls even notes that his political liberalism shares values with the perfectionist liberalism that Mill constructs, but does not solely seek to cultivate the virtues of individuality that Mill does (1993, 200). In this way, Rawls is still promoting the first-order good of liberty, but it is not the crux of his argument nor his defense. He diverges from Mill when he stops at establishing that these "primary goods" are needed for liberty, opting to not affirm a singular concept of what makes life good.

Rawls does not justify his construction in terms of a first-order good as Mill does, but rather builds around his notion of justice as fairness, and creating a political society where each person is respected evenly. As such, the values Rawls builds around affect the basic structures of

society and how people interact with one another in the political sphere, but, Rawls argues, they do not encompass every aspect of a person's life in the way Mill's structure does. Rawls thinks it is morally good for people to exercise their sense of justice and follow their conception of the good, but it does not dictate how those are supposed to be exercised (Rawls 1993, 176).

In addition, Rawls understands that his justice as fairness is abstract and is an ideal to work toward, but is clear that there is a distinction between comprehensive and abstract, and that working toward an ideal is not necessarily comprehensive (Rawls 1993, 154). That is to say, Rawls builds around an ideal that carries moral values, but they are neutral values that do not extend fully into the private lives of individuals. Instead of dictating values such as "you should do what causes the most happiness for the most people" as a Utilitarian might, Rawls dictates values such as "afford everyone the same basic liberties." The former tells a person how they should act if they want to do what is morally good, influencing their actions at every turn, while the latter makes no assertion as to how a person should act outside of the political framework.

Rawls's political liberalism seeks to build a system where individuals can affirm their own understandings of how life ought to be lived while simultaneously understanding that it is unreasonable to use the power of the state to force everyone in the society to conform to that doctrine (Rawls 1993, 139). It provides a clear example to contrast Mill's perfectionist liberalism and highlights the contrasts between the approach of a "political" liberalism as opposed to a "comprehensive" liberalism.

Why Political Over Perfectionist?

Rawls is clearly committed to constructing a system centered around basic liberties for all citizens and the common ground between many opposed comprehensive doctrines. That said, the

question remains as to why he values such a construction. Rawls believes that a political society provides benefits as well as avoids certain problems that comprehensive liberalisms or structures encounter.

One of the greatest problems Rawls sees with comprehensive systems is that each one necessarily affirms one particular conceptualization of the good life for all people within that society. This is consistent with his construction of the political system, because by ensuring that everyone in a society has equal basic liberties, among other fundamental needs, the political system becomes one that is shared among all of the people. Because this government and its political power is shared among all the people within society, Rawls says it is unreasonable to monopolize that power to affirm a singular doctrine (Rawls 1993, 138). He states, "when there is a plurality of reasonable doctrines, it is unreasonable, or worse to want to use the sanctions of the state to correct or to punish, those who disagree with us," cementing the issue Rawls has with doctrines that are incompatible with his framework; they seek to enforce their doctrine with a collective power (1993, 138). One note about this point is that just because Rawls is clear that such doctrines are incompatible with his system does not mean he is claiming that such doctrines are false or wrong, instead he is arguing that they have no place in his political liberalism (1993, 138). This is an important step demarcating a key difference between a political and comprehensive theory of politics; namely, the kind of truth claim that the theory makes on its own behalf.

A good that Rawls claims political liberalism provides is a social good. Because political liberalism has "a shared final end, an end that requires the cooperation of manu to achieve" there is a collective good that arises from this cooperative establishment of a political system (Rawls 1993, 204). Rawls likens it to the pride one might feel after their team performs well, and the

desire to remember that feeling and success, which spurs them to do better and be better. He further defends this with the point that people tend to refer to the establishment of democratic institutions as turning points in history and see themselves as superior to nondemocratic societies (Rawls 1993, 204).

This collective success is absent in a construction such as Mill's because the system asserts one meaning of good, and although individuals can pursue that good in their own way, there is no collective work required to reach that end. In fact, Mills focus on the individual leads to his construction of the government, though representative and of the people, being plucked from the aether and affirmed as the ideal government, whereas Rawls's construction requires collaborative effort to achieve. In addition, this common ground reconciles Rawls's theory with the historical and permanent fact of democratic cultures that is the diversity of comprehensive doctrines exhibited in societies (1993, 36, 216–17). As a result of this fact of plurality that Rawls brings up, his theory provides an answer to said diversity, and while Mill fundamentally agrees that disagreement and discussion is good for fostering growth, that agreement does not extend to alternative conceptualizations of good, leaving Mill without as workable of a response to this fact. In other words, by requiring a collaborative effort, which Rawls sees as good in and of itself, the political construction that he builds also considers historical facts in reconciling many opposed doctrines. As such, Rawls feels that it is unreasonable to structure society around a singular comprehensive doctrine, and as such he points out another reason why the political society is preferable to the comprehensive.

Yet another benefit the political system provides in Rawls's eyes is that of the exercising of individual thought and morality within a well-ordered society. Rather than conflict over nonpolitical values, as a diverse society without a political system would, people within Rawls's

system justify their stances on political terms (1993, 203). He believes that it is intrinsically good for people to employ their own moral and rational convictions in a space where even those who disagree with them are still respected as equal citizens, and that the political system he constructs guides this discussion on common terms (Rawls 1993, 202–3). This avoids conflict of nonpolitical values, and concentrates disagreement to the political sphere where. Rawls builds a debate ground on shared values that leads to more productive debate because rather than appealing to distinct comprehensive doctrines, people are appealing to shared values for reasons inspired by their individual doctrine. In a way, Rawls is separating the views of the people into two distinct but related views: the comprehensive and the political (1993, 140). While the comprehensive informs the political, using the political grounds for these discussions avoids deeper conflicts between the doctrines and promises some measure of stability, which is a further good in Rawls's eyes.

However, despite all of the goods that Rawls believes his political liberalism provides, there is one central reason why he believes societies built around comprehensive doctrines are undesirable. That reason is that reasonable people don't want to force their doctrine on others but in order to enforce a comprehensive doctrine at the social level using state power is necessary, which is oppressive and coercive by nature (Rawls 1993, 37). Rawls directly references Mill's liberal society here, arguing that if a society such as the one Mill crafts were to exist it would not be able to endure for long without using state power to remain committed to the single doctrine (1993, 37 note 39). In other words, Rawls believes that it is a feature of free institutions to generate a diversity of reasonable comprehensive doctrines as a result of the free thinking and reasoning necessary for free institutions. Because of this feature, the only way Rawls sees for a

society with free institutions to subscribe to a singular doctrine is to use coercive power to maintain that subscription.

