

## Freedom and Work in Neoliberalism

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### I. Introduction

In February 2014, opponents of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) seized on the Congressional Budget Office's (CBO) projections about the impact of the legislation on employment in a cynical bid to tarnish its reputation. Critics of Obama Care contorted the CBO's prediction that the ACA would result in a reduction of total working time into the specious claim that the health care reform would force over two million Americans out of work. Given the central role that paid work plays in satisfying both material and social needs, the threat of job losses was bound to trigger anxieties. But even after the CBO clarified that the predicted reduction of total working time would follow from the *choice* that many would make to work less (as a result of the expansion of Medicaid, health insurance subsidies, and protections for older people), critics like Paul Ryan lamented the possibility that the legislation would remove incentives to work and that, as a result, many on low-incomes would miss out on the "dignity of work."<sup>1</sup>

Although one might expect that enhanced choice in the realm of work would appeal to American longings for freedom, it is striking how quickly this value pales in significance once the putative virtues of paid work are placed in doubt. Of course, mainstream criticisms of the recent Republican pontification on work and health care reform show that welcoming expanded freedom in relation to work hardly constitutes a radical position. Yet while this latest installment of political

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<sup>1</sup> See Suzy Khimm, "Paul Ryan: Obamacare is a 'poverty trap'," *MSNBC* February 5, 2014, accessed February 14, 2014, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/paul-ryan-obamacare-poverty-trap>

theater has sharpened the distinction between Republicans and Democrats on issues affecting ordinary working Americans, it also draws attention to the curious silence on more fundamental questions. For example, if large numbers of the population appreciate the potentially empowering and liberating effects of the ACA, why is the need to work for wages so rarely understood as a form of coercion *in and of itself*? And how do we reconcile the widely acknowledged view that work is “disciplined time” (while only leisure counts as “free time”), with our professed commitment to freedom?<sup>2</sup> To be sure, freedom is but one of our fundamental values, and even John Stuart Mill, *the* theorist of negative liberty, recognized that “every one who receives the protection of society owes a return for the benefit.”<sup>3</sup> But why, given the innumerable ways in which people can and do contribute to society *other than through the sale of their labor power*, are criticisms of the structural coercion and moral imperative to work for pay so scarce? In other words, if we care about freedom as much as we say we do, why are we so uncritical of the preeminence of paid work in contemporary politics and society?

In this paper I argue that, despite the obvious tensions between work and freedom, the conception of freedom that features in neoliberal philosophy helps shore up an idealized vision of society centered on paid work. In particular, I show that a neoliberal conceptualization of freedom and the economy lacks the ‘teeth’ with which to criticize the material necessity of entering the labor market, at the same time as it positively celebrates an entrepreneurial orientation to work as a practice of freedom. This conceptual narrowing of freedom cannot ‘all by itself’ account for our attachment to the value of work. Not only does the idea of paid work as a route to dignity and inclusion in the community continue to play an important role in social and political life. In addition,

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Rojek, *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time* (London: Sage, 2010), 24.

<sup>3</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1978), 73.

such an interpretation of my argument might lead to the patently false conclusion that, prior to the ascendancy of neoliberal thought, the notion that employment abrogated freedom enjoyed widespread support. Whatever the negative effects that flow from the fact that union membership in the US has reached its lowest level in more than 70 years (stagnant wages perhaps first among them), the halcyon days of organized labor hardly featured a grand ‘refusal of work’ as advocated by autonomist Marxists like Mario Tronti.<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, the demise of organized labor over the past three decades cannot be understood solely, or even mainly, in terms of a shift of consciousness among the working population: labor market ‘flexibilization,’ to name just one trend that works hand in glove with neoliberalism, amounts to an aggressive process of re-regulation in favor of capital, leaving organized labor structurally constrained and weakened. But this essay advances the proposition that the rise of a new way of understanding freedom can go some way to explaining our collective lack of opposition to the regime of wage labor. In what follows, I read Hayek alongside the work of Isaiah Berlin to draw out the distinctive features of Hayek’s account of freedom. In doing so, I want to stress that I do not mean to endorse Berlin’s argument as expressing some ‘true’ or ‘pristine’ account of freedom. There are some important and persuasive critiques of Berlin’s theory,<sup>5</sup> and it is quite likely that some other theory entirely would provide a stronger foundation for a ‘critique of work.’<sup>6</sup> Indeed, my goal in this

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<sup>4</sup> Mario Tronti, “The Strategy of Refusal,” 1965, accessed online March 24, 2013, <http://libcom.org/library/strategy-refusal-mario-tronti>

<sup>5</sup> For example, Thomas Dumm offers a rich reading of Berlin that draws attention to Berlin’s displacement of questions concerning the political construction of space in his account of negative liberty. Thomas L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 48-49.

<sup>6</sup> The republican and humanist Marxist traditions are two possibilities. For example, Alex Gourevitch suggest that “because republicanism has been especially sensitive to the paradox of slavery and freedom, it is from that tradition it has made sense to ask the question ‘can work be free?’” Alex Gourevitch, “Labor and Republican Liberty,” *Constellations* 18, no. 3 (2011): 445, doi:

paper is not to offer a ‘critique of’ work, but instead to advance a ‘critical theory’ of work, shedding light on how work and freedom ‘work’ in our present.<sup>7</sup>

Although Hayek’s concept of liberty appears on its face simply to reiterate Berlin’s concept of negative liberty as non-interference, I show that, on closer inspection, Hayek sketches a significantly narrower range of actions that constitute coercion and unfreedom than does Berlin. I argue that, whereas Berlin’s account of negative liberty perhaps surprisingly leaves open the possibility of a radical critique of the material, political and social pressures we face to join the ‘world of work,’ Hayek’s theory can admit of no such claim and flatly rejects the very notion of structural coercion. While we should, of course, exercise caution in treating Berlin and Hayek as offering definitive accounts of liberalism and neoliberalism respectively, this finding nevertheless marks the defanging of negative freedom as a critical concept at the hands of neoliberal philosophy.

Of course, to claim that Hayek’s theory of coercion leads to an “immunization of the economic realm against any kind of criticism based on power or coercive effects inherent in it,”<sup>8</sup> is not the same as saying that work constitutes a practice or instantiation of freedom in and of itself. But as I show in sections IV and V of this paper, neoliberal freedom provides the ideological support for the figure of the enterprising subject, which in turn undergirds the postindustrial ethic of work as self-realization. Using the work of Berlin once again to shine a light on Hayek, I suggest that Hayek’s embrace of the entrepreneur and of competitive capitalism goes beyond a commitment to

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10.1111/j.1467-8675.2011.00644.x. Of course, Karl Marx’s early writings, particularly those addressing alienation, also offer the basis for a freedom-based critique of contemporary work.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel A. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Biebricher, “Power in Neoliberal Thought,” (paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 29-September 1, 2013), 13.

negative freedom as non-coercion and that, by straying into the realm of positive freedom (understood as self-realization), his theory contains a fundamental contradiction.

