

**PRESERVING LIBERALISM BY ENHANCING  
A HAYEKIAN-SPONTANEOUS ORDER BASED  
ON PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND FREEDOM**

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**Abstract.** Liberalism continues to be the best system guaranteeing peace, security, economic and political freedom, and prosperity, but the necessary price is individual responsibility. It is only by (self-) limiting a part of personal freedom, that one can ensure the proper and spontaneous functioning of society and the market. An international spontaneous order based on responsibility, freedom, tolerance, and cooperation might be the best paradigm for preserving liberalism today. And preserving liberalism means strengthening the individual commitment to an open society; it requires three proposals aimed to preserve and relaunch liberalism. 1) Rejecting populist, collectivist authoritarianism and omnipotent, ever-present government. 2) Enlarging the spontaneous Great Society and international institutions. 3) Enhancing capitalist free-market economy and individual responsibility.

**Keywords:** *Liberalism; Hayek; Spontaneous Order; Collectivism; Responsibility*

*Liberalism's Crisis, Liberty, and Cooperation*

Liberal societies and liberalism are in crisis. This is partially the result of their inability to ensure the welfare promised at the Cold War's end when both socialist and collectivist systems were defeated, and liberal democracy was identified as the best paradigm able to guarantee political and economic freedom. This aspect was analysed by Fukuyama (1989), who proposed the "End of History" thesis, for which liberal democracy represented the end of all credible alternatives to government. Though an era was sealed, new questions, such as religious extremism and nationalism, Fukuyama (*Ibid.*) argued, would be the challenges in the future. This prophecy was fulfilled soon after, as the new liberal world order faced religious terrorism (early 2000s) and populist nationalism (late 2010s). From the end of the Cold War, new collectivist autocracies emerged within a "National-Socialist" revival (not to be confused

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with historical Nazism), entailing the use of nationalist rhetoric (Nationalism) and the State as an ever-present player in the economy and people's lives (Socialism).

While liberalism continues to be the best system able to guarantee peace, security, economic and political freedom, and prosperity, the necessary price is individual responsibility. It is only by occasionally (self-) limiting a part of personal freedom, that one can ensure the proper and spontaneous functioning of society and the market. The theorists of early liberalism in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries acknowledged the necessary limits of freedom through the promotion of self-interest and individual preferences without harming others, managing diversity, and mitigating conflict. According to classical liberalism, people are "inherently and capable of both being autonomous and enjoying so being to the extent required by the institutional structures of the economic marketplace and constitutional democracy" (Buchanan, 2005, 12). An international spontaneous order based on responsibility, freedom, tolerance, and cooperation, might be the best paradigm for preserving liberalism today. It would enable people to cooperate while pursuing their interests.

Sociologist and economist Friedrich von Hayek wrote about catallactics, a system that allows people to integrate into a community. This order might enhance, save, and relaunch liberalism internationally. Liberalism is the attempt to manage complexity in the spontaneous order by rejecting arbitrary coercion or collectivist and vertical solutions. Possible solutions for preserving liberalism include condemning collectivist authoritarianism, promoting free-market capitalism and freedom of trade, protecting human rights, and guaranteeing private property. Cooperation among actors is also a desirable condition in a complex world and is needed for obtaining personal outcomes and absolute gains (Moravcsik, 1997). People might establish common ends, but often these "will not be ultimate ends to the individuals but means which different persons can use for different purposes" (Hayek, 1944, 63). Cooperation leads to independence. And it is necessary in any kind of order; from family to government, from firms to institutions (Hayek, 1973).

Cooperation ought not to be seen as a loss of personal freedom; rather, as the acknowledgment that a single agent cannot always increase his well-being alone. He needs "the freedom of others". Increasing individual freedom is a guarantee for the preservation of liberalism. "Freedom will prevail only if it is accepted as a general principle whose application to particular instances requires no justification" (Hayek, 1976, 61). Strengthening "responsible freedom" – which considers the liberty of others, thus the limits to personal freedom to ensure other people's liberty – is solid ground for a free society. Hayek (1973, 55) wrote that a "condition of freedom in which all are permitted to use their knowledge for their purposes, limited only by rules of just conduct of universal application, is likely to produce [...] the best conditions for [...] their ends: [...] such a system is [...] maintained only if all authority, including that of the majority of the people, is limited in the exercise of coercive power by general principles to which the community has committed itself."