Related to this core problem that Rawls sees with comprehensive societies is a question of the infallibility of people. To use state power to affirm one particular comprehensive doctrine is to affirm one singular definition of what is good or what a good life is. While those that subscribe to said doctrine likely believe that they are correct, is it acceptable to take the risk if they are, in fact, wrong? Mill writes of the fallibility of people as part of his construction of the importance of free discussion in his liberal society (2002, 17), and yet is content with affirming a singular definition of good. What if Mill has an improper definition of intelligence as self-development? For example, Mill's government is out of line in granting the more educated individuals more votes because not only does it undermine the basic equality of the citizens, but it also cements one understanding of intelligence. While Rawls does not say whether doctrines such as Mill's are incorrect, his political liberalism avoids the problem of affirming a wrong definition by affirming no definition.

Is Rawls's Political Liberalism Actually Comprehensive?

While it may be true that Rawls's concept of political liberalism, and his justice as fairness is comprehensive, as some critics argue,[6] the level of comprehensiveness exhibited by "political" liberalisms (Rawls) compared to "perfectionist" liberalism (Mill) is different in meaningful ways. Robert George criticizes Rawls in *Natural Law and Public Reason* (1997) by arguing that Rawls's construction is comprehensive because when politics intersects with moral issues under Rawls's system, the justifications for policy rule out any moral arguments not

[6] Rawls addresses some of these criticisms in footnotes on pages 198-200 in *Political Liberalism*.

rooted in public reason, discounting illiberal reasoning (George and Wolfe 1997, 31–33). Stephen Macedo, in a defense of Rawls's system, uses the example of Catholic Traditionalists having to read books for school that are on the Catholic Church's prohibited books list to show where it may seem that Rawls's construction restricts or even silences comprehensive doctrines (1995, 472). Macedo defends Rawls by arguing that political liberalism does not "seek to exclude religious people from the public realm" or "'silence' people, or limit First Amendment rights to free speech" but rather suggests that "the most basic political rights and institutions should be justified in terms… that can be shared with reasonable people" even if their comprehensive doctrines differ (1995, 475). This means that though Catholic Traditionalists may encounter tension between their beliefs and what is taught in school, the school is teaching values which are essential to political society, so it is not teaching that any religion is wrong but rather that they are all the same in the eyes of the state (Macedo 1995, 473–74).

Rawls himself admits that the principles of a reasonable political conception will necessarily restrict some comprehensive views and encourage some ways of life while discouraging others, but this is not necessarily an issue to him (Rawls 1993, 195). Rawls simply believes that it is impossible to afford space in a society to every single doctrine, and this may lead to some good doctrines being left out of society, as it would be too optimistic to claim that his construction only excludes bad doctrines (Rawls 1993, 198). So while there may be some doctrines that are necessarily excluded by Rawls's liberalism, and though there is a chance that some of those doctrines are good ones, his liberalism is still minimally comprehensive because it asserts no further values about the good life.

As I detailed earlier, Rawls himself suggests a distinction in the levels of comprehensiveness doctrines exhibit depending on the scope of their views. And although he

argues that his political liberalism does not promote even a partially comprehensive doctrine, thus putting himself on the purely political end of the spectrum, I am sympathetic to the idea that this construction may in some way be partially comprehensive because of the requirements it forces on those who would be members of it, such as basic liberties for all. This is not to say that these requirements are bad or undesirable, but rather that by virtue of establishing these that his construction could be seen in some ways as partially comprehensive because so often rights and liberties are more than political. So, conceding the fact that Rawls's structure may be comprehensive in some way, I argue that it is less comprehensive than perfectionist liberalism and doctrines more comprehensive than it. Furthermore, whether Rawls's liberalism is entirely political or not, while an interesting and complicated topic, is not critical to my use of it as a tool for measuring neoliberalism. However, the critical difference in the comprehensiveness of Rawls versus Mill lies in the type of value system that the theories develop as well as their scope.

A perfectionist liberalism like Mill's does not just place any value at its center, but rather a value that makes a claim about how life should be lived. For example, Mill argues that a good life is one where individuals can develop themselves. He specifically structures the government in a way that he believes will best foster that development with individual freedom, although it is explicitly crafted to allow many different ways of life to coexist and conflict in order to best foster the intelligence of the people (which in turn improves the government). The scope of this system is wider than what Rawls is suggesting with his liberalism; it extends into the nonpolitical world by telling people *how* they should be living their lives.

However, Rawls makes no such claim, and his "comprehensive doctrine" is focused on the political and fostering cooperation between drastically different doctrines by attempting to build a middle ground for them all (Rawls 1993, 135). He argues that no one comprehensive

doctrine is appropriate as a political conception for a constitutional regime because he believes that the interactions between many different doctrines and ideas is a measure of free institutions, something highly valued and echoed in neoliberalism and even Millian liberalism (Mill 2002, 15–16; Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 22). In addition, Mill is far from the most comprehensive of doctrines, as we can look at doctrines such as Calvinism which lay out explicit, singular conceptions of the good life, though it then strays from the liberal tradition. Mill exemplifies perfectionist liberalism, and Rawls offers an account of what a minimally comprehensive liberalism might look like on this scale.

Perfectionist liberalisms are necessarily comprehensive; they tell us how we are supposed to live a good life, and they often involve paternalism or state action to help us achieve that good life. Contrasting this with Rawls's definition of political liberalism it is clear that a political liberalism cannot be entirely comprehensive and "involves, so far as possible, no wider commitment to any other doctrine" other than the political conception it builds off of (1993, 15). This showcases the core distinction between these liberalisms, and although it is in question whether Rawls truly constructs a purely political liberalism, the differences between Rawls and Mill are apparent.

The Deeper Implications of This Critique: Comprehensiveness as a Spectrum

Those that criticize Rawls on his comprehensiveness have a compelling point, and their criticism illuminates a deeper conversation surrounding Rawls's construction: the idea of comprehensiveness as a spectrum rather than bimodal. The construction of Rawlsian liberalism is drastically different from Millian liberalism, but as critics point out it seems that Rawls may not be entirely political. Despite this criticism, the liberalisms of Rawls and Mill are so different

in both aim and in structure that it would be unproductive to refer to them both as comprehensive in the same way.