Such a finding might appear implausible given Hayek's worries in *The Road to Serfdom* that socialism leads to fascism and the destruction of individual freedom by organizing society around a "unitary end."<sup>9</sup> Of course, given market freedoms we have the choice about what kind of work to perform – a choice which Hayek stresses subjects of planned economies lack. Yet in presenting competitive capitalism as in the 'true' and long-term interests of the masses whatever their own thoughts on the matter; in offering an account of freedom that shores it up; and in depicting the entrepreneur as a more fully self-realized subject than the 'passive' employee, I contend that Hayek commits himself to a form of positive freedom, as theorized by Berlin. It thus becomes clear that freedom in Hayek's theory is not only significantly circumscribed, but helps nourish the notion that, when we actively adjust ourselves to the dictates of the market, we are in fact, acting as free subjects.

Clearly not everyone has read Hayek. But to the extent that his theory has helped shape dominant and taken-for-granted ways of thinking and knowing in contemporary neoliberal society, my reading of Hayek can help explain not only our collective acquiescence to, but also our embrace of paid work. Moreover, this analysis calls into question the narrowness of Hayek's account of negative liberty, and the association he makes between entrepreneurial behavior and freedom. As such, it is my hope that it helps open up space for the development of opposition to both the work society and neoliberalism more broadly. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section, I consider in more detail what it means to read Hayek as a philosopher of neoliberalism. In the third section, I turn to Hayek's account of negative freedom, before making the case in the fourth and fifth sections that his theory also offers a surprisingly positive version of

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 31, 56.

freedom, especially in his embrace of the figure of the entrepreneur. The sixth section concludes the paper.

## II. Reading Hayek as a Philosopher of Neoliberalism

To understand what it means to read Hayek as a philosopher of neoliberalism, one must deal with the vexed question of what in fact constitutes neoliberalism and who should stand among its chief authors. By neoliberalism, I mean the effort to reformulate classical liberalism and its various arts of government to produce and maintain a society organized around the free market.<sup>10</sup> When a group of 26 European and American “liberal sympathizers,” including Hayek, met in Paris in 1938 at the Colloque Walter Lippmann, the term “neoliberal” was coined to name a refurbished liberalism that would aim to avoid the twin perils of both laissez faire and collectivist theory and practice.<sup>11</sup> In fact, to the neoliberals of the 1930s and 1940s, the Great Depression had resulted from the failure of laissez-faire policies, and it paved the way for collectivism and planning in the shape of the British Keynesian state, New Deal reforms, and the rise of Bolshevism and Fascism in Europe.<sup>12</sup> To stem

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<sup>10</sup> See Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2. Biebricher, “Power in Neoliberal Thought,” 4-6. Loic Wacquant, “Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism,” *Social Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2012): 68, doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8676.2011.00189.x.

<sup>11</sup> Rachel S. Turner, “The ‘Rebirth of Liberalism’: The Origins of Neo-Liberal Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 67-83, 71, doi: 10.1080/13569310601095614. Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Turner, “Rebirth of Liberalism,” 70. Biebricher, “Power in Neoliberal Thought,” 5. Indeed, in *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek later characterized laissez-faire as “a highly ambiguous and misleading description of the principles on which a liberal policy is based.” Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, quoted in Werner Bonefeld, “Freedom and the Strong State: On German Ordoliberalism,” *New Political Economy* 17, no. 5 (2012): 633-656, 638.

the tide of this collectivism, Hayek envisioned an international society that would bring together intellectually isolated neoliberal thinkers with the task of breathing new life into liberalism.<sup>13</sup>

At the opening address in 1947 of the Mont Pelerin Society, the group established for this very purpose, Hayek spoke of the intellectual task of “purging traditional liberal theory of certain accidental accretions, which have become attached to it in the course of time, and also facing up to some real problems which an over-simplified liberalism has shirked or which have become apparent only since it has turned into a somewhat stationary and rigid creed.”<sup>14</sup> Hayek offers us an ideal reference point for understanding the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary neoliberal society: He is perhaps the most recognized and widely read neoliberal thinker, and his work has in turn shaped “neoliberal practice in several states,”<sup>15</sup> although, as I note below, we should not assume a neat fit between neoliberal theory and practice. Moreover, his 1960 book, *The Constitution of Liberty*, offers a rich and detailed account of freedom, and thus lends itself to the type of conceptual analysis that this paper will perform. But before analyzing the specific claims that Hayek advances in this work, we need to consider the goals that animate it.

Hayek makes clear that his purpose in *The Constitution of Liberty* “is to picture an ideal, to show how it can be achieved, and to explain what its realization would mean in practice.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, looking to the earlier success of socialists, Hayek learned the value of utopian thinking and thus set neoliberals the task of constructing a “‘liberal utopia’ based on the principles of free trade and

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<sup>13</sup> Turner, “Rebirth of Liberalism,” 74.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Biebricher, “Power in Neoliberal Thought,” 6.

<sup>15</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Fragility of Things: Self-Organizing Processes, Neoliberal Fantasies, and Democratic Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), v.

freedom of opportunity, regardless of how small its prospects of early realization may be.”<sup>17</sup> For this reason, although we clearly should not read Hayek’s work as an attempt to describe the social reality of *his* time, it does provide guidance as to the dominant political rationality of *ours*.

Notwithstanding the naivety of reading Hayek’s work as a *description* of ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism,<sup>18</sup> there are still clear benefits offered by a close reading of Hayek as a *philosopher* of neoliberalism. First, even though ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism understood in terms of concrete and localized practices and institutions parts ways with neoliberalism as a set of more abstract ideals, a clear sense of what those ideals *are* furnishes an indispensable tool with which to understand and criticize the ongoing neoliberal project. How are we to assess claims that, for example, the solution to the present crisis is ‘more’ neoliberalism if we abandon efforts to understand the philosophical positions and ideals that underpin it?<sup>19</sup>

Second, and more to my point, while the institutions and policies of ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism may not precisely match those of neoliberal authors, a more diffuse political imaginary or rationality that structures multiple interlacing fields of twenty-first century life does in fact reflect the philosophical positions of thinkers like Hayek.<sup>20</sup> One need only think of the push to organize (and explain) as many human activities as possible according to the model of the market – whether education, health care, detention centers, or environmental protection – and the tendency to

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<sup>17</sup> Turner, “Rebirth of Liberalism,” 75.

<sup>18</sup> Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3, (2002): 380-404, 382, doi: 10.1111/1467-8330.00247.