The best method of preserving individual liberty on a global scale appears to be an order that sets clear, reasonable, and responsible limits to potential anarchic degeneration or collectivist statism. In strengthening freedom, in other words, one must set clear limits dictated by the individual spirit of personal responsibility. Individualism is “an attitude of humility [...] and tolerance [...] and is the exact opposite of the intellectual arrogance that underlies the demand for the global direction of the social process” (Hayek, 1944, 170). To encourage individuality is to encourage personal responsibility. There is no need to use force in social and international relations; as Norman Angell (1911) argued, brute force is not at all practical or indeed desirable, for the rational potency of individual intelligence and self-control already yield the best results. An individualist attitude opposed to the collectivist and autocratic drift that has re-emerged in this last decade might help to save, protect and preserve liberalism and the liberal order.

“To direct all our activities according to a single plan presupposes that every one of our needs is given its rank in an order of values which must be complete enough to make it possible to decide between all the different courses between which the planner has to choose” (Hayek, 1944, 60). The individual cannot and should not be relegated and controlled, his needs and preferences cannot be decided by a bureaucrat, a State, or a Party. Preserving liberalism means reinforcing an international order based on individual and mutual liberty, with a rejection of violence, arbitrary coercion, and centralized solutions. It means strengthening the individual commitment to an open society requires three proposals aimed to preserve and relaunch liberalism. 1) Rejecting populist, collectivist authoritarianism and omnipotent, ever-present government. 2) Enlarging the spontaneous Great Society and international institutions. 3) Enhancing capitalist free-market economy and individual responsibility.

#### *Proposals for a Spontaneous Order Preserving Liberalism Worldwide*

Rejecting collectivist authoritarianism (based on single-actor, illiberal, arbitrary coercion and control) and omnipotent government (enhancing the system of checks and balances, making the rule of law stronger).

Liberalism is based on the trust of individual actors that use their liberty to create outputs while preserving peace and acting in a spontaneous order. On the contrary, collectivism – a typical element of both right – and left-wing authoritarianism – is just the opposite. According to Hayek (1944, 145) collectivism “has no room for the wide humanitarianism of liberalism but only for the narrow particularism [...]. If the ‘community’ or the state are before the individual [...] only those individuals who work for the same ends can be regarded as members of the community.” Collectivism disregards individual freedom and uses coercion to punish those who defect. Rejecting collectivism enhances the individual dimension of the person and its arbitrary action. Encouraging collectivism means destroying and disincentivizing personal responsibility and private property. Authoritarian collectivism leads to totalitarianism, a path taken with the consent of many people, those who “prepared voluntarily to submit to that totalitarian discipline” (Hayek, 1944, 141).

This cancels any individual action and possibility to differentiate people according to capacities and outputs. Hayek (1960, 37) warned about the drift of autocratic collectivism: “To turn the whole of society into a single organization would be to extinguish the very forces that shaped the individual human minds that formed it.” Notwithstanding the evidence of the failure of the collectivist Soviet model, the tendency toward an omnipotent government weakening civil institutions and the system of checks and balances while discrediting liberalism as a system of antibodies to totalitarianism, continued unabated after the end of the Cold War. As Hayek (1944) warned about the inability of the political and ruling classes to understand Nazism and Fascism as both a response to and a variant of Socialism, today’s open society’s enemies pose the same challenge with the powerful means of modern propaganda. Still, authoritarian regimes use repression, elitism and planning, based on coercion and control of the individual – who is relieved of all responsibility for individual action.

They are progressively disintegrating the rule of law, replacing it with the will of a Party-State-Nation based on arbitrary and political criteria. According to the more demagogic regimes, in a nation where the division between the “good” (us) and “bad” (them) is apparent, there is no place for the rule of law because there is no need to guarantee anyone’s safety. Hayek has always been averse to arbitrary coercion, the antithesis of human freedom and the cornerstone of liberalism, the condition of individuals that includes the lowest degree of coercion possible in a society. Coercion prevents all the individuals from pursuing their aims and prevents them from contributing to the community (*Ibid.*). “Centralization is an instrument of political power, and it creates a degree of dependence scarcely distinguishable from slavery” (Hayek, 1944, 150). Hence, it is crucial to reject collectivist authoritarianism based on control, centralization, and coercion. This is argued by Hayek in the third volume of *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*.