Nussbaum and Waldron discuss the distinction between political and comprehensive as binary; a liberalism is either political or comprehensive (2011; 2004). Though Waldron does make it clear that the categories are not monolithic, he still uses a binary delineation (2004, 91-92). Ruth Abbey analyzes Rawls through a feminist lens, and she touches on the notion that in order to address some feminist concerns, it might be necessary for Rawls's theory to be at least partially comprehensive (Abbey 2007, 6–7). As Rawls does (1993, 13), she understands or at least hints at the notion that there are varying degrees of comprehensiveness with regards to the impact a conception has on the lives of individuals. Although there are threads that comprehensiveness has gradation, depending on the scope and implementation of a theory's impact on the private beliefs of individuals, it seems that the general consensus is that of a binary.

I draw on these strains of thought to pivot the understanding from two separate categories to a spectrum where the ends are "fully political" and "fully comprehensive" in order to add more nuance to the categorization of these theories. Understanding comprehensiveness as relative rather than bimodal allows for an analysis of neoliberalism not focused on whether it is "political" or "comprehensive" but rather *how* comprehensive it is relative to Rawls and Mill.

Viewing comprehensiveness as relative allows me to concede to the criticism that Rawls's political liberalism is comprehensive in some ways. I am not tied to Rawls being entirely political, and as such, I can concede to the criticisms of Rawls without losing weight in my use of his liberalism as an example. I simply use Rawls's theory as a less comprehensive

example to highlight differences that help me to tease out what makes a theory comprehensive and thus build this spectrum of sorts.

The implications of this spectrum require some clarification regarding the examples I provided in the previous sections. I asserted them as examples of a "political" and a "comprehensive" liberalism, which is true, but these are relative terms. Mill certainly builds an uncontroversially perfectionist liberalism, but that is not to say it is as perfectionist or as comprehensive as it can get. Similarly, Rawls provides a strong example of the minimally comprehensive side of the spectrum even if he does not fully achieve the political ideal he desired.

Turning this spectrum to my analysis of neoliberalism, I highlight that neoliberalism parallels Rawlsian liberalism in some ways, but is more comprehensive and takes steps similar to Millian liberalism, though it does not achieve the same scope of comprehensiveness as Mill does. This leads to neoliberalism being situated farther from the political end of the spectrum where it claims to reside, sitting in a partially comprehensive space that lacks depth and reveals tensions in the foundations of neoliberal theory.

Chapter IV:

Neoliberalism: Comprehensive or Political Liberalism?

When applying the idea of comprehensiveness as a spectrum to neoliberalism, it is not easily sorted into either the political or comprehensive category, though it portrays itself in the political category. Although neoliberal expositors exhibit parallels to Rawls's political liberalism in their theory, neoliberalism showcases an internal tension between its commitment to a minimally comprehensive construction and its assertion of a market-centered society. Neoliberalism exhibits many similarities to Rawls's political liberalism, and if it is taken entirely at face value, it seems to be minimally comprehensive in a way similar to Rawls's. It does build the political order around a common ground of some sort, but the values it posits are those of a market philosophy that contrasts Rawls's construction.

I contend that the parallels to Rawls are surface level, and the centering of markets and building a political order around them constructs a comprehensive doctrine that enforces a competitive mindset and dictates that a good life is one lived according to market principles. Rather than using a political system to build a common ground between differing comprehensive doctrines, neoliberals insert markets as the method to establish common grounds for agreement and cement market ideologies in society. I argue that the competitive mindset and market morals that neoliberalism forces on those who live in a neoliberal society shift neoliberalism away from purely political liberalism. Neoliberalism builds around the market rather than some other ideal as other prevalent theories do, and thus it can be difficult to orient the theory. In addition, I contend that markets are not a convincing vision of humans flourishing in the way that Mill's self-development or Rawls's justice as fairness are.

The many issues with neoliberalism and its confusing position can be traced to the same issue: the centering of the market order and its effects on the individual in the neoliberal construction. Because markets are fundamentally a means to an end, or a tool, rather than a specific value system, neoliberalism showcases a confused tension between the text of Friedman and Hayek and some of the intrinsic values of the market. Despite the many positive characteristics of the market, neoliberalism places far too much hope in the market by making it the core of the political order. There is no detailed end state for the people under the market. In other words, neoliberals trust markets wholeheartedly to provide the ideal lifestyle to the citizens, so they do little to establish any end-state values.

I further argue that neoliberalism carries a comprehensive doctrine through its focus on the market order. It seems that we may need to subscribe to some concept of a good life to effectively participate in a neoliberal society, pulling it outside of the realm of "political" though not fully into the realm of "comprehensive." While it is not intrinsically bad for a theory to be comprehensive, as Mill's example showed, it highlights that neoliberalism is not entirely political. Neoliberalism situates itself as one type of liberalism while simultaneously exhibiting clear similarities to another, starkly different liberalism. This highlights the tension within neoliberalism; it is pulled in two different directions which obscures critical aspects of its theory.

Neoliberalism as a Minimally Comprehensive Liberalism

Firstly, I will detail the parallels to Rawls that neoliberalism exhibits to highlight the minimally comprehensive features of neoliberalism. Friedman and Hayek, like Rawls, emphasize the importance of structures that allow people with different conceptualizations of how a good

life should be lived to come together, interact, and agree entirely because they are acknowledging the independent end goals of the others for mutual benefit.

Neoliberals emphasize that the limited scope of neoliberal ambition facilitates this cooperative dynamic among diverse people. Using Rawlsian language, we might say that they claim that neoliberalism has no comprehensive doctrine. Hayek's ideal construction of society is centered around the market order and "lacks an agreed ranking of ends," or a value system on what is good in life (2012, 269). Hayek argues that the lack of an explicit set of ends makes it possible for individuals to better act on and enjoy their freedom and the values that freedom brings (2012, 269). Hayek is constructing the market in such a way that it is fundamentally not comprehensive. It provides no account for what is good, as that is determined through the interactions between individuals within the market.

Rather than a system of deliberation and justification in the Rawlsian mode, Hayek argues that it is *market exchange* which brings together people with differing ends in a way that respects their individuality. He claims that because cooperation presupposes common ends, those with differing ends are necessarily opposed under any system other than the market order (2012, 270). He says "only the introduction of barter made it possible for the different individuals to be of use to each other without agreeing on ultimate ends" (Hayek 2012, 270). This shows that Hayek, and neoliberals in general, do not just see the market order as one way to achieve such cooperation, but they see it as the *only* way for individuals with differing ultimate ends to come together. In the same way that the overlapping consensus allows agreement between opposed doctrines for Rawlsian liberalism, so does the market for neoliberalism.