<sup>19</sup> For this point I am indebted to Thomas Biebricher’s response to my question at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois, August 29-September 1, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Although I recognize that these terms have different theoretical lineages and perhaps capture slightly different concepts and processes, in many ways I take their meanings to be overlapping.



construct the ideal subject in the image of the entrepreneur (as opposed to citizen for example).<sup>21</sup> While a multitude of texts – political speeches, technical and self-help manuals, television shows, and so forth – provide evidence of this political rationality, the philosophical work of thinkers like Hayek deserves close attention because it offers an unusually sustained theoretical development of the key tenets. Given the centrality of freedom to Hayek’s theory, moreover, engaging with his work promises new insights into our puzzling acquiescence to structural coercion.

### III. Berlin, Hayek, and Freedom as Non-Coercion

I begin this section with a brief overview of Isaiah Berlin’s “Two Concepts of Liberty,” first delivered as a lecture in 1958. By reading Hayek alongside Berlin, I show the family resemblance between their negative concepts of liberty. But more importantly, I accent the narrowness of Hayek’s account of freedom, and thus its insensitivity to the structural coercion to engage in paid work. The defanging of freedom as a critical concept in turn helps secure the willing and active consent of those “who live only so long as they find work.”<sup>22</sup>

Although the meaning of freedom is, as Berlin puts it, “so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist,” in his view two particular concepts stand out for their historical significance and likely future impact on human affairs.<sup>23</sup> They are, of course, negative and positive liberty. Whereas negative liberty rests on the claim that “I am normally said to be free to the

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<sup>21</sup> Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Theory and Event* 7, no. 1 (2003): 19, doi: 10.1353/tae.2003.0020. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty: Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168. The republican conception of freedom as non-domination provides an important third account of freedom.

degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity,” its positive counterpart “derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master.”<sup>24</sup> In this section I focus on negative liberty; in the next two sections I consider in more detail Berlin’s account of positive liberty.

Berlin’s specification of negative liberty, which he traces back to such thinkers as Locke, Mill, Constant, and Tocqueville, is explicitly political. That is to say, Berlin draws a clear line between not being able to attain certain goals (for example, jumping “more than ten feet in the air”) due to “mere incapacity,” and being “prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do.”<sup>25</sup> This distinction has a particular bearing on economic matters, and he offers a brief yet suggestive analysis of the terms ‘economic freedom’ and ‘economic slavery.’ As Berlin notes, there may be no law against my purchasing a loaf of bread, but I may still think I am a victim of economic slavery or oppression if “I believe that my inability to get a given thing is due to the fact that other human beings have made arrangements whereby I am, whereas others are not, prevented from having enough money with which to pay for it.”<sup>26</sup> Within this seemingly straightforward discussion lie (at least) two ambiguities.

First, Berlin suggests that one may “very plausibly” make the claim of oppression in the bread example; but in doing so he displays ambivalence about whether such a case does in fact constitute an infringement of freedom. Indeed, he sums up this discussion by noting that the “criterion of oppression is the part *that I believe* to be played by other human beings” (emphasis added), with this belief resting on a “particular social and economic theory about the causes of my

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 169, 178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 170.

poverty or weakness.”<sup>27</sup> Berlin does not offer an evaluation of the merits of any such theory, and thus leaves the reader unclear as to whether, in *his* view, the person who cannot buy a loaf of bread experiences oppression. Nonetheless, Berlin does not *rule out* the possibility of oppression in this example, and in this respect, as I shall show below, he offers a more expansive account of negative liberty than Hayek.

If we accept Berlin’s “criterion of oppression,” it becomes clear that what counts as an infringement of liberty will remain contested unless we have a widely approved social or economic theory to help adjudicate claims of oppression. Berlin’s famous commitment to value pluralism suggests the inevitability of conflict over theories that might clear up the matter once and for all.<sup>28</sup> We might say, therefore, that Berlin sought to explicate the general criteria according to which one should decide whether an infringement of liberty had taken place, while refraining from offering a definitive pronouncement on the plausibility of particular social and economic theories. I shall return to the significance of this point below.

A second ambiguity in the text quoted above arises with respect to the role of intentions in whether an act counts as coercive or oppressive. For example, Berlin somewhat confusingly claims both that “coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act,” and that the “criterion of oppression is the part...played by other human beings,... with or without the intention of doing so, in frustrating my wishes.”<sup>29</sup> As Nancy Hirschmann points out, Berlin claimed in a later formulation “that obstacles need not be deliberate,”

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>28</sup> Berlin’s “entire intellectual universe turned on his insight into value pluralism (which he sometimes believed he had been the first to discover.)” Jan-Werner Müller, “Fear and Freedom: On ‘Cold War Liberalism,’” *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no. 1 (2008): 45-64, 53, doi: 10.1177/1474885107083403. Also, see Dumm, *Michel Foucault*, 54

<sup>29</sup> Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 170, 169.

although as she understands it, “they still had to be attributable to specific humans who could be held accountable for them.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, in one later text, Berlin suggests a distinction between the “absence of freedom” on one hand, and “oppression” on the other: whereas the former may follow from “alterable human practices” whether intentional or otherwise, acts that constitute oppression are “deliberately intended.” Yet even to this explicit requirement of intent in the case of oppression Berlin adds the possibility that oppression may take place simply when acts “are accompanied by awareness that they may block paths” to choices that a subject might make.<sup>31</sup> Based on this last point, I suggest that Berlin would resist a rigid distinction between coercion and oppression based on the absence or presence of intent, since oppression may arise simply when an individual or group can reasonably be expected to foresee the consequences of their actions.<sup>32</sup>

Turning now to the work of Hayek, I want to first point out the obvious similarity between his understanding of freedom and Berlin’s. On the face of it, Hayek offers a view of freedom in line with Berlin’s concept of negative liberty when he suggests that “the range of physical possibilities from which a person can choose at any given moment has no relevance to freedom,” but that instead, “the only infringement on it is coercion by men.”<sup>33</sup> A closer reading, however, reveals disagreement between them.