“The last battle against arbitrary power is still ahead of us – the fight against socialism and for the abolition of all coercive power to direct individual efforts and deliberately distribute its results. I am looking forward to a time when this totalitarian and essentially arbitrary character of all socialism will be as generally understood as that of communism and fascism” (Hayek, 1976, 152). Socialism is not treated the same as its offspring, Fascism, Nazism, or Communism; but, because of its intrinsic authoritarian and coercive collectivist nature, it lays the premises for yet monstrous legacies. Modern autocracies use collectivism and nationalism: they are national-socialist. And they despise the individual, its freedom, and its property. A free system is where a regime contemplates yet not unlimited freedom and categorically bans arbitrary coercion. A system where the rule of law is applied, and such rules are simply shared and agreed upon among people so that order-preserving liberalism can protect the individual from collectivist authoritarianism.

The rule of law must govern states and is antithetical to coercion. “While every law restricts individual freedom to some extent by altering the means which people may use in the pursuit of their aims, under the rule of law the

government is prevented from stultifying individual efforts by ad hoc action” (Hayek, 1944, 76). While liberalism does acknowledge the importance of laws that necessarily limit individual freedoms, it emphasises reasonably enhancing personal liberty on the condition of it not infringing on that of someone else. According to Hayek (1973) legislation is primarily based on the establishment of rules that protect the individual and his rights from arbitrary coercion. Enforcing the rule of law preserves liberalism both nationally and abroad. It is indispensable for strengthening personal liberties, as well as a spontaneous order based on shared rules, not imposed commands. An autocratic heel presses on the nation’s neck; while free societies are woven together by the gentle threads of free accords among free persons.

Classical liberalism rejects anarchy and eco-anarchism, which means unlimited arbitrariness, destruction of the market, and threats to private property. Strengthening the rule of law is a powerful deterrent from any regression to the law of the jungle. The adoption of liberal institutionalism abroad goes hand in hand with the bolstering of the checks and balances at home (Hayek, 1944). Any government’s powers should be limited, for anyone can attest to the failures of State or Party control on society, but one might argue that they are just as egregious as those perpetrated by unlimited democracy and the unlimited power of the majority. Limitation of power means controlling a government not merely for self-preservation, but for the individual’s and its liberties’ sake: checks on any power prevent the proliferation of localized tyrannies. Rejection of populist-authoritative coercion and illiberal control by the government, while enhancing global institutions, the checks and balances system, and the rule of law are the pillars of free orders.

Enlarging a spontaneous Great Society internationally (based on individualism, cooperation, tolerance, and inclusion) and international institutions (preventing conflict, preserving peace, human rights, and liberty).

An order that aims to preserve liberalism must be based on a free and open society. The Smithian Great Society or the Popperian Open Society identifies just that: societies based on the individual and its freedoms, tolerance, multilateralism, economic freedom, limited State, and cooperation. A great society defends and reflects liberalism. Today’s challenge is to expand a Great, Open Society internationally, a difficult mission in the era of rising populist and collectivist autocracies. Strengthening the Open Society is the best guarantee for the proliferation of liberal ideas. Hayek (1967, 162) explained the concept of “spontaneous order of human activities”, “under the enforcement of universal rules of just conduct, protecting a recognizable private domain of individuals” (*Ibid.*). Such an order is the product of a multitude, but not a result of human design or artificial projects (Hayek, 1973). The spontaneous order is the result of a multitude of many, not a result of deliberate human design (*Ibid.*).

It is the result of man’s free and responsible action. The Open Society is safe because it is not based on the annihilation of the Hobbesian “State of nature”, and it leaves the freedom to individuals to operate in society. Hayek (*Ibid.*)

stresses that the Great Society is complex: for while spontaneous orders are free and cannot be manipulated by political parties or the State or other associations (*Ibid.*), ensuring a free and secure order is quite another matter. The Open Society is accessible to anyone (Popper, 1945), and the spontaneous order allows humans to undertake their course in society, pursuing their aims freely, emancipated by the constraint of subjugation of the State. The spontaneous order is the theorization of the free and open society, where there is no arbitrary coercion unless the freedom of others is violated: human beings make their choices in freedom, under their own responsibility. Such an order does not follow a utopian project of (State – or Party – led) planning, nor is it an anarchic jungle of peril and incivility.