Echoing Hayek's sentiment, Friedman makes a link between markets and representation. He writes that the market "permits unanimity without conformity; . . . it is a system of

effectively proportional representation" (1962, 23). He claims that the market serves as grounds for free discussion for individuals to reach a consensus and therefore provides freedom without requiring interference or coercion from the state. In this way, he is tying the job of representation to markets rather than the government. Friedman joins Mill in believing that freedom requires free and full mobilization of collective discussion, which in turn requires representation, (1962, 23), but he then places the task of representation in the hands of the market. The market allows people to operate on their own self-interest, assuming that the collective self-interest will reflect or be identical to the common good (Valone 1982, 110). In this way, Friedman hopes the market can serve to effectively represent the interests of the people as an aggregate of self-interest. In this way, neoliberalism assumes that what is popular on the market as a result of individual transactions is reflective of what the population desires as a whole. Each individual speaks their mind with their wallet, and the market reflects the many different interests in a way that mirrors a proportionally representative system.

Friedman believes that the political process "tends to strain the social cohesion essential for a stable society," especially when the issues are those of the fundamental differences because he argues that "fundamental differences in basic values can seldom if ever be resolved at the ballot box" so conflict will inevitably arise when the political process touches issues of fundamental values (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 23–24). Where Mill prevents this strain on society with intelligent representatives and a system that evaluates opinions based on the intelligence of the voter, neoliberalism sidesteps the issue of a representative government structure with the claim that markets allow people to better express their opinions in a more dynamic way due to pricing and its separation from the political system (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 23, 108–9).

To further stress the dynamic property of the market, Friedman argues that in the market, "each man can vote, as it were, for the color of tie he wants and get it" and that individuals do not have to submit even if they are in the minority (1962, 15). The market provides an alternative method of representation that "reduces the strain on the social fabric by rendering conformity unnecessary with respect to any activities it encompasses" and as such permits the existence of disagreement and opposition in a way that does not require total agreement (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 24). Many different colored ties can be produced, in proportions that correspond to the desires of the public. Friedman also argues that fundamental differences in values—such as those tied to religion—can rarely be solved simply by the political system, and further clarifies that "the wider the range of activities covered by the market, the fewer are the issues on which explicitly political decisions are required and hence on which it is necessary to achieve agreement" (1962, 24). In other words, the market provides a dynamic space for people to make themselves heard through commerce, and because they do not have to conform when they are in the minority there is no burden on the system when disagreements occur.

Importantly, this representation that Friedman details even permits "subversive" policies such as advocating for socialism under capitalism by protesting and organizing together with their money, and he argues that such advocacy is impossible the other way around because people cannot accumulate the funds needed to speak and work toward such goals (1962, 16–17). Friedman is critical of a political system that seeks to fulfill the ideal of representation tends toward ineffective and fragmented policy because "the final outcome generally must be a law applicable to all groups, rather than separate legislative enactments for each 'party' represented" and therefore weakens and basis for a consensus with conformity (1962, 23). There is a clear parallel to Rawls in the ambition to achieve goals in a way that does not force people to conform

to one specific value system. However, unlike Rawls who seeks to build a purely political solution, Friedman and neoliberalism turn to the market because they view the purely political as ineffective and often coercive, as well as leading the people to accept majority rule because unanimity can only exist as an ideal in the political system.[7]

For Friedman, Hayek, and other neoliberal thinkers, the market is fundamentally not a political construction, and yet is able to bear the task of organizing diverse preferences in a way similar to Rawls's construction of justice as fairness. Of course, neoliberalism has a place for the political for areas that cannot be handled by the market or can only be handled at great cost, as detailed previously. These factors lead to Friedman constructing a political order around the market order, which opens the door for political agreement, since the exclusively political category is unburdened by the expanded role of the market order.

In other words, Friedman and Hayek each describe a society filled with disagreement on how life ought to be lived, but brought together by coordination through the market order. As detailed previously, neoliberalism places a large amount of trust and hope in the market, believing that the market allows greater levels of individual expression and individual cooperation without requiring the coercion and conformity that a non-market society requires. This means that neoliberalism seeks to foster cooperation and build a common ground between opposing doctrines in a way strikingly similar to Rawls, but it uses the market, a fundamentally non-political structure, to do so.

The idea of "minimal comprehensiveness" captures this ambition to theorize the terms of cooperation in ways that require very little from people. And, whereas Rawls's cooperation is a collective effort akin to a team, the neoliberal form of cooperation is individual and their

[7] Friedman argues that unanimity is simply too costly in both time and effort to be practical, so we must accept majority rule in the political system (1962, 24).

cooperation is only on the terms that each can achieve their individual goals. In other words, there are few collective goals in the neolioberal construction, but rather groups of individuals with similar interests or goals that choose to work together. Neoliberalism places immense trust in this brand of cooperation, because rather than coercion it depends on the self-interest of individuals, which has been proven to be a reliable trait. In this way, neoliberalism is seemingly more grounded than Rawls by placing trust in a historically dependable trait rather than in the abstract ideal of people converging around justice as fairness.

In addition, neoliberalism portrays itself as fundamentally anti-paternalist.[8] Its focus on negative liberty and an established role for the government is oriented around preventing coercion and promoting individual liberty through a market-based system to organize the people. The anti-paternalist stance of neoliberalism highlights the seemingly key disagreement with perfectionist liberalism: the neoliberal state does not enforce a value system because it favors upholding the market, so neoliberals fundamentally oppose a state-enforced comprehensive doctrine in the form of a "ranking of ends." In fact, Hayek offers a scathing criticism of doctrines that guarantee each member of society certain benefits through positive rights, as they require construction of society "as a deliberately made organization by which everybody is employed" and this is by nature incompatible with his conception of individual responsibility to partake in the market and earn for themselves (2012, 264). He sees such doctrines as necessarily totalitarian, and argues that social and economic rights are incompatible with "the old civil rights" and enforcing them would require "destroying that liberal order at which the old civil

[8] Neoliberalism does make exceptions to their anti-paternalist standpoint for children and those not of sound mind, but in general they frame government intervention as infringing on individual liberty (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 32–33). They are not alone in this sentiment, as Mill similarly argues that children, "barbarians" and the mentally ill are not entitled to the same level of freedom as others (2002, 9–10).

rights aim" (Hayek 2012, 263)**.** In other words, Hayek argued that restructuring society around economic well-being would destroy the market order (Whyte 2019, 79).

Taking these criticisms of paternalist and positive doctrines along with Friedman's and Hayek's accounts framing the market as a tool that allows people with different ideas on how to live life to come to an agreement on the structure of society we can see a similarity to Rawl's model. The market order serves as the means by which a political order can be built despite disagreements over values, and it further serves as a representative grounds for discussion similar to the shared political conception that Rawls details. Though the neoliberal construction differs from Rawls's through its use of markets rather than a theory of justice, it seems that at a glance neoliberalism is, at the very least, less comprehensive than Mill's construction.