Recall that, according to Berlin, if I am unable to buy a loaf of bread because of human arrangements that leave me too poor to do so, I can “very plausibly” argue that I am a victim of

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<sup>30</sup> Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Berlin, “Introduction,” in *Liberty: Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Hardy, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Iris Young sketches a similar account of oppression when she notes that oppression results even from the “everyday practices of a *well-intentioned* liberal society” (emphasis added). Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 12.

oppression.<sup>34</sup> For Hayek, by contrast, freedom is violated when “somebody else has power so to manipulate the conditions as to make [a person] act according to that person’s will rather than his own.”<sup>35</sup> In short, whereas Berlin’s theory is amenable to claims of indirect and unintentional infringements of negative liberty (to be arbitrated by relevant economic and social theories), Hayek’s formulation requires greater intentionality on the part of an agent for a claim of coercion or oppression to get off the ground.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, later in *The Constitution of Liberty* Hayek distinguishes between being “compelled by circumstances to do this or that,” and being coerced, where the latter involves the actions of another “human agent.”<sup>37</sup> Given that for Hayek, a state of liberty is one in which “coercion of some by others is reduced as much as possible in society,”<sup>38</sup> this is no merely semantic distinction. How, then, does Hayek propose to distinguish between being “compelled by circumstances” and being coerced? Hayek observes that my not being able to borrow a book I want from the library because

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<sup>34</sup> Although she does not attribute this position to Berlin, Hirschmann suggests that on the “responsibility view” of negative liberty – which “focuses less on how barriers are set in place and more on their possible removal” – poverty would count “as a restriction of liberty if one developed an economic theory that identified a definite class of people who were able to alleviate the poverty.” Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, 18. Two pages later, however, Hirschmann points out that the methodological individualism of many proponents of negative liberty makes them unable to accept that “generalized social conditions” such as poverty should count as barriers to freedom.

<sup>35</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Hayek considers oppression “perhaps as much a true opposite of liberty as coercion,” but thinks that it “should refer only to a state of continuous acts of coercion.” *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 11. Elsewhere, Hayek makes clear that while ‘perfect freedom’ would involve the complete absence of coercion, this would require that all members of society “strictly observed a moral code prohibiting all coercion.” Since we do not yet know how to create such a society, we must in the meantime use coercion to prevent people from coercing others. See Friedrich Hayek, “Freedom and Coercion: Some Comments and Mr. Hamowy’s Criticism,” (1961) accessed August 21, 2013, [http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=2136&chapter=195266&layout=html&Itemid=27](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=2136&chapter=195266&layout=html&Itemid=27).

someone else already has it does not mean that I am coerced. While Berlin (like most other people) would presumably agree with this conclusion, his route to it differs from Hayek's. Allow me to explain how.

On Berlin's account, to establish coercion or oppression I would need to show that my inability to borrow the book of my choice was the result of arrangements that enable some people, but not me, from accessing it. Since in Hayek's example, the reason I cannot borrow the book is simply that someone else has already checked it out, anyone else who wanted to do so would similarly find his or her hopes dashed. Thus, this example would clearly not constitute coercion or oppression from Berlin's perspective. It is worth remembering, however, that for Berlin, oppression and hence the infringement of freedom need not result from intentional acts. This does not mean that the person who borrows the book I desire before me unintentionally oppresses me, since anyone else who wanted it would face the same disappointment. What it does mean, however, is that human arrangements that 'frustrate my wishes,' even without the intention of doing so, may still be oppressive. What might such arrangements look like?

If I cannot visit the library because I do not own a car and it is not situated on a bus route, and if those who do not own cars are predominantly poorer members of society, then even if the decision to build the library on that particular site was not taken with the *intention* of excluding the poor, I suggest that on Berlin's theory, the result could nevertheless constitute an infringement of our negative liberty. For Hayek, by contrast, "coercion implies both the threat of inflicting harm and the intention thereby to bring about certain conduct."<sup>39</sup> Clearly, I am not coerced when someone else already has the book of my choice, perhaps unless they took it with the intention of thwarting my plans. But on Hayek's account, nor do I suffer a loss of freedom when the library is situated

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<sup>39</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 134.

beyond my reach, because the site of the library and the planning of public transportation do not amount to acts of coercion.<sup>40</sup>

The examples we have considered thus far illuminate the narrowness of Hayek's account of freedom compared with Berlin's, but they do not bear directly on the question of employment. I conclude this section with an analysis of Hayek's thoughts on this subject. In the next section I return to Hayek's arguments against central planning, but here I focus on his claim that a "fully socialist state" would involve a "complete monopoly of employment" in the sense that the government would be "the only employer and the owner of all the instruments of production." One concern from the perspective of freedom, therefore, is that under such conditions the state-cum-employer "would possess unlimited powers of coercion."<sup>41</sup> I am less interested in the soundness of this argument than the light it sheds on Hayek's commitment to competitive capitalism.

In the latter society, according to Hayek, one finds not one but many potential employers. He notes that, "so long as" an individual employer "can remove only one opportunity among many to earn a living, so long as he can do no more than cease to pay certain people who cannot hope to earn as much elsewhere as they had done under him, he cannot coerce, though he can cause pain."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, although Hayek acknowledges that employers may exploit workers' fear of dismissal during periods of high unemployment to "enforce actions other than those originally contracted for," he assumes that such conditions would "be rare exceptions in a prosperous competitive

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<sup>40</sup> It is also perhaps important to note that, while Hayek distinguishes between coercion and oppression, he considers both to be "true opposite[s] of liberty," where the latter should "refer only to a state of continuous acts of coercion." Ibid, 135.

<sup>41</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 137.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 136.

society.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, one must remember the criterion of intentionality in Hayek’s concept of oppression, which leads him to the following conclusion:

Even if the threat of starvation to me and perhaps to my family impels me to accept a distasteful job at a very low wage, even if I am ‘at the mercy’ of the only man willing to employ me, I am not coerced by him or anybody else. So long as the act that has placed me in my predicament is not aimed at making me do or not do specific things, so long as the intent of the act that harms me is not to make me serve another person’s ends, its effect on my freedom is not different from that of any natural calamity – a fire or a flood that destroys my house or an accident that harms my health.<sup>44</sup>

I want to highlight two important features of this passage. First, notice that in this example there is effectively only one employer, yet still no coercion takes place. Hayek cannot mean, therefore, that a socialist state is *necessarily* coercive on account of having only one employer. Rather, one must conclude that the risk he perceives in such an arrangement is that workers have no exit option *in case* they do encounter coercion. So-called ‘competitive’ society has the advantage over a socialist one to the extent that it enables workers to leave coercive relations.

Second, even when the choice a worker faces is between starving or taking a poorly paid and unappealing job, Hayek rejects the possibility of claiming that he or she is coerced into accepting employment, for the simple reason that no agent has intentionally acted such that the worker must make this invidious choice in the first place. Of course, Hayek would have to object if the only available work eliminated the worker “as a thinking and valuing person” and thus made her into “a bare tool in the achievement of the ends of another.”<sup>45</sup> It is telling, therefore, that in this example, the job is “distasteful” rather than exploitative. On my reading of Berlin, by contrast, the lack of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid,136-7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 21.



intentional act that causes this situation does not disqualify it as coercive or oppressive. Indeed, there are two possible criticisms one might make of it that fit within Berlin's parameters.