Liberalism can be protected and preserved only if a civil and free society is strengthened. The liberal order “makes use of men in all their given variety and complexity, sometimes good and sometimes bad, sometimes intelligent and more often stupid” (Hayek, 1958, 12). In a free society, there are many “sub-orders”, and the State is not the only actor (Hayek, 1973); therefore, Hayek promoted an extended order of human cooperation, where a free society is one without a particular end (*Ibid.*). We need the responsible freedom of others to ensure our own and preserve private property. Hayek’s spontaneous and cooperative order is “neither an omnipotent super-state, nor a loose association of ‘free nations’, but a community of nations of free men” (1944, 242). He recognizes that the preservation of free systems and liberalism is difficult “because it requires a constant rejection of measures which appear to be required to secure particular results” (Hayek, 1973, 61).

The need to cooperate in an open society reinforces freedom and interconnectivity so that conflicts and wars will naturally appear obsolete and counterproductive for the international realm, nations and individuals. Strengthening and preserving liberalism means improving both the open society and the spontaneous order. The consolidation of international institutions promoting peace, human rights, and freedom in general individuals is thusly vital. Hayek himself favoured the creation of a new League of Nations which would state that “*we must aim at preventing future wars as much as possible*” (1944, 244). The threat of war will never be completely vanquished, but the adoption of an institutionalist approach, conducted both at home and abroad, along with the adhesion to international institutions, would do much to prevent any fall into a belligerent slippery slope. States enter international institutions and accept their entanglement, not only to reduce the impact of current conflicts (Keohane, 1984) but also to discourage future conflict outbreaks.

International institutions might contribute to economic prosperity, “but it is impossible to be just or to let people live their own life if the central authority doles out raw materials and allocates markets, if every spontaneous effort has to be ‘approved’ and nothing can be done without the sanction of the central authority” (Hayek, 1944, 234). Institutions should not be a cage, but a counterbalance to the State, strengthening the market and individuals’ freedom. Liberal institutions’

work of promoting cooperation is consistent with the idea of a limited State. The government must ensure (physical) protection of people and their property. However, it must be based on the limited power of the majority to avoid degenerations, as well as allow people to choose their rulers. Government must grant security against physical harm or privation of property, “without endangering general freedom” (*Ibid.*, 124). The State must have a firm hand, but a light touch, leaving room for individuals’ centrality and their responsible actions and goals in society.

Life, liberty, and property must be protected from others’ aggression and the almighty government. As constitutionalism means limited government (Hayek, 1973), strengthening constitutionalism and institutionalism means reinforcing liberty. Limited government is a crucial element of a society promoting liberalism. “The State should confine itself to establishing rules applying to general [...] situations and should allow the individuals freedom” (Hayek, 1944, 79). Solutions are not gifted by the magnanimity of the State; they emerge spontaneously, but only if the order is free. They come from individual empowerment. Only a limited government is a good government (Hayek, 1976), but limited government also means that the rules in place must be thoroughly enforced. Shared rules, not commands, are capital in the Great Society that preserves liberalism. They help establish wide cooperation and tolerance, limiting conflicts. Such a result is also magnified by institutions that check the governments, defending peace, human rights, and freedom.

Enhancing capitalist free market economy (based on free trade, competition, property, political and economic liberties) and responsibility (acknowledging the limits of knowledge, rejecting collectivist planning).

Political freedom cannot be separated from economic freedom. An order aimed to preserve liberalism must defend freedom of commerce and enterprise, the basic framework of the market economy, which in no way means market anarchy. Economic freedom is an indispensable element for the achievement of political freedom. It is “the prerequisite of any other freedom; it must be the freedom of our economic activity which [...] also carries the risk and the responsibility of that right” (Hayek, 1944, 105). The single individual is responsible for producing the outcome he desires and pursuing the economic gains it looks for in the market. An open economy inevitably places responsibility on the individual, who is personally confronted with the dynamics of the market, supply, and demand. Empirical evidence proves that prosperity is enhanced with economic freedom (McColskey, 2007), a prerequisite which cannot be separated from political freedom. A Great Society that intends to foster and preserve liberalism must ensure both with the same determination.