Neoliberalism's Comprehensive Doctrine

I contend that this glance is deceptive and although it may posit itself as minimally comprehensive, neoliberalism in fact carries a hidden comprehensive doctrine that is rooted in the use of markets as the foundation of the political system as opposed to some other conception, such as Rawls' justice as fairness. Neoliberalism centering itself around markets leads to it focusing on the tool to achieve freedom rather than the individuals living within the society. Where justice as fairness may be difficult to attain, Rawls at least builds an ideal society where each individual is guaranteed the fundamental necessities to thrive. This is noticeably lacking in the neoliberal construction, aside from small notes about basic income. While they hope and trust, with good reason, that markets thriving will inevitably lead to the people thriving, there is no guarantee that this will happen. Rawls's construction carries guarantees that the people will be able to achieve first-order goods even though he does not use those goods as justification.

Similarly, Mill explicitly builds around a first order good in self-development, and he clearly details what he believes will lead to development and how it benefits society. Neoliberalism lacks such explicit guarantees that the people will have their needs met. In this section I detail how neoliberalism's comprehensive doctrine is realized through text as well as how it is lacking compared to both Mill's and Rawls's constructions.

The root of this comprehensive doctrine is that neoliberalism uses markets as the means for organizing society, both political and social, to best promote individual liberty and protect the rights of the people. This use of markets as the fundamental organizational tool for such goals leads to the neoliberal society and individuals within it being guided to follow market ideologies in a way that is not entirely unlike a comprehensive doctrine. By intertwining markets with the inner workings of society and building around markets, neoliberalism demands that those in said society operate in accordance with market principles, whether consciously or unconsciously, to effectively participate. Simply put, the premise of neoliberalism is that a good society is reasonably structured around a market order. However, many practices of good living for both individuals and collectives are actually undermined, not enhanced, by market relations. The discussion below showcases that neoliberalism's foundation extends beyond its parallels to Rawls's theory through its commitment to the market order. This extension happens in a variety of ways ranging from the neoliberal construction of human rights to the morals that the market order enforces.

To help me make this point, let me turn to Locke, a preeminent theorist of property rights. Locke is committed to markets as a continuation of his commitment to private property and self-defense, framing markets as one of many means to the end which Locke constructs (Locke 1823, 124). This follows from his stance on property because money and market

exchange permit higher levels of accumulation because goods which might perish and prevent others from making use of them[9] can be sold or exchanged for money, which will not deteriorate (Locke 1823, 126). So, Locke sees markets as a means to maximize the right to property and increase the amount that a person can accumulate reasonably.

Neoliberals however, see the market as an end in and of itself, building the entire political and social order around the success of the market order and using it to guide interactions between individuals and institutions. In doing so, markets do not just become one tool of many to support and cultivate freedom, but rather become the only means by which the neoliberal conceptualization of freedom can be realized..

To further clarify the neoliberal centering of the market order as an end, I turn to Friedman and his seemingly political construction of the market order that, I argue, is actually an affirmation of a comprehensive doctrine. Rather than construct a specific value system of what a good life is in terms of a value system and explicit morals, he builds off of the classically liberal notion that a good life is one where individuals can make full use of their liberty and live their life as they choose (Friedman and Appelbaum 1962, 195,200). As noted above, this construction would be compatible with political liberalism, as it is neutral to all comprehensive doctrines. However, Friedman does not stop his construction at this point, and he continues to build on this minimally comprehensive foundation in such a way that it enforces a doctrine of competition in nearly every aspect of life, as I show below. This is where the results of centering the political order around nonpolitical markets express themselves, as neoliberalism posits a necessarily comprehensive system to foster the growth and success of markets. While it is framed as what is best for the individuals within the neoliberal society, neoliberalism still requires that those

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[9]To Locke it is impermissible and against the laws of nature to accumulate in a way that prevents others from making use of the resource (Locke 1823, 116).

individuals act in accordance with markets and submit to a government structured entirely around the market principles.

This becomes apparent in Friedman's account of the competitive order. The competitive order "would seek to use competition among producers to protect consumers from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property, and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves" (Friedman 1951 [2012], 3). He fundamentally believes that building a government around the protection of the competitive or market order protects the citizens from the state and one another. However, by placing competition at the center of the political and social order, it becomes impossible to not partake in this competitive order.

While this is in some ways similar to Rawls's justice as fairness requiring that comprehensive doctrines be compatible with the broader structure in that it restricts the actions of individuals, Rawls is clear that justice as fairness "honors, as far as it can, the claims of those who wish to withdraw from the modern world… provided only that they acknowledge the principles of the political conception… and its political ideals of person and society" (1993, 200). The political ideals require that these doctrines act in a certain way regarding others in the political capacity, which undoubtedly restricts them, but it is in a way that is different from how markets shape society. Here I return to Friedman's account of the market as a tool for representation. He believes that markets serve as effective tools for proportional representation as an aggregation of self-interest. I argue that this is a mistaken view of representation, because rather than work toward a collective goal, which Rawls's explicitly argues is good, the market leads people to align merely by self-interest. If a person's self interests and actions in the market are used to represent them in the political capacity, then the separation between the private and

political shrinks. While it is possible to withdraw from the competitive order in some way, such as living as a subsistence farmer, the means for such lifestyles are becoming more scarce. As a result, it seems to be increasingly difficult to escape the market in both relations to others as well as in general existence within a society.

Furthermore, neoliberalism promotes a culture of competition that orients interactions within society, cementing it as customary. Brown (2017) provides insight into the cementing of market ideologies as customary through the economization of our political system. She points to the *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission* (2010) Supreme Court case, which I detailed previously, to highlight the neoliberal remaking of the political system in economic terms. This case permitted corporations to donate money to political candidates in the electoral process, allowing "corporate funds to flood the electoral process" and further highlights the shift toward a transaction-oriented system because monetary donations are equated to votes after *Citizens United*, making the electoral process more transactionary and economized (Brown 2017, 111). A further effect of this economized process is that competition is inserted as well, as those with more money are more likely to be "heard" by candidates and therefore there is incentive to earn more money to have greater impact on the process (Brown 2017, 107). Though it is only one example, *Citizens United* provides a striking example of neoliberalism tying markets to politics and further cementing competition as a culture through legal enforcement.

