

## On the Economic Reconciliation of Collectivism and Individualism

- **Introduction and Establishment of Intentions and Epistemic Context**
- Introduction, progressive social values vs liberal economic values, status quo
- Epistemic scene-setting, generalist disclaimer
  - Personal sensemaking exercise, ideally the byproduct of which would be the generation of discourse which aids in the sensemaking efforts of the reader. Deleuzian philosophy. Help prime the reader to understand progressivism and liberalism in terms which are theoretically compatible.
  - Not familiar with embedded liberalism or with market socialism.
  - Lack of experience in spheres of politics, economics, and policymaking, i.e. this is a purely theoretical exercise except insofar as it may inform my involvement in the crypto-philanthropic complex.
  - Acknowledge the deep confusion of these terms in popular (especially transcontinental) discourse.
    - Liberalism in economic sense vs present cultural sense, i.e. Republican ethos is generally more economically liberal than Democratic ethos.
    - Set provisional definitions of progressivism, liberalism, neoliberalism, collectivism
- **How Neoliberalism Can Be Understood in Pure Terms, and How The Present Global Order Seems to Have Diverged from Such.**
  - Proper classical liberalism should protect competitive markets from capture by private firms and by states, as a means to ensure some sufficient degree of decentralization of economic power.
    - Arguably a proper liberal economy strikes a balance between sufficient and excessive state intervention in the market, enabling the conditions for competition and decentralization, and intervening when these values are threatened by would-be monopolies or cartels.
  - The “Neoliberal” era doesn’t necessarily embody liberal/neoliberal ideals, but has slouched toward cronyism and market fundamentalism. Neoliberalism as a [discredited zombie ideology](#).
    - Perversion of neoliberalism
    - Laissez-faire is illiberal when it entails private monopoly.
    - Touch on three crux points where neoliberal theses were disproven
      - Enron as evidence against efficient market hypothesis
      - Subprime mortgage crisis bailouts as evidence against state non-interventionism
      - National hoarding of Covid PPE as evidence against efficient and liquid global markets.
  - What would pure neoliberalism look like, drawing from Hayek, and how would it differ from market fundamentalism?
    - If classical liberalism was pre-collectivism, “pure” neoliberalism is a post-collectivism return to classical liberalism after having witnessed the risks of runaway collectivism.

- **The Sense in Which the Term ‘Progressivism’ is here used, a Critique of Certain Progressive Means, and an Exaltation of Certain Progressive Ends**
  - Critique of certain progressive means, exaltation of certain progressive ends.
  - Example of flawed progressive means toward noble progressive ends: Higher taxation of the wealthy as a progressive policy, yet the reality of the present byzantine legal system permits virtually boundless potential for tax evasion strategy.
  - “Economic equality” vs “Widened economic opportunity and stronger collective economic security” as different interpretations of progressive ends, critiquing the former and exalting the latter, and expounding on how the latter may be theoretically compatible with pure neoliberalism.
- **Intimations Toward the Reconciliation of Progressive Values with Economic Liberalism**
  - In theory, to what extent is progressivism at odds with economic liberalism?
    - It is far from clear to me.
  - Applying dialectical pragmatism to the reconciliation of progressivism with economic liberalism. (i.e balancing collective economic security with individual economic liberty)
  - Inversion of “embedded liberalism” into “embedded progressivism” where instead of economic liberalism being embedded within strong state control and welfare policy, we have strong progressive values embedded within economic liberalism?
  - A “free market collectivism” wherein the values of collective economic security and widened economic opportunity are non-coercively promoted within the private sector by a reticulum of nonprofit enterprises?
    - Example: the “crypto-philanthropic complex” as a nascent example of a collectivist parallel economy which can fund public goods without relying on taxation or coercion. Wild west of philanthropy.
    - Touch on current debate about whether, or the extent to which, venture capital can systematically be relied on to support public goods.
  - Some combination of embedded progressivism and free market collectivism?

It appears that, over the course of the twentieth century, the primary cultural thrust of progressivism has, insofar as it is characterized by its discontent with the socio-economic status quo, identified the theoretical and practical framework of neoliberalism as its nemesis. While I am no economist, and while haven’t any serious experience in policymaking, I can say that what progressive criticism of neoliberalism I’ve encountered has been characterized by a well-intentioned yet neglectful oversight of the basis of neoliberal thought and its justifying virtues. It should also be acknowledged that what follows here is no proper work of scholarship, but is rather a short prospectus on a mode of thought which may guide proper scholarship. What follows here is, rather, a generalist inquiry into how neoliberalism may perhaps be reconciled with the progressive values in our day considered antithetical to it, an exposition of

why such values are not necessarily so antithetical, and something of a progressive apologia of neoliberalism.

To whatever extent one may vaunt the free market as the basis for individual liberty, both economic and political, one must also acknowledge that the economic playing field, at any given moment, is not intrinsically level. We do not all inherit the same degree of financial security, nor are we all born into political stable regimes. The thesis of liberalism in the economic sense, and in turn that of neoliberalism, is that the government should not hinder the dynamism of economic competition. In terms of the disparity of economic opportunity, this means leaving the playing field as it is, as far as government action is concerned.