A crucial aspect of the free-market economy that improves liberalism is fair economic competition. “Competition is a procedure of discovery, a procedure involved in all evolution [...]; and through further competition, not through agreement, we gradually increase our efficiency” (Hayek, 1988, 19). Thanks to competition one discovers facts that otherwise will remain unknown (Hayek,

2002). Competition increases output reliability and individual curiosity. Importantly, cooperation – that is, when actors adjust their behaviour according also to the preferences others (Keohane, 1984) – does not mean an absence of competition, nor the endangerment of natural cooperation in society. Competition leads individuals towards an order based on market preferences: a simple “way of guiding individual efforts” (Hayek, 1944, 37) and is more efficient than planned solutions. “An effective competitive system needs an intelligently designed and continuously adjusted legal framework” (Hayek, 1944, 40).

Competition drives our quest for knowledge in an open society. In the free market, everyone potentially has something to offer according to their ability and willingness. The price mechanism is a guarantee of independence and freedom in the spontaneous order and international trade strengthens an order that places liberalism at its core. Not only is trade mutually beneficial, but as Angell (1911) explained, war is also economically irrational, and the expansion of free trade and interconnections made any necessity to enlarge states’ territories obsolete (Fukuyama, 1992). Economic freedom leads to commercial integration and interdependence. Free trade is a peaceful force, which leaves people better off than if they pursue more chauvinist alternatives. The free-market regime is ultimately the one that best allocates resources among interacting actors. Individuals exchange resources and goods, satisfying their needs according to their preferences. The free market fosters entrepreneurial creativity, rejecting collectivism.

The free market is not necessarily based on the libertarian-anarchist approach and entails the willingness to play by the rules (Buchanan, 2005). The market is the result of spontaneous order (Hayek, 1973), and capitalism is proper for free and open societies. An order that sets out to defend liberalism would inevitably have to defend economic liberalism. Also, the arsenal of economic rights includes the right to private property. “The system of private property is the most important guarantee of freedom, not only for those who own property, but scarcely less for those who do not” (Hayek, 1944, 108). Preserving property means protecting the individual and their liberties and rights. “Law, liberty, and property are an inseparable trinity” (Hayek, 1973, 107). In defence of the spontaneous order that preserves liberalism, Hayek contemplated the need to preserve freedom of trade, economic competition, private property, and the necessary union of political and economic freedoms, rejecting the idea of the economic plan. Human beings’ knowledge is naturally limited.

Humans cannot collect all the information available to them to act in society, as well as the State cannot efficiently allocate all resources based on individual needs – it does not know all the information either. Economic control and planning are indicative of the desire to “de-responsibilize” the individual. A spontaneous order is an order that does not claim to have or to know all the information; it accepts that human knowledge has limits. They can freely act in the market, but an economic plan decided by a State or the Party cannot satisfy people’s needs. Strengthening individual responsibility means promoting choices within the market

specifically, according to one's desires. "Whoever controls all economic activity controls the means for all our ends" (Hayek, 1944, 95). Furthermore, "economic control is not merely control of a sector of human life which can be separated from the rest; it is the control of the means for all our ends" (*Ibid.*). Those who control the economy want to control the individuals and their preferences.

There are no objects in nature that can gather all possible information around any individual or collective; thus, according to Hayek, the solution remains free will and freedom of choice. Economic control is always political control, and any arbitrarily decided plan is the biggest threat to any order aiming to preserve liberalism and freedom of choice. Such an order must reject the plan – that is, any intervention of the State which distorts the economy. The plan enslaves the individual, preventing him from being responsible and depriving him of his power as a citizen and economic choice-maker. Plans repress the creativity of the individual, while freedom promotes it. Plans are entirely in contradiction with a capitalist economy based on economic freedom and free competition precisely because they do not allow the individual to be responsible for his personal choices. Only an order that acknowledges human natural ignorance and the impossibility of gaining all information and that rejects collectivist plans will allow liberalism's proliferation.