Mill is explicitly critical of custom and culture when it becomes pervasive and the core justification for actions (2002, 67). Although Mill is referencing culture in the sense of notions of right and just being attributed to conformity to that culture, there are some similarities to neoliberal competition. The competition that neoliberalism creates is despotic in a sense because if a person does not act rationally or competitively as the market dictates, it can be seen as

wrong. For example, a person might fully knowingly vote to raise their taxes in order to help others, but this is a nonsensical move in a pure market perspective.[10] An individual who operates according to the market could absolutely choose to help others by giving their money away, but this would be an act of private charity rather than through the veins of government action. In order to progress or cooperate under neoliberalism, individuals must appeal to the market. Of course, even Mill supports markets and competition for the progress and incentives they create, but he does not make them the end-state or say they will always be necessary.

The neoliberal centering of markets does not just lead people to compete in a specific capacity, but rather imposes a competitive order over the life of the people underneath the market. This, similarly to the distinction between levels of comprehensiveness, is a distinction of the scope of these restrictions. Because markets are the singular means to secure the freedom of people within the society, and in order to follow their good the people need to adhere to market principles, there are similarities to Mill's liberalism in broad terms. Although both neoliberalism and Millian liberalism value individualism and personal freedom, they differ in significant ways. Where the Millian individual is self-motivated and seeks to cultivate themselves (Mill 2002, 60), the neoliberal individual is led to be much more transaction-minded.

Further comparing the market construction to Mill's construction, it is clear that Mill constructs individualism as self-development and proceeds to structure the political system around it. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, constructs individual liberty as freedom from coercion, and builds around markets to prevent coercion. The goal of the Millian government is not merely the improvement of opportunities or quality of life, but rather actively improving the

[10] Of course, the argument could be made that this move is to their benefit because they enjoy helping others or feel that it fulfills a moral obligation. I am of the mind that helping others is moral, but neoliberalism makes no such moral claims, and for the purpose of this example, we can assume that this individual gets no benefit at all and simply helps people for the sake of helping them.

character and quality of *person* that the individuals under the government are. Though both theories share a respect and desire for freedom of opportunity, neoliberalism sees that opportunity as the end goal whereas Millian liberalism sees the opportunity as means to self improvement.

This difference is further illuminated in the specificity in the design of the systems Mill and neoliberalism detail. Mill lays out a specific and well thought out system that first defines what is good based on first-order goods, and then further lays out a system of government that pursues that first-order good by allowing people to execute a good life while ensuring they are protected as much as possible from coercion and each other.

Neoliberalism, on the other hand lays out clear reasoning for why the market is good, but does not build toward any specific first order good. It claims that markets lead to goods such as freedom, but it places immense trust that markets will operate properly and continue to do so secure those goods for the people. The neoliberal government is focused on protecting the people insofar as making sure they are able to operate within the market, but it has little power to actively ensure that people are attaining first-order goods. In this way, the market can fail to secure the satisfaction of both preferences and necessities for individuals, because there is always a loser in competitions. Markets necessitate inequality, meaning there are likely to be some who cannot afford the satisfaction of their desires. This effect is made more severe by the unbounded accumulation at the top, and so the market production turns to favor their desires, leaving the needs of others left unsatisfied.

Neoliberalism sets itself up for a market culture entirely structured and designed around one tool, rather than around a moral value as Mill does. So, although neoliberalism is certainly comprehensive in some ways that even Rawls is not, the comprehensive structure of

neoliberalism is unsatisfactory when weighed against Mill's more compelling comprehensive liberalism.

Jessica Whyte offers an additional account of neoliberalism not as an amoral system designed around the economy—as critics such as Wendy Brown see it as—but as a theory in which markets can only be fully realized with sufficient political, social, and moral foundations (2019, 8). She points to Hayek in making this point (Whyte 2019, 11), who claims that the society under the market-order "requires somewhat different moral views, from one in which people serve visible needs" and "demand[s] new moral conceptions which do not prescribe particular aims but rather general rules limiting the range of permitted actions" (Hayek 2012, 302). These "new moral conceptions" are focused on adherence to market principles, promoting self-interest and submission to market outcomes alongside the claim that our only moral duties are those that are negative (Whyte 2019, 12; Hayek 2012).

Hayek is clear that a new moral order is required for markets to be successful, and at the same time, he sees this moral order centered around the cash-nexus as one that is the only feasible way to "make peaceful reconciliation of the divergent purposes possible" (2012, 272). An important note is that though the market is essential to the economy, Hayek is not saying that this construction is putting the economic ends of people first. Rather, he understands the market as the only way to reconcile the differing non-economic needs of individuals without an explicit ordering of needs (2012, 273). So the market order, and neoliberalism in general, requires that we subscribe to a "new" moral code for it to function, but claims that said moral code and market-order is the only way in which we can coexist while maintaining different conceptualizations or orderings of what is good. So, Hayek desires to reconcile the many opposing doctrines that people hold.

Although it may seem that this moral order is analogous to Rawls's political construction, Hayek takes steps that are more pervasive than those that Rawls takes. Because Rawls constrains his construction to the purely political, it has less of an effect on how individuals live their private lives. Hayek, however, removes positive moral duties from his construction, meaning it extends far beyond the purely political and hangs over the private lives of individuals as well. Where a purely political order affects the sphere where people must interact with one another in a political capacity, such as respecting their legal rights, Hayek's construction removes positive moral obligations which would be present at all times in a person's life, such as an obligation to donate to charity, volunteer at a homeless shelter, or vote for policies which reduce suffering.[11] This is yet another case where the seemingly political construction serves to conceal the moral doctrine that neoliberalism requires. While Hayek depicts his construction of the market order as neutral and conciliatory, I contend that demanding that we abandon any positive moral duties conflicts with a great many comprehensive doctrines, reasonable or not, complete or not. On top of the replacement of traditional moral codes, the construction of morals around the market and self-interest as a replacement for other sources of moral codes marks an expansive transition in the structure of society and pushes neoliberalism further away from the minimally comprehensive side of the spectrum.

While the market-centered political system is not paternalist, it still establishes a positive duty in the government to uphold and protect market values. This places neoliberalism in a position where it builds the government around the market order and then requires it to uphold the market value system— a system where the government is seen as the opponent of freedom and must be restrained to protect liberty yet is necessary to do that which the market cannot. This

[11] I am not making any claim as to whether these obligations are right or wrong, rather I am just providing some examples of positive moral obligations.

is part of why the neoliberal comprehensive doctrine is obscured by the facially politically liberal construction of neoliberalism. It frames the government as restricted and therefore they claim that the market order takes the place of any singular comprehensive doctrine, allowing any comprehensive doctrines to flourish so long as they agree on the political. However, the market order itself serves as a form of comprehensive doctrine, though an unconventional one. Rather than a specific understanding of the good life, the market order promotes a life where an individual can best make use of their freedom through competition with others and the opportunities that neoliberals argue the market order provides.