First, if I can provide a compelling social or economic theory which shows that my wishes for fulfilling and well-paid work have been frustrated by the acts of others (for example, by the use of labor-saving technology, the deliberate weakening of union power through the legislative and judicial process, and political resistance to increasing minimum wages), then I may justifiably claim that in Hayek's example I do in fact suffer a loss of freedom. Indeed, in an example particularly relevant to our concerns, Berlin argues that negative and positive liberty can be curtailed when a situation is permitted or promoted "in which entire groups and nations are shut off from benefits which have been allowed to accumulate too exclusively in the hands of other groups and nations, the rich and strong," and that these arrangements, including the provision of education, cause "doors to be shut to the development of individuals and classes."<sup>46</sup>

But in addition, Berlin would have us consider whether everyone or just some people find themselves in the situation of having to accept a "a distasteful job at a very low wage." If human arrangements, such as the provision of education, the tax system and inheritance rules, or pensions schemes are such that some members of society can avoid this type of work – or any work at all – thanks to specialized training or the accumulation of family wealth, while others have no choice but to take it, then again this situation raises concerns about the loss of freedom, even within Berlin's framework of negative liberty. Although Berlin does not offer a critique of the requirement to engage in paid work in general, his account of negative liberty does open space for a critical assessment of the distribution of opportunities that give rise to particular instances of structural coercion. Hayek, on the other hand, rejects the idea of coercion in this case by insisting that it would need to involve intentional acts.

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<sup>46</sup> Berlin, "Introduction," 40.

#### IV. Positive Freedom and Employment

The discussion so far has focused primarily on what I have called Hayek's defanging of negative freedom, and I have suggested that this domestication erects a significant barrier to criticism, let alone recognition, of the structural coercion to take part in paid work. As I show in this section, Hayek's view of freedom also involves an embrace of the entrepreneur and of the institutional framework of competitive capitalism. Here I elaborate the inter-relationship between entrepreneurialism and freedom in Hayek's thought, and suggest that his foray into institutional design has some resonance with Berlin's concerns about positive liberty.

Although we have seen that Hayek defines freedom as the absence of coercion, it is worth considering his explicit criticism of coercion and what he thinks is important about freedom. Hayek contends that "coercion is evil precisely because it...eliminates an individual as a thinking and valuing person and makes him a bare tool in the achievement of the ends of another."<sup>47</sup> Later in *The Constitution of Liberty*, he claims that the "chief aim of freedom is to provide both the opportunity and the inducement to insure the maximum use of the knowledge that an individual can acquire."<sup>48</sup> Given this "opportunity and inducement," individuals can discover "a better use of things or of one's own capacities," thus contributing to the prosperity of society as a whole. What stands out here is Hayek's description of this use of our abilities as an "entrepreneurial capacity."

In particular, Hayek claims that while some of us work hard to discover "the best use of our abilities" and should be considered entrepreneurs, others do not. Moreover, he claims that free societies reward the person who makes "successful use" of this capacity more highly than they do the individual who "leaves to others the task of finding some useful means of employing his

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<sup>47</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 80-81.

capacities,”<sup>49</sup> although it is unclear whether by ‘reward’ he means merely pay or also social esteem. In section V I analyze the entrepreneur’s orientation to work more directly, but here I want to highlight the key role that Hayek gives the entrepreneur in safeguarding the freedom of society as a whole.

We saw in section II that neoliberal thinkers positioned themselves against both the collectivist tendencies of early twentieth century liberalism and totalitarianism. For Hayek, collectivism of various stripes differs from liberalism and individualism by “refusing to recognize autonomous spheres in which the ends of the individuals are supreme,” and instead erroneously “presupposes... the existence of a complete ethical code in which all the different human values are allotted their due place.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, in *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek argues that socialism leads to fascism and the destruction of individual freedom by organizing society around a “unitary end.”<sup>51</sup> The apotheosis of collectivism was a central plan to direct all economic activity, a project ultimately doomed to failure in Hayek’s view by the limitations to human cognition.<sup>52</sup>

Although Hayek opposed rationalism in the form of central planning, it is important to note that he nonetheless sought “new institutional designs to maintain ‘the constitution of liberty.’”<sup>53</sup> The problem, as Milton Friedman saw it, was how to reconcile “interdependence with freedom,” given the need for economic coordination in “advanced societies” that arises from a highly complex

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>50</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 56, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 31, 56. Despite similarities with Berlin’s critique of positive liberty, Alan Ryan notes that Berlin “was dismissive of Hayek’s fears in *The Road to Serfdom*.” Alan Ryan, “Isaiah Berlin: The History of Ideas as Psychodrama,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (2012): 61-73, 65, doi: 10.1177/1474885112463651.

<sup>52</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 35. See also David Bholat, “Hayek’s ‘Great Society’: On Civilization and its Savages,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 15, no.2 (2010): 175-188, 179, doi: 10.1080/13569317.2010.482376.

<sup>53</sup> Müller, “Fear and Freedom,” 58.

division of labor.<sup>54</sup> As a solution, Friedman and Hayek both propose competitive capitalism and the price mechanism to coordinate individual productive efforts. Against the common misconception of neoliberalism as a return to laissez-faire, moreover, Hayek acknowledges that the creation and maintenance of “effective competition” requires governmental action and coercive interference into economic life.<sup>55</sup>

In the previous section we saw how, according to Hayek, such a system allows workers the freedom to choose where and for whom they will work. Thus, although the employed person may find it “at times highly irksome” that she must “do the bidding of others,” this does not mean that the worker is thereby unfree in the sense of being coerced.<sup>56</sup> For Hayek, the very freedom of workers depends on a group of ‘independent’ persons who will ensure that there is not one but many employers to whom the former can sell their labor power.<sup>57</sup> In other words, to safeguard freedom we need a “multiplicity of opportunities for employment,” which rests on “the existence of independent individuals who can take the initiative in the continuous process of re-forming and redirecting organizations.”<sup>58</sup>

This argument, of course, gives a particular legitimacy to, and encourages public admiration for, the activities of entrepreneurs, and it is not difficult to detect a version of it in the recent term ‘job creator.’ For example, according to the Job Creators Network, which in a strikingly Hayekian tone describes itself as “the voice of real job creators that has been missing from the American debate on jobs and our economic crisis,”

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<sup>54</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 36-37.