### *The Necessary Ignorance, Freedom, and Responsibility*

This paper proposed the strengthening and preservation of liberalism internationally through the implementation of three concepts. 1) Rejecting collectivist, illiberal, and coercive authoritarianism, omnipotent and ever-present government by enhancing checks and balances and the rule of law. 2) Enlarging the spontaneous, individual- and cooperation-based society, and institutions aimed at preventing conflict and strengthening human rights. 3) Supporting a competitive free market economy and enhancing personal responsibility in opposition to planned and collectivist solutions. An order aiming to emphasize these three pillars preserves liberalism both at home and abroad. Freedom of action implies the unpredictability and unavailability of all information. Such an order knows its own relative ignorance of the actions and preferences of its members, strong in the knowledge that freedom of choice is the ultimate provider. Collectivist and autocratic societies do not contemplate the possibility of doubt and lack of knowledge.

Ignorance is a condition for acting within the liberal order. To accept ignorance is to accept freedom. Accepting not knowing all information incites the individual to act creatively. It is not a coincidence that autocratic societies have a low degree of innovation and progress, which is the result of individual ideas, not State-sanctioned programmes. Socialism and collectivism do not accept ignorance and insist they can control all the variables that lead to an individual decision. Plan-based collectivist systems – right-wing socialism (Fascism) and left-wing socialism (Communism) – claim to run the economy based on infallible and utopian certainty. An order-preserving liberalism is a spontaneous order that

does not control all information but accepts that any central authority cannot have a total and all-knowing grasp of its people's preferences. No single individual has or can have all the answers (Hayek, 1958). No one has absolute knowledge. Information and knowledge are dispersed throughout society and not centralized, even in the current social-media world.

An order that aims to refortify the three elements analysed throughout the paper can profit from a better understanding of its composing actors, however, one cannot rely on collective intelligence – which does not exist – because people constantly and unpredictably change their plans considering any newly acquired information (Hayek, 1973). A free system is also based on the personal responsibility of the individual. Of which there are two dimensions: “(i) responsibility for expressing the will [...] one has in action [...] and (ii) responsibility for having the will one expresses in action” (Kane, 2019). “The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and human responsibility”, Václav Havel (1990) said. Responsibility exalts liberty and fosters the Open Society (Popper, 1945), which is in constant adjustment according to the individuals' preferences and objectives. Responsibility opens new paths: it is a necessary condition for freedom.

And the freedom of the individual ends when that of another begins – a concept alien to collectivists. Hayek (1944, 217) appealed to a “responsibility, not to a superior, but to one's conscience, the awareness of a duty not exacted by compulsion, the necessity to decide which of the things one values are to be sacrificed to others, and to bear the consequences of one's own decision, are the very essence of any morals which deserve the name”. Liberal spontaneous order is based on people, on the individual, and his freedom. As the authoritarian system provides collectivization of merits and faults at the expense of objective success and failures, the liberal doctrine stresses the individual to mind its actions' consequences. Liberty and responsibility are inseparable (Hayek, 1960). Liberty does not only mean freedom to act, but also to take responsibility for one's actions, and, concurrently, facing the consequences. As individuals, we are responsible for both what we do and what we achieve. That is the way.

No one else is to blame. “Face this reality and we are already halfway there” (Buchanan, 2005, 94). Taking responsibility may seem counter-intuitive – and often unpopular –, but it is a necessary condition for exercising freedom. Freedom imposes discipline, and this discipline is called responsibility. There are limits to freedom and liberty (Buchanan, 1975). These limits allow liberalism to proliferate and individuals to be protected from aggression. Hayek (1944) tells us that any civilization might take an unexpected turn, and the disappearance of liberty is one sign of such a turn. Liberty is a mark of civilization (Berlin, 1998), and it is a typical sign of the Hayekian spontaneous order. It is the enabler of the catallactic, to some extent. Liberty must be exercised with responsibility, for it is the greatest feature that protects liberalism itself. The safest guarantee for the maintenance of a spontaneous order that preserves liberalism in a world challenged by collectivist autocracies using nationalist rhetoric and the ever-present State in economic matters.

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