Supplementing the underlying comprehensive doctrine discussed above, Neoliberalism constructs individual rights differently from more classical liberalisms, though often claiming to subscribe to those classical constructions. Neoliberals build their theory around individual rights, which are notedly distinct from economic rights, using a construction of human rights as means to secure basic welfare rather than broad popular rights (Whyte 2019, 226). However, rather than the classical or old liberal construction of rights for self-determination and individual sovereignty, the neoliberal builds around cementing and strengthening the market order, shielding the economy from politicization (Whyte 2019, 227). This is a marked divergence from the parallels with Rawls detailed previously, because rather than aiming for the politicization of society to afford more space for conflicting doctrines, neoliberalism seeks to marketize society to achieve a similar goal.

Neoliberalism's competitive ethos serves as an at least partially comprehensive doctrine. It may be a stretch to say that neoliberalism is a perfectionist liberalism, but it seems that it is innately more demanding of us than a textbook political liberalism would be. For example, a person living within Rawls's construction of society would be able to subscribe to any

reasonable comprehensive doctrine, and they largely have the ability to live life with whatever principles they desire. While this is true to some extent with neoliberalism, the fact remains that any doctrine must not only be able to coexist with others but also must be compatible with competition and the almost entirely negative moral construction of neoliberalism. This excludes doctrines such as Kantianism, depending on the reading of him, or the aspects of Rawls's theory which require some level of enforced distribution so that any inequality is to the benefit of the worst off in society (Rawls 2001, 42).

While both Rawls and Mill hold a place for markets in their construction, it is simply that: a place. They may augment their constructions with markets as a means to achieve their respective goals, but where neoliberalism differs is that it builds around the market. In the sense that a person cannot live under Rawls's "political" liberalism without respecting the basic liberties of other people, a person cannot live under neoliberalism without adhering in some way to the competitive moral order that it employs.

Neoliberalism extends beyond the boundaries of political liberalism, building compliance with the market order and competitive mindset into the law, as it did in *Citizens United*, in order to cement markets as the measure of social organization. People cannot live in a neoliberal society without adherence to capitalist values; they must use money, they cannot operate in a non-market economy, and they cannot unburden themselves of the competitive mindset if they want to interact with those who remain as participants in society. For example, even a group of committed communists could not operate in society writ large without submitting to capitalism. They may be able to live on a commune and sustain themselves, but if they desire to leave that commune, they necessarily enter a market order. In other words, aside from a commitment to the

political doctrine by which neoliberalism constructs the political system, it is also committed to pervasive competition in a way that extends beyond the simple market order.

The Stakes of the Competitive Order

The core of this argument is that neoliberalism commits entirely to the market order as means of freedom, but makes no claims on what that freedom should be used for so the freedom becomes an end for individuals to determine the value of. Where Mill agrees that freedom is good, it is good because it allows for self-development as a good life. These constructions are markedly different, as neoliberalism stops short of developing the ideal of human flourishing. Freedom is certainly good, but without the ability to meaningfully utilize it for a greater end, it lacks substance. For example, a person might be free to choose between slavery or death, but most people do not see such freedom as of much worth.

In its employment of the market, neoliberalism is also more demanding of individuals in some way that is uncharacteristic of other political liberalisms. Rawls focuses on a consensus without forced conformity, the goal of this consensus is a shared political order that promotes the well-being of its citizens regardless of their personal doctrines. While neoliberals— Friedman especially— are explicitly in support of the idea of unanimity without conformity, the unanimity he details is not one of collaboration but rather one of aggregate self-interest. Brown identifies issues with this construction, with the most negative of effects being the domination of the political realm by corporations under the guise of the interests of their shareholders (2017).

Using a spectrum of comprehensiveness for this analysis of neoliberalism offers a lens into the nebulous cloud that is the discussion surrounding neoliberalism. I offer one way to understand and orient neoliberalism in hopes to open a new mode for analyzing, critiquing, or

even defending neoliberalism. I argue that comprehensiveness as a spectrum is as central to this discussion as the argument that neoliberalism carries a comprehensive doctrine because it allows us to understand neoliberalism in a new light.

Furthermore, employing Rawls and Mill in this analysis provides strong examples of other liberalisms that are constructed vastly differently yet still work to achieve the goal of freedom in their own way. They highlight the steps that neoliberalism takes that are markedly different from both, namely the centering of markets as opposed to a clearly articulated value. Markets are fundamentally different from the values of Mill and Rawls. The market offers no insight as to what type of life a person should pursue aside from one that is lived in competition with others. It offers no end goal, individual or collective, and focuses not on the betterment of people, but on their material conditions. While it can be argued that neoliberals see markets as means to freedom, and so they build around freedom, the point remains. What use is freedom if the people have no ability to make use of it except on the market?

Neoliberalism places immense trust that markets will achieve the good they claim it does. While they have ample reason to do so, Hayek himself argues against defending the ideal market because of the unrealistic standard that it sets. For the amount of trust that neoliberals have in the market, arguing against it in its ideal form, though an honest move by Hayek, seems detractive in that they still defend inequality and competition which have the potential to negatively impact wellbeing. To defend aspects of markets that can cause harm while simultaneously trusting a non-ideal form of markets by virtue of the freedom in relations they provide is a move that details the lack of clarity surrounding the outcomes people might achieve.

An important detail that this discussion of the nonideal highlights is that, despite this discussion largely treating them as one, markets are not a monolith. A global market for oil is

multitudes larger and more complex than a small-town farmers' market. To say a nonideal market provides freedom, as Hayek does, begs the question of which form of market? This question is even more difficult when grappling with the fact that neoliberalism centers the competitive market order in its political construction. Without a monolithic, ideal market to build around, what form of market should be defended and upheld? Friedman and Hayek both argue in some way for a market with a minimum basic income, one in which the government maintains their operation, but there are still multitudes of possible markets that fulfill those requirements. In this way, freedom is insufficient without a clear understanding of which nonideal market neoliberalism builds around, because it seems that for freedom to be of worth in the neoliberal construction, then the people must be able to choose what types of markets to employ and in which spheres they should be employed.