<sup>56</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 120.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

The liberties and livelihood of millions of Americans are in serious danger. Too many are unemployed, and for far too long. Americans are desperate for new jobs, yet the federal government weakens free enterprise and ties the hands of job creators.<sup>59</sup>

Although Hayek saw the need for governmental intervention, he too was concerned that it could become overweening and stifle entrepreneurialism. In particular, while employed persons are free in Hayek's sense, they nonetheless present a serious threat to freedom in democratic society once they become a majority, since they do not understand the need for many "opportunities for action" and "exercises of freedom which are essential to the independent if he is to perform his functions." As a result, employed persons are "in many respects... alien and often inimical to much that constitutes the driving force of a free society."<sup>60</sup> In Hayek's estimation, therefore, it may

prove to be the most difficult task of all to persuade the employed masses that in the general interest of their society, and therefore in their own long-term interest, they should preserve such conditions as to enable a few to reach positions which to them appear unattainable or not worth the effort or risk.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, there is no necessary contradiction in committing oneself to the notion that the "ends of the individuals are supreme,"<sup>62</sup> and suggesting that the masses need to be convinced of the merits of an institutional framework whose value they do not currently understand or accept – provided this 'persuasion' does in fact respect the autonomy of the employed masses and grants them the final say. Yet it is important to note that Hayek's enthusiasm for "drawing up plans for ideal institutional set-ups" betrays a different kind of skepticism toward rationalism than that of

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<sup>59</sup> "What's the Problem. America has lost her way – the American Way," accessed September 17, 2013, <http://jobcreatorsnetwork.com/issues.php#sthash.2NT0mSYb.dpbs>.

<sup>60</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 120, 119.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>62</sup> Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 56.

‘cold war liberals’ like Berlin, who hoped instead for a “commitment to the right ‘constellations of certain values’ (Berlin) and a gradual liberalization of attitudes.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Bholat goes as far as to suggest that Hayek “attributes an omniscient foresight to capitalist prices that contravenes his own argument about the limitations of human reason, individual or aggregate.”<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, without of course sanctioning coercion, I suggest that Hayek’s concern to ensure the institutional framework of competitive capitalism begins to resemble Berlin’s account of positive liberty. According to Berlin, proponents of positive liberty as self-realization argue that “if it is my good, then I am not being coerced, for I have willed it, whether I know this or not, and am free (or ‘truly’ free) even while my poor earthly body and foolish mind bitterly reject it.”<sup>65</sup> What alarms Berlin about this “positive doctrine of liberation by reason” is that it can serve to justify all manner of coercion in the name of expanding the freedom of those being coerced, particularly when the ‘true’ self is identified with a class, society, or humanity as a whole, as is the case in “many of the nationalist, Communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian creeds of our day.”<sup>66</sup> Hayek’s suggestion carries strong echoes of Berlin’s account of positive liberty: he implies that workers are at risk of undermining the bases of their ‘true’ freedom due to ignorance of what their own long-term interests require, and suggests that through the appropriate education, to borrow Berlin’s phrase, they can be liberated by reason. While Hayek offers a significantly narrower account of negative liberty than Berlin, he also reveals himself to be more forthright than the latter about the type of institutions – competitive capitalism – that would best foster freedom in his view.

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<sup>63</sup> Müller, “Fear and Freedom,” 57.

<sup>64</sup> Bholat, “Hayek’s ‘Great Society,’” 182.

<sup>65</sup> Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 180-181.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 179, 191.

## V. The Figure of the Entrepreneur: Freedom at Work

Whereas the individual's freedom hitherto basically meant the possibility of either accepting or refusing his assigned status, it is now seen as meaning the possibility of permanently redeploying one's capacities according to the satisfaction one obtains in one's work, one's greater or lesser involvement in it, and its capacity thoroughly to fulfill one's potentialities.<sup>67</sup>

As noted above, critical accounts of neoliberalism commonly foreground entrepreneurialism, but in the last section of this chapter I want to explore the more specific relationship between the figure of the entrepreneur, freedom and work. I take as my starting point the insightful documentation by Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose of what they call the rise of “an entrepreneurial identity” in relation to work in the 1980s, captured succinctly by Jacques Donzelot in the quotation above.<sup>68</sup> Miller and Rose suggest that, in the context of concerns about international competitiveness, quality, and the importance of the customer, this identity took root in management doctrines as a way to “overcome organizational problems, and to ensure dynamism, excellence, and innovation by activating and engaging the self-fulfilling aspirations of the individuals who make up the workforce.”<sup>69</sup> In these doctrines, the worker was thus “depicted as an enterprising individual in search of meaning, responsibility, and a sense of personal achievement in life, and hence in work.”<sup>70</sup>

While I find much of value in Miller and Rose's analysis, I want to consider what Hayek's characterization of the figure of the entrepreneur and the ‘independent’ can add to it, particularly in

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<sup>67</sup> Jacques Donzelot, “Pleasure in Work,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 252.

<sup>68</sup> Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, “Production, Identity, and Democracy,” *Theory and Society* 24, no. 3 (1995): 427-467, 454, doi: 10.1007/BF00993353.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 453.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 454.

terms of the relationship between work and freedom in neoliberal thought. For example, Miller and Rose claim that “The individual is now to be fulfilled *in* work, a realm now construed as one in which we produce, discover, and experience our selves, rather than to be emancipated *from* work, perceived as merely a means to end.”<sup>71</sup> But what are the philosophical antecedents to this view? How might a closer reading of Hayek than Miller and Rose offer enable a deeper understanding of this shift in the meaning and experience of work?

In what follows, I show that Hayek’s celebration of the ‘independent’ and the entrepreneur goes beyond the ability of these individuals to secure the freedom of the masses discussed in the previous section, and suggest that they enjoy what contemporary scholars of career counseling call vocation or career. Although employed persons are free as long as they are not coerced in Hayek’s sense of the term, I suggest that entrepreneurial-independents surpass this negative liberty and enjoy a form of positive liberty as self-realization as theorized by Berlin. Before going any further with the analysis, however, I must enter an important caveat.

By examining the central role of entrepreneurialism in neoliberalism, I do not mean to suggest that, in ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism, everyone either does, can, or wants to behave as an enterprising subject. For example, one career counseling scholar points out that some people prefer to treat paid work as “only a means to an end,” allowing them to “engage in what they consider their real work,” such as the artist with a ‘day job’ or those who “find satisfaction in family, in community service, or in personal hobbies.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Prilleltensky and Stead criticize some career theorists for assuming that individuals have more career choice than may in fact be the case. Thus, they write that

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 457.

<sup>72</sup> Jane Goodman, “Toward A Holistic View: Decision-Making, Postmodern, and Emerging Theories,” in *Career Counseling: Foundations, Perspectives and Applications*, eds. David Capuzzi and Mark Stauffer (New York: Routledge, 2012), 87.



The assumption underlying all career theories is that at least some career choice is present, if only individuals knew how to properly utilize their inherent characteristics and relational and contextual resources to successfully navigate the world of work. Career psychology has placed little emphasis on oppression, how this maintains the status quo and marginalizes people and the extent to which this may severely limit or remove individuals' career choice options.<sup>73</sup>

While these points highlight the impact of personal preferences and structural barriers on whether a person behaves as an enterprising subject, this does not mean that the ideal itself has no meaning or impact on the world. On the contrary, the figure of the enterprising subject acts as an ideal that both helps legitimize the structural coercion to engage in paid work in a manner befitting a free subject, and at the same time marginalizes those who do not or cannot live up to it, and who thus encounter significant obstacles in exercising their “capabilities in socially defined and recognized ways,”<sup>74</sup> as not fully free.