That said, while the ends of progressivism largely revolve around greater parity of economic opportunity, the means through which this is commonly sought out often involve government action. Arguably the ideological impetus of socialism is the neutralization of economic want, and the greater equalization of economic opportunity. What is intriguing, and deserving of inquiry beyond my presently modest abilities, is the prospect of promoting wider economic opportunity without resorting to empowering governments to attempt to artificially level the playing field. In other words, progressivism and neoliberalism may yet be sublated, provided we can tactfully dispose of the illiberal means by which progressivism commonly seeks to attain its ends, namely government intervention in the notionally free market.

Before going any further, I should acknowledge a few things, so as to minimize what disservice I do to those holding some of the beliefs here discussed. Firstly, progressivism at large does not necessarily involve the empowerment of government to intervene in free markets, but the progressive mindset, mine included, often conflates economic liberalism with the entrenched cronyism and extractive corporate practices it tends to entail, and in doing so risks undervaluing or even taking for granted the foundational importance of free markets. Secondly, neoliberalism at large is not always, and perhaps it is even rarely, promoted on a basis of humanism and political liberty, and is rather well-suited for extractive individualists to appropriate in support their own ends, i.e. to get the government off their back so they can amass as much wealth as possible.

It is said that the doctrines of neoliberalism, especially the work of Hayek and his intellectual successors, are largely misunderstood by the general public, both by progressives who take economic liberty for granted and thus understandably overlook the importance of free markets, as well as by those who will arm themselves with whatever justification they can, however intellectually dishonest, to grow their businesses indefinitely, even to the point of monopoly or other anti-competitive arrangements. It is arguably due to this field of prevailing misconceptions that the conversation explored in this inquiry seems, at least on the surface of the public sphere, so sparse in occurrence and so shallow in depth. Then again, I am no expert and perhaps this conversation has taken its course here or there, to whatever avail.

Popular misconceptions notwithstanding, it is my impression that a dialectical reconciliation of progressive values with neoliberal policy is not only theoretically possible, but practicably

plausible. Before any of that is laid out, however, perhaps a brief bit of semantic context regarding the relationship of liberalism and neoliberalism is warranted, if for no other reason than to lay out my present level of understanding for the reader to discern. Liberalism in the economic sense refers to societies wherein the government or political authority engages in little to no economic intervention, instead letting markets follow their own spontaneous and emergent patterns of commerce. It is argued that this naturally enables economic growth and the widening of economic prosperity, to a greater extent than could be achieved with a more centrally planned economy. Indeed, it is in distinction to centrally planned economies that liberal economies are defined, as if the markets are “liberated” from a central planning authority which, simply by virtue of not being omniscient in terms of economic foresight, would otherwise artificially constrain said markets. Neoliberalism, in theory at least, constitutes a “return” to liberal economic policy after a period of more centralized economic planning and state programs around the onset of the twentieth century and the ensuing few decades. To what extent neoliberalism is a dialectically “higher” form of liberalism is a somewhat superfluous matter, and to argue such may or may not be giving too much credit to neoliberal thought leaders, but it can at the very least be said to be newer, hence the ‘neo’ in the term.

To sublate progressivism with neoliberalism would be to preserve the virtues of both while avoiding, to the greatest extent possible, their respective vices. Here, I will argue that the ends of progressivism are noble, if we take them to be the widening of economic opportunity rather than the more communist vision of absolute economic parity, while the common means of progressivism are more dangerous than they are worth, namely the empowerment of the state to economically intervene and coercively go about the distribution of wealth. I will also argue that the basis of neoliberalism is noble, namely that the government should only engage in regulation that doesn’t hinder the ability of competition to keep markets efficient and preserve individual economic liberty, while some of the consequences of this basis are dangerous, namely the gaping economic disparity entailed by unchecked profit-maximization, and any market capture such unchecked growth may lead to.

Here, two points demand clarification. Firstly, that the allowance of private enterprise to grow unchecked is certainly not an economically liberal position, but rather an illiberal one insofar as it entails the potential capture of markets by way of private monopoly. To be a true liberal, in the economic sense, is to oppose the capture of markets either by government or by private enterprise, and it thus follows that a key responsibility of a liberal government, and even a central tenet of liberalism, is the enforcement of antitrust law. At the precipice of monopoly, laissez-faire is illiberal. Secondly, that economic liberty is what liberalism is fundamentally concerned with, while the spread of economic opportunity is arguably only what can incidentally follow such liberty. Opportunity, in the sense of having one’s basic needs met so as to enable one’s pursuit of higher endeavors, is arguably more central a value to progressivism than to economic liberalism, and yet it is a value which is not necessarily at odds with liberty. Indeed, to figure out how to promote the spread of economic opportunity, without resorting to coercive redistribution of wealth or other forms of state intervention, is the primary object of the larger dialectical venture to which this inquiry humbly gestures.

With those points covered, and to return to the formal, if over-simplified, sublation of progressivism and neoliberalism initiated above, what might a synthesis look like? It must involve the preservation of individual economic liberty, while also involving some promotion, however systemically or spontaneously structured, of the broader economic welfare beyond mere economic liberty. The question of whether this economic welfare, here treated chiefly as some measure of the financial opportunity enjoyed by the average person, can be widely promoted without instituting state-enforced systems is an interesting one. If it is a matter of the wider provision of financial security, to the effect of the financial security enjoyed by someone with an inheritance, the prospects indeed seem bleak for relying on non-state funding, that is, philanthropic funding, to provide such security. But if we approach the problem less directly, and think about the manifold public goods which can go toward aiding individuals on their paths toward financial security, then the prospects of a private sector solutions