Of course, my argument that neoliberalism exhibits internal tension and inconsistency is not a fatal blow to neoliberalism. In fact, nearly any theory exhibits inconsistencies in some way. For example, Mill constructs a society around individual development, and does not detail how people must develop, which means there is potential for individuals to develop into sophisticated and intelligent authoritarians which highlights that the empirical reality of human development may look drastically different from the ideal he constructs.[12] Similarly, the criticisms of Rawls that I addressed earlier spoke to a similar level of inconsistency in his construction. Despite the fact that internal inconsistencies are almost universal, I still maintain that highlighting and critiquing neoliberalism's inconsistencies provides value in understanding and orienting the theory. The inconsistencies neoliberalism exhibits muddy the waters surrounding the theory, making it difficult to understand wholly, and my critique attempts to provide some level of

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[12] Credit to Mariah Zeisberg for raising this point in our discussion.

transparency. The lack of transarency exhibited helps to explain why there is more divergence among neoliberals regarding the role of government because at times it seems the government is only there to protect markets, and at other times they argue for more expansive governmental measures that seem to be rooted in a deeper philosophy regarding markets. In this way, even if my individual critique is misguided or even incorrect I still provide a means for critiquing neoliberalism through its relative position to other theories.

Regarding my individual critique, I would like to address a counterargument derived from Hayek's argument for basic income. He argues that the government has a duty to provide a minimum level of income for those who are sick, elderly, or cannot make their living on the market for various reasons (Hayek 2012, 395). In this argument, it seems that he could be drawing on a more humanitarian impulse or at least a concern for those who cannot partake in the benefits of the market. In this way, my critique that neoliberalism focuses only on the market and building around it seems to be mistaken. This reading of Hayek is not entirely unfounded, as his construction of the great society has much concern for the non-economic, as he goes so far as to explicitly argue against seeing markets as means for economic rights (Hayek 2012, 263; Whyte 2019, 226). So, I concede that Hayek does exhibit concerns for values other than the market at times. He is directly concerned with those who cannot act within the market, and he does not construct their value or what they deserve with market terms.

Hayek's concern here is rooted in his fear of the "dissolution of the ties to the local community" as a result of a more open and mobile society (Hayek 2012, 394–95). He sees meaning and value in membership to whatever social groups one claims, and criticizes systems that tempt "large numbers to leave the relative security" because they can sow discontent and violence when people can no longer earn their living (Hayek 2012, 395). Here Hayek clearly

exhibits a concern for non-market principles, yet I understand this as a measure of security for his market society so that people do not grow discontent with the system as a whole. That said, I concede that it is plausible that Hayek had concerns other than the pure operation of the market, and I further understand that my individual critique of neoliberalism certainly carries faults. That said, I maintain that the worth of this discussion is not entirely dependent on the individual critique I put forward, but also on the mode of analysis and the idea of comprehensiveness as a spectrum.

Conclusion

This thesis argues that neoliberalism lies between Rawlsian and Millian liberalisms on the spectrum of comprehensiveness. While this is not intrinsically problematic, it does little to compellingly differentiate itself from Rawls's political liberalism and its moral order centered on markets is underdeveloped when compared to Mill's perfectionism. Each of these theories clearly lays out its purpose and desired end-goal, in terms of what benefits people will reap. Both incorporate ideas of freedom and individualism in their own ways, but they elaborate on what those values lead to, or what further benefits can be reaped from them. Neoliberalism leaves this fully in the hands of the market and individuals within them.

Mill and Rawls both construct drastically different, but similarly coherent theories with different end goals. Where Rawls's society is not justified on a first-order good, it does the work to show that the fundamental needs of individuals are guaranteed to be met and as such provides a neutral, but still moral, good for the citizens. Mill's perfectionism is justified on a first-order good, and Mill details why and how building around that good will foster the development and growth of people and therefore how it will better the people living within it. In contrast, neoliberalism builds towards markets alone. Freedom is uncontroversially good, and both Rawls and Mill create space in their theories for markets, but markets are far from the only means to achieve freedom. Nevertheless, neoliberalism attaches markets as the ultimate means to freedom. In simplest terms, Mill, Rawls, and other liberals such as Locke see markets as a tool to be used to achieve some greater good or goal, whereas neoliberals mistakenly see markets as the ultimate end to freedom. In addition to not being the only means to freedom, markets are sometimes even a counterproductive route to freedom: I argued that unfettered markets may enforce a pervasive

mindset of competition that, while helpful within the market, may distract individuals from developing and pursuing their conception of the good, which is also an element of living freely.

In simpler terms, markets are akin to a hammer; incredibly useful in the areas where they are designed for. However, one would not bring a toolbox filled only with a hammer when they need to build a house. Other tools are required and have their own purposes. Neoliberalism attempts to build a house with only a hammer, and as a result, everyone who will be living in that house must conform to the framework that the hammer requires. Obviously, this analogy is far from perfect, as markets are multifaceted and dynamic where hammers are undeniably not. That said, by focusing so much on the market neoliberalism ignores the other possible tools that can be used to make an even better society.

By employing markets in such a central manner, my argument is that neoliberalism exhibits a comprehensive doctrine. This doctrine is one of competition and it is rooted in the market framework that neoliberalism requires, and it guides both the private and political interactions of individuals.

The competitive doctrine may be an effect of neoliberalism's being conceptualization under established capitalism; neoliberals feel that the current system is good, but needs improvement. Neoliberalism's construction under established capitalism carries an implicit commitment to and justification of capitalist values, even if it reads as facially neutral. This leads to the question of whether neoliberalism's comprehensive doctrine is a result of its construction under capitalism, or if capitalism is further engrained by neoliberalism's comprehensive doctrine? I cannot say I know the answer to these questions, but I maintain that neoliberalism carries a comprehensive doctrine nonetheless.

I urge the reader to think deeply about this question and the broader discussion of this thesis. Consider the alternative forms of liberalism I laid out, not as theories or constructions we should adhere to or strive to enact, but as examples of what a compelling construction of a political theory entails. What types of values do they center and most importantly what level of concern for the people do they explicitly exhibit? Reconsider assumptions about what neoliberalism requires, as I argue it is far more than it seems at face value. Reconsider what the liberal defense of markets entails, is it a place for markets as Locke, Mill, and Rawls have? Or is defending markets to build entirely around them and their operation as neoliberalism does?

These questions all point to possible sources of discomfort with neoliberalism. Imagine a committed liberal who tangles with these questions. In light of this discussion, they are offered an 'off-ramp' so to speak. They can see that there are alternative strains of liberalism that are constructed more concretely with far more clarity, and it is revealed that the neoliberal approach is far from the only one. To be neoliberal is certainly to be liberal, but the vast field of liberalism encompasses far more than solely neoliberalism.

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