To begin, we first need to clarify Hayek's use of the terms ‘entrepreneur’ and ‘independent,’ which express overlapping though distinct meanings. Notice that Hayek claims that, “in discovering the best use of our abilities, we are all entrepreneurs,” whereas the term “independent” simply refers to anyone who is not employed as a wage laborer.<sup>75</sup> While an employed person could therefore

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<sup>73</sup> Isaac Prilleltensky and Graham B. Stead, “Critical Psychology and Career Development: Unpacking the Adjust–Challenge Dilemma,” *Journal of Career Development* 39, no. 4 (2012): 321-340, 322, doi: 10.1177/0894845310384403.

<sup>74</sup> Here I am supplementing Iris Young's account of marginalization with an analysis of freedom. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 53; 54. William Connolly seems to make a similar move when he refers to a “diverse population shuffled to the margins of freedom, dignity, social participation, and affluence,” which “provides a living contrast through which generally admired conventions of identity and responsibility are tested, validated, and vindicated.” William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 204.

<sup>75</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 81, 120.

count as an ‘entrepreneur’ so long as he worked hard to discover his talents, he could not be an ‘independent’ without giving up his employment.

In spite of this capacious view of entrepreneurialism, however, Hayek later suggests that ‘independents’ tend to be more entrepreneurial than the employed, in that they are “inventive” and “experimental,” while they also experience work as a process of “shaping and reshaping a plan of life, of finding solutions for ever new problems.”<sup>76</sup> The employed person, by contrast, does other people’s bidding, and sees work as largely a matter “of fitting himself into a given framework during a certain number of hours.”<sup>77</sup> In sum, this distinction suggests that, whereas the entrepreneurial-independent takes control of life to maximize his opportunities and satisfactions, life is something that happens to the non-enterprising employed worker.

But we should not interpret this characterization as suggesting that the employed are simply passive victims of circumstance. On the contrary, Hayek claims that whether a person is independent or employed is essentially a matter of choice: “A great many people will *choose* employment because it offers them better opportunities to live the kind of life they want than would any independent position” (emphasis added). “Even with those who do not especially want the relative security and absence of risk and responsibility that an employed position brings, the decisive factor is often not that independence is unattainable but that employment offers them a more satisfying activity and a larger income than they could earn as, say, independent tradesmen.”<sup>78</sup> It is therefore almost as if, in Hayek’s view, the employed person ‘chooses not to choose.’

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 121, 122.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 120.

Moreover, as David Bholat suggests, although Hayek does not explain why so many people prefer employment to independent positions, “this trend is the result of the capitalist price system he recommends.” In other words, “It is because the strategic logic of capitalism materially coerces and ideologically encourages people to direct themselves to production with the highest expected monetary reward that entrepreneurial endeavors are sacrificed for the safety of employment.” The provision of a universal basic income might alter this calculus in favor of greater economic risk taking, for as Bholat points out, “In an economic system without a basic income...it is prohibitive to brook the uncertainty entrepreneurship entails.”<sup>79</sup>

While both the employed and independent persons are free in Hayek’s account, the latter experience ‘more’ freedom in relation to work given that it involves a continuous exercise of choice and judgment. This point is significant because it means that employed persons appear in Hayek’s scheme as essentially entrepreneurs manqués: they have assessed their options as good entrepreneurs should, but have decided against a life of ongoing entrepreneurialism as an ‘independent.’ As Hayek himself acknowledges, this choice (to the extent it really is one in practice) may be guided by a need or desire to prioritize activities that fall outside the scope of paid work. Indeed, some people consider their ‘real work’ to be what they do after their ‘day job’ is over. But although these activities might offer many or perhaps more opportunities than paid work (depending on one’s social class) to discover “the best use of our abilities,” in our present work society recognition, status, and power hinge on one’s employment. If greater material and social rewards go to those who exercise more autonomy *in* work, then prioritizing non-work activities comes at a steep price.

Given the rise of the entrepreneurial identity in the decades following the publication of *The Constitution of Liberty*, as well as the effects of the regime of flexibility (which, as I argue elsewhere, discipline workers to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit), Hayek’s implication that employed workers

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<sup>79</sup> Bholat, “Hayek’s ‘Great Society,’” 183.

lack entrepreneurial spirit may be a less accurate description of contemporary occupational behavior than it was in the early 1960s, although as I noted above, even today not everyone can or does embrace this identity. Nevertheless, Hayek's discussion and celebration of the enterprising-independent person has clear resonance with contemporary understandings of career and vocation.

For example, in a recent career counseling textbook, one finds the distinction between work, career, and vocation. Whereas work is "designed to fulfill the tasks of daily living and ensure survival," career goes beyond this in that it "is characterized by volition, pay, and hierarchical and thematic relationships among various jobs that may or may not constitute a career."<sup>80</sup> Now, one cannot be sure whether, in 'choosing' employment over an independent position on the grounds that the former offers a more satisfying activity and a larger income than the latter, the employed person pursues a career. It may be the case, for example, that a person chases promotions and thus has a 'career' purely because this allows him or her more disposable income with which to pursue a hobby or support his or her family. But I want to suggest that the distinction Hayek makes between the employed person and the independent is more clearly reflected in the definition these career counseling scholars give of 'vocation.'

Following the National Vocational Guidance Association (now known as the National Career Development Association), they define vocation as "a time-extended working out of a purposeful life pattern through work undertaken by the individual'... that exists over the course of the life span and highlights the relation between work and identity."<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Benjamin N. Cohen writes that "vocations have the potential to provide a sense of purpose to our life," and that "one of

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<sup>80</sup> David S. Shen-Miller, Ellen Hawley McWhirter, and Anne S. Bartone, "Historical Influence on the Evolution of Vocational Counseling," in *Career Counseling*, eds. Capuzzi and Stauffer, 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 4, 5.

the primary factors motivating vocational choice is a search for a meaningful vocation.”<sup>82</sup> This language resonates clearly with Hayek’s claim that the independent person experiences work as a process of “shaping and reshaping a plan of life.” Moreover, Hayek claims that “for the independent, there can be no sharp distinction between his private and his business life, as there is for the employed, who has sold part of his time for a fixed income.”<sup>83</sup>

I argue elsewhere that the regime of flexibility erodes this distinction even for employed workers, but the point here is that the independent in Hayek’s account experiences work as woven almost seamlessly into life, and thus has what we might call a vocation. Although employed persons can and arguably must cultivate an enterprising disposition in today’s flexible labor market, it is also worth noting that even those who sell their labor increasingly do so *not* by fitting themselves “into a given framework during a certain number of hours,” but by working in a variety of flexible ways: they may determine the place and time of their work, be paid based on the completion of projects rather than by the hour, or have no ‘framework’ to fit into in the first place since their employer determines at short notice when they are needed to work.

