Hayek on Government

Two Views or One?

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Introduction

In 1975, Margaret Thatcher, then Leader of the Conservative Party Opposition, met with the Party's Research Department. The meeting was to consider a policy paper which argued a pragmatic middle way between the extremes of Right and Left. However, a middle way was unacceptable to Thatcher. Before the presentation of the paper had finished, she produced a copy of Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960). "This is what we believe" she said, as she slammed the book on the table (Cockett, 1995, 174).

Thatcher, and the principal modern critics, Brittan (1983) and Gray (1989), regard Hayek as having one view of government. This is a government whose purpose is to support the liberal order by confining its activities. The thesis of the paper is that there were two Hayeks on government. The paper supports the criticism by Keynes of Hayek on the role of government in *The Road to Serfdom* (Keynes, 1944, in Cockett, 1995, 89), and finds further evidence for Keynes' criticism in Hayek's later works on policy, *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), and *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1976)\(^1\).

One Hayek on government dated from the rise of Nazi and Soviet totalitarianism in Europe, and the interventionist role of government contained in the 1942 Beveridge proposals for social security in England (see Cockett, 1995, 59-60 and 78-79). For this Hayek, there was no middle road between liberalism and totalitarianism. Any move beyond a minimum role of government would be inexorably the "road to serfdom". Government must be confined to constructing a stable framework of the rule of law to promote individual liberty. Government's only monopoly was the power of coercion, which was limited to enforcing the rule of law, collecting taxes and ensuring external security. All else was determined by the competitive market. The role of policy was to make the market as competitive as possible. This is the Hayek on government Thatcher, Brittan and Gray understood.

A thorough examination of Hayek's policy positions reveals another Hayek on government. This Hayek recognised the duty of government extended beyond policies which underpin and improve the competitive market. These exceptions and qualifications to laissez-faire were guided by considerations of social welfare, an appreciation of the failures of the competitive market and changing ideas about policy. Hayek tried to show that the way is open for government to do more than support the competitive market, by following rules that are consistent with the liberal order. However, the paper argues that Hayek's attempt to make these exceptions and qualifications to laissez-faire consistent with a government bound by the rule of law was unsuccessful, because Hayek violated his own rules and because the rules themselves were flawed. The result of advocating policies to correct the failings of laissez-faire was a second, unintended, view of the role of government.

Hayek's advocacy of a minimum, active government was supported by an integrated system of thought comprising the value of liberty, the rule of law as the political prerequisite to liberty, and the competitive market as the economic prerequisite to liberty, which provided the only efficient means of dealing with the knowledge problem. This system is presented in Section 1. The rules for government policy which Hayek proposed to ensure a liberal order are
presented in Section 2. The policy roles Hayek assigned to government are discussed in Section 3. The conclusion emphasises the inconsistency of Hayek's "constitution of liberty" with his policy position (Section 4).

1. Hayek's System

Values

Hayek's central value was liberty, by which he meant that "the coercion of some by others is reduced as much as is possible in society" (CL, 11 - emphasis added). Liberty is not the freedom to do certain things, but freedom from the will of others. Liberty is being able to "decide what use we shall make of the circumstances in which we find ourselves" (CL, 19). It is being able "to order our own conduct in the sphere where the material circumstances force a choice upon us" (RTS, 157). For Hayek the individual's material circumstances are irrelevant to his liberty. One may be rich and subject to coercion, or poor and free (CL, 17). Liberty is freedom from the "arbitrary will of another" (Hayek, 1962, 229). No one has the moral right to impose their values or will on anybody else. That would be coercion, which is "bad because it prevents a person from using his mental powers to the full and consequently from making the greatest contribution that he is capable of to the community" (CL, 133-134).

Although for Hayek freedom was "desirable for itself on ethical grounds" (LLL:2, 71, and see also CL, 68), its primary justification was as a means. According to Hayek, following Kant, "welfare has no principle...it depends on the material content of the will, which is dependant on particular facts and is therefore incapable of a general rule" (quoted in FC, 73). There were two arguments for freedom in Hayek's interpretation of Kant's view. One was that people have different values (RTS, 45). There is no "complete ethical code" in which "all different human values are allotted their due place" (RTS, 43). Hayek's solution to the problem of competing values was to avoid the issue of value choices, by giving people the freedom to decide for themselves "as much as is possible" what they want. The second argument was the "inevitable ignorance of all of us concerning a great many of the factors on which the achievement of our ends and welfare depends" (CL, 29). The individual can only use "all his unique combination of information, skills and capacities which nobody else can fully appreciate" if he is free (Hayek, 1962, 233). In so far as society is controlled or directed, it is limited to the powers of the individual minds which control or direct it (Hayek, 1945a, 32).

Because we do not know how people will use their freedom, we do not know who will do things of benefit to society, so everyone must have freedom (CL, 32 and Hayek, 1945a, 15).

The Rule Of Law

Freedom can only be exercised if people subject their behaviour to restraint. Restraints limit what people can do, but Hayek argued there is no freedom without rules of law and conduct (LLL:3, 163, Hayek, 1945a, 11 and 24, note 23). The rules must be known beforehand, embody abstract, normative principles, and have uniform application.

Rules must be known in advance so that they constitute data in relation to which men can plan (CL, 153 and RTS, 60). Rules then become an "instrument of production" (RTS, 55). The rules are like the laws of nature: if they are known beforehand, the individual can use his knowledge of the rules to achieve his aims, just as he can use his knowledge of the laws of nature (CL, 142). For Hayek, known rules enable the individual "to make the fullest use of his knowledge". This is because the "law tells him what facts he may count on and thereby extends the range within which he can predict the consequences of his actions" (CL, 156-157). Rules that are known beforehand are not coercive, because the individual can avoid putting himself in a situation where he would be subject to the rule (CL, 142).
The rules must express abstract, normative principles. They should not have "concrete ends" or apply to "particular sets of circumstances" (LLL:3, 20). Their effect on particular individuals cannot be foreseen at the time they are laid down (CL, 153-159 and LLL:3, 112). By not serving particular ends, abstract rules serve values, or the preservation of a kind of order (LLL:2, 15). They will eliminate certain choices for the individual, but will not limit the choice to some specific action that somebody else wants him to take. In this way, rules give people the freedom to make the greatest use of their knowledge, because the rules have nothing to say about the particular circumstances of time and place (RTS, 56-57). Such rules are not coercive (CL, 154-155).

The content of the abstract principles must be "deeply ingrained moral beliefs" which command agreement among men (CL, 62). The content of rules requires time-honoured social agreement, which is more than a matter of majority voting. Social agreement will only be possible for general principles, for agreement is more difficult the more specific is the issue (LLL:3, 17). Agreement to the rules is critical because coercion can only be a minimum if individuals can be expected to conform voluntarily to the abstract rules (CL, 62).

Finally, rules must have uniform application. The rule must be the same for everyone. This is equality before the law, which is Hayek's notion of justice. The rules of law and conduct are just if they are the same for all. Rules are not coercive when they apply equally to all (CL, 154-155). Discriminatory rules, specific commands or the granting of certain privileges for particular individuals are all inconsistent with justice (LLL:3, 100). Justice will produce unequal outcomes, because people are different. However, to have rules which aim to do the reverse, that is, produce equal outcomes, requires discriminatory rules. This would be inconsistent with freedom (CL, 275). So the consequence of the rule of law is economic inequality (RTS, 59).

The Idea of the Market

The starting point of the economic problem is that all the individual members of the economic system have some knowledge about their skills, opportunities and values. Much of this knowledge is tacit or unconscious. Thus, it often cannot be communicated as knowledge others can use. Freedom gives individuals the scope to use this knowledge and take account of their knowledge. This means more information is used, because more questions are asked and more answers found (LLL:2, 9 and FC, 77).

The market provides the means for this knowledge to be disseminated. Market prices are generated by people acting on their plans through exchange. Prices summarise the knowledge of individuals about their values and the costs of production. As such, they communicate a great deal of knowledge. Prices summarise more knowledge than any individual can acquire. Prices allow the individual to use tacit knowledge in decisions about values and costs and to take advantage of the knowledge of others, without having that knowledge. Price provides "a readily intelligible yardstick" by which to make informed choices (Hayek, 1968, 187 and LLL:2, 72). Decisions about production and consumption taken in relation to price can be made without self-examination in relation to values and in ignorance of the events affecting the market (LLL:3, 162). The feature of the market is that people need not know very much to make good decisions, if they rely on price signals (Hayek, 1945b, 86).

Prices are a communication system, with positive and negative feedback loops, because they communicate information about opportunities and errors. The difference between expected prices and the costs of provision provides information to entrepreneurs about the value to society of resource allocation. Prices reveal where the market (and society) believes benefits lie. Costs reveal the values that must be given up. If there is a positive difference, it indicates an improvement in the use of resources is possible. By performing this
guidance function, prices lead producers to serve unknown consumers with unknown ends, ends that the producer does not need to know, and which are irrelevant to the decision he makes about what to do (FC, 59 and 100). The knowledge society has about least cost methods of production and about consumer values is created by the market process. Without competition they would not be known (LLL:3, 75). It is because of the market "that people know at least as much about possibilities and opportunities as they in fact do" (Hayek, 1946, 106).

Society requires a means of adapting to change successfully if it is to survive and prosper. Change can only be resisted at the cost of falling income. The market is the most effective means of adaptation because it relies on decentralisation, so individuals, who are best placed to make decisions about themselves, can make decisions about how to adapt. Change will only be known to some (and even for them, knowledge may only be partial, for the adaptation to the unknown unfolds slowly). The market spreads this knowledge by prices, and shares the consequences. The adaptation may not be perfect, but it is the best there is. This ability to adapt is why the market societies survive and prosper (FC, 76), even though usually no one will know how the necessary adaptations will be brought about (CL, 400). The adaptation to unforeseen events will always mean someone is hurt (LLL:1, 63). Competition discovers which plans are "false" (LLL:2, 117), which disappoints or defeats some expectations or intentions (Hayek, 1968, 180). However, it is in the "permanent interest of all" that some be forced to do something they do not like, such as changing jobs or accepting a lower income (LLL:3, 94).

The outcome of market competition is material progress (CL, 394), which generates a level of real income in which the share of each individual is "as large as we know how to make it" (Hayek, 1968, 186). The maximum aggregate real income was for Hayek the only meaningful economic welfare objective (LLL:1, 121 and Hayek, 1966, 173). Progress constitutes the "general good" arising from "the facilitation of the pursuit of unknown individual purposes" (LLL:2, 1). However, the essence of freedom is that its benefits are "unknown and uncertain" (CL, 68). Freedom does not guarantee progress, rather it is more likely to generate progress than any alternative.

Progress is generated by market competition, which in turn requires freedom, Hayek's central value. This is a critical step in Hayek's argument. It marries the idea of the market as a knowledge generator and disseminator with the design of the liberal order. The market is politically desirable because it is the means of minimising coercion and economically desirable because of its knowledge qualities. An efficient market requires freedom, and freedom is the purpose of the liberal order. Thus, the rules of a liberal order must also be the rules of a competitive market, and these are the rule of law.

2. The Rules for Government in a Liberal Order

The Coercive Role of Government

For Hayek, the aim of policy in a society of free men cannot be a maximum of foreknown results, but only an abstract order:

The aim of policy in such a society would have to be to increase equally the chances for any unknown member of society pursuing with success his equally unknown purposes, and to restrict the use of coercion...to the enforcement of such rules as will, if universally applied, tend in this sense to improve everyone's opportunities (LLL:2, 114).

There is no good alternative to improving the competitive market due to its effectiveness in marshalling knowledge and co-ordinating the different plans people have. Government policy is constrained by ignorance and the need to select a single value or
hierarchy of values, when no substantive value can be "correct". Government can only assist or make possible the formation of an abstract pattern or structure in which the expectations of individuals approximately match each other, through making each observe rules which are independent of particular purposes (LLL:3, 139). The principal benefit of such rules is that they reduce coercion as much as is possible (FC, 63 and LLL:3, 146).

The role of government is to identify and promulgate the rules necessary for the abstract order, whose economic dimension is the competitive market. Thus government economic policy must be known, general and uniform, because policy of this kind fosters the competitive market. Government may only use coercion to enforce rules of this kind (CL, 284). Government must have a monopoly of coercion for the purposes of enforcing the rule of law, collecting taxes and ensuring national security, and this must be its only monopoly (CL, 210 and LLL:3, 42).

The rationale for coercion by government was that it prevents more severe coercion by others (CL, 144). Government was to do this by designing the rule of law to create a private domain within which the individual was free. This required private property rights (CL, 20) and contract law (CL, 141). For Hayek the real issue for the role of government was "whether the state ought to confine its coercive action to enforcing these rules [of private property] or go beyond this" (CL, 145). Hayek’s view was that the coercive activities of government must be "strictly limited" (CL, 257). As the justification for coercion by government was to prevent coercion by others, and the means to do this was the private domain, it would follow that government coercion should be limited to enforcing the rule of law to protect the private domain through property rights (CL, 144-145). Thus, the protection of liberty "requires that coercion be used only to enforce the universal rules of just conduct protecting the individual domains" (LLL:3, 111 - emphasis added). Measures to ensure the competitiveness of market relations, principally the free flow of information and low barriers to entry (Hayek, 1966, 174), assist the individual’s freedom in the private domain by allowing property rights to be exercised as widely as possible. The provision of information must be funded by coercive taxation, while ensuring low barriers to entry required a coercive legal framework.

The Non-coercive Role of Government

Government may do things other than identify and enforce the known, abstract, just rules necessary for the abstract order, collect taxes and secure peace. Hayek stressed that no role is necessarily excluded from government, although competition is always preferable if it is possible (RTS, 27, Hayek, 1947, 110, LLL:3, 42 and HOH, 113). Government has a role where effective competition cannot be created for the provision of "valuable" output. Thus, The Road to Serfdom supported a significant number of exceptions and qualifications to laissez-faire. These exceptions were the source of Keynes’ criticism of The Road to Serfdom (quoted in Cockett, 1995, 89-90). According to Keynes, Hayek was arguing that "as soon as one moves an inch in the planned direction you are necessarily launched on the slippery path which will lead you in due course over the precipice". At the same time, Keynes said, Hayek admitted that the practical matter is one of knowing where to draw the line (see RTS, 61), because the extreme position is not possible. Keynes concluded that this admission means Hayek is "done for", because the argument is then about where to draw the line.

In his later work, principally The Constitution of Liberty, Hayek set out rules for the exceptions to laissez-faire. The rules were designed to ensure that these roles of government were consistent with the liberal order. Each role must meet four requirements: it must follow the rule of law (CL, 221), which means it is compatible with the competitive market, and does not replace the market with planning; second, although consistent with the rule of law, the role must be non-coercive (CL, 257 and 284); third, where possible, the role should be outside the market (Hayek, 1976a, 306); finally, government must not claim a monopoly of provision.
(CL, 223 and LLL:3, 47). If the role can be provided in a way that satisfies these four requirements, whether government should perform the role is then dependant on its "expediency", or whether the "benefits are worth the cost" (CL, 222, and see also RTS, 28).

3. The Roles of Government

According to Gray (1989, 141), Hayek assigned government two policy roles: "the refinement of the institutions and legal arrangements which shape the market process", and "the provision of the goods and services the market will not provide". Further, says Gray, these two roles were justified by Hayek, not on utilitarian grounds, but by their contribution to the working of competitive processes and the prospects of people to participate in market activity. The discussion of this Section finds that some government roles and reforms do fit Gray's first category. The roles are designed to contribute to the competitive effectiveness of the market, and they are consistent with Hayek's rules for the role of government. This group comprises the "private law", competition and stabilisation policies. These also tend to be the cases where Hayek was most clear and consistent about what he believed government should do. There is much less evidence for Gray's view that the provision of goods and services the market will not provide is to contribute to the competitiveness of the market. There is some evidence, in relation, for instance, to the role Hayek assigned government in information provision (see CL, 223). However, it cannot be said to be Hayek's rationale for the wide-ranging roles he advocated.

Brittan argues that "[c]ontrary to popular belief Friedrich Hayek has not provided any recognisable economic criteria for recognising state intervention of the harmful type" (Brittan, 1983, 63). The criteria are recognisable: they are Hayek's rules for the role of government. The problem for Hayek is that a number of his policies are inconsistent with his own rules and the rules are flawed. This group of policies includes an income maintenance scheme, collective goods, education, and town planning. These tend to be the roles where Hayek's proposals were not always clear, and reveal the impracticality of his view about reconstructing the evolutionary tradition to reveal policy needs (FC, 69). These are also roles about which Hayek tended to change his position.

"Private Law"

The most important task of the government is to "articulate, interpret and develop" what Hayek called the "private law". Private law comprises private property rights, protection from force and fraud, the rules of contract, and the liability for damages caused to another. Private law defines the individual domain, ensures the performance of promises and the justice of exchange, gives people the freedom to produce and price at whatever level they choose, and makes people take account of the impact on others of what they do (CL, 145, Hayek, 1966, 167, LLL:1, 103, and LLL:2, 40). For Hayek the rights established by private law are artefacts, not natural rights. They are protected because they are an effective means of securing the freedom necessary for a market. The "recognition of private property is an essential condition for the prevention of coercion, though by no means the only one" (CL, 140), because private property provides autonomy. With his private property rights protected, man is free from coercion (CL, 20). Private property is also an "inducement" to the individual to contribute as much as possible to the need of all others (Hayek, 1945a, 13).

The content of private law is to be defined and revised as required by the needs of competitive system (CL, 229). The most important reform for Hayek was the removal of the special legal position of trade unions (Hayek, 1947, 117). Hayek believed trade unions had become "the only important instance in which governments signally fail in their prime function - the prevention of coercion and violence" (CL, 267). Unionism can produce a de
facto authority which replaces market competition (CL, 270-3). Hayek also believed patents and copyright unduly extended private property rights and fostered the growth of monopoly (Hayek, 1947, 113-115). Copyright may not be an effective stimulant to effort, and should be confined to "exceedingly useful works" such as dictionaries and textbooks, which "could not be produced if, once they existed, they could be freely reproduced" (FC, 36-37). Hayek also advocated the reform of corporation law, which he believed had tended to encourage the expansion of the modern corporation beyond what is justified by technology (Hayek, 1947, 116 and Hayek, 1960a). The problems of corporations are problems of the special conditions which the law has created and the law can change.

"Fugitive resources", which include game, fish, water and oil, raise problems for defining property rights. The problem is that no one has an incentive to conserve these resources, since what one does not take another will. The problem is that "private property cannot exist" or private property is only beneficial if it is given exclusive control of the resource (CL, 369). However, Hayek favoured a system of private property rights rather than "social control". Hayek was never explicit about the way a system of private property rights could be implemented. His argument was confined to the merits of private property and the market compared with government control. Hayek acknowledged there is an "act of faith" required to accept market authority (CL, 369).

Hayek also identified important exceptions to the inviolability of private rights. Private property rights may be suspended in times of emergency, like wars and natural disasters (LLL:3, 54). These are examples of "necessary infringements of private sphere". They must be cases where the public gain is greater than harm done by the disappointment of normal expectations, the exceptions must be defined by rule, and full compensation must be paid (CL, 217-8). However, these conditions do not satisfy Hayek's rules for the role of government. The first, the excess of public gain over private harm, is a consideration of expediency, which on Hayek's account cannot justify coercion. The second constitutes a break with the generality of rules requirement of the rule of law. The third is a new consideration, nowhere raised by Hayek in relation to the rule of law. The idea that compensation can be paid to offset a violation of property rights sits uncomfortably with Hayek's stress on the importance of property rights to liberty.

**Competition**

Hayek was critical of competition policy which focussed on market *performance*. This follows from his idea of the market as a means of discovery: "If we do not know the facts we hope to discover by means of competition, we can never ascertain how effective it has been in discovering those facts that might be discovered" (Hayek, 1968, 180). This kind of competition policy requires knowledge that authorities are unlikely to have (LLL:3, 85). Its premise is inconsistent with the rationale for adopting competition for resource allocation. This is the argument for competition: we do not know beforehand who will do best nor what is best. It is a discovery procedure for this purpose, and it does so in a way that is consistent with the rule of law. By contrast, competition policy commonly entails discretionary powers, which infringe the rule of law and so are inconsistent with the prerequisites of the free market (CL, 265).

There is a role for another kind of competition policy. The correct focus of competition policy is to ensure that the market *process* is as competitive as possible (LLL:3, 68). There are two requirements for a competitive market. There must be no impediments to the flow or transmission of knowledge and there must be low barriers to entry (Hayek, 1966, 174). Barriers to entry must be low enough for there always to be the threat of entry. The threat is sufficient to ensure that existing firms are under competitive pressure (Hayek, 1940, 196).
Thus, it is not monopoly as such which is undesirable, but the prevention of competition (LLL:3, 83).

Monopolies are caused by economic superiority, government policy and collusive behaviour. There