In addition to increasing contingency and precariousness in the labor market, these structural changes mean that, in effect, employed persons, not to mention ‘independent contractors,’ must behave as Hayek suggests that the enterprising ‘independent’ does. My interpretation of Hayek’s depiction of this figure suggests that it provides an appealing ideal about how work can become a practice of freedom in the sense of self-realization: this person has not just work but vocation, and not only earns money but creates meaning in his or her life through a series of choices about where to work and how best to capitalize and deploy his or her talents to the benefit of self and

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<sup>82</sup> Benjamin N. Cohen, “Applying Existential Theory and Intervention to Career Decision-Making,” *Journal of Career Development* 29, no.3 (2003): 195-209, 200, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1021470230341>.

<sup>83</sup> Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 122.

community. Of course, as I have noted, various structural barriers reduce the likelihood that members of oppressed groups will succeed in this task, but as Hayek's extremely limited understanding of coercion and oppression suggests, neoliberal thought has difficulty acknowledging them. Instead, the standard explanation for lack of success blames individual and cultural factors like an allegedly insufficient commitment to education or lack of work ethic and discipline.<sup>84</sup>

To refer to work as a practice of self-realization once again calls to mind Berlin's concept of positive liberty. Berlin suggest that self-mastery looks like a positive way of saying "much the same thing" as negative liberty: both refer to a condition in which one is "a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role."<sup>85</sup> In many ways, Hayek's figure of the entrepreneur, "shaping and reshaping a plan of life," embodies this idea of freedom as self-direction. Moreover, the inducement to discover and make the "best use" of our abilities echoes Berlin's discussion of the "splitting of personality into two," with a 'higher' or 'true' self dominating one's 'lower' nature, which lies at the heart of positive liberty.<sup>86</sup> As Berlin puts it,

This dominant self is then variously identified with reason, with my 'higher nature', with the self which calculates and aims at what will satisfy it in the long run, with my 'real', or 'ideal', or 'autonomous' self, or with my self 'at its best': which is then contrasted with irrational impulse, uncontrolled desires, my 'lower' nature, the pursuit of immediate pleasures, my 'empirical' or 'heteronomous' self, swept by every gust of desire and passion, needing to be rigidly disciplined if it is ever to rise to the full height of its 'real' nature.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 42.

<sup>85</sup> Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 178.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 178, 181.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 179.

As I noted in the previous section, the danger posed by this doctrine is that it can serve to justify coercion by appealing to the ‘higher’ freedom of those being coerced. While Hayek does not sanction such coercion in his own terms, I have shown throughout this paper that his view of coercion is so narrow as to preclude all but intentionally harmful acts. Not only does the politically constructed necessity to engage in paid work not register as coercion and hence as an infringement of freedom.<sup>88</sup> In addition, Hayek presents the very system based on the exploitation of wage labor – competitive capitalism – and those who benefit most from it – the capitalist class of employers – as the acme of freedom. But why should we assume that it is through entrepreneurial economic behavior that we best realize ourselves?

## **VI. Conclusion**

In this paper I have shown that neoliberal philosophy provides a theory of freedom ideally suited to sustaining our commitment to the requirement of paid work: Hayek effectively defangs Berlin’s negative liberty, thus immunizing the material and social pressures that individuals face to engage in paid work from a potential freedom-based critique. To be clear, Berlin does not explicitly articulate such a critique himself, but I nonetheless presented an interpretation of his account of oppression that leaves open a number of possibilities in this vein. For example, a person or group could plausibly claim that the use of labor-saving technology or various political tactics that reduce the average wage coerce them to accept Hayek’s “distasteful job at a very low wage.” Moreover, one might argue that the provision of education, structure of pensions schemes, and the tax system and inheritance rules allow some members of society to avoid this type of work thanks to specialized skills or savings while simultaneously coercing the less privileged to accept it. Finally, one could

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<sup>88</sup> As Kathi Weeks puts it, “that every individual is required to work, that most are expected to work for wages or be supported by someone who does, is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity.” Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 7-8.

argue that the institution of private property as a whole ensures that members of the working class must sell their labor power in order to survive, while it allows a minority of individuals never to work for pay in their lives. None of these situations register as infringements of freedom in Hayek's account.

But it is one thing to say that Hayekian freedom remains blind to these forms of structural coercion, another to say that work itself constitutes a practice of freedom. Thus, in sections IV and V I explored his defense of both competitive capitalism (as an alternative to *laissez faire* on the one hand, and to collectivism on the other) and the leading actor in its drama, namely the entrepreneur. In particular, I argued that the discovery and development of one's abilities and the conscious choice about how best to deploy them mark the entrepreneur as someone who takes control of his or her life and who thus acts as a fully fledged autonomous subject. While Hayek tends to assume that employed persons lack such an ethos, the rise of the entrepreneurial identity in management discourse and practices, as well as the regime of flexibility, increasingly incite us all to cultivate it.

It takes a very narrow view of freedom not to grasp and criticize the structural coercion most of us experience to enter the workforce. Hayek not only supplies such a theory, but he also bathes the very coercion we suffer to work and valorize our 'human capital' in the legitimating glow of freedom. While it is difficult to dispute the exercise of freedom when subjects make a range of choices both about and at work, the overvalorization of employment in contemporary society ensures that opportunities for the development of our capacities in non-paid settings remain marginal to the everyday lives of most people. But if we value freedom and individuality, then we should be wary of associating self-realization so quickly and narrowly with economic activities. As J.S. Mill put it so brilliantly, "A man cannot get a coat or a pair of boots to fit him, unless they are either made to his measure, or he has a whole warehouseful to choose from: and is it easier to fit



him with a life than with a coat, or are human beings more like one another in their whole physical and spiritual conformation than in the shape of their feet?”<sup>89</sup>

The overdetermination of our attachment and acquiescence to wage labor – the concatenation of discourses on freedom, dignity, inclusion, respect, and the politically constructed material necessity to sell our labor power to make ends meet – means that discarding the neoliberal view of freedom would not result in the immediate crumbling of the work society. But to the extent that this view of freedom forms part of contemporary ideology – the “concepts and languages of practical thought which stabilize a particular form of power and domination”<sup>90</sup> – calling it into question will play an important role in ethically and environmentally urgent debates about the place of work in our lives.

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<sup>89</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 3.

<sup>90</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology – Marxism without Guarantees,” *The Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 28-44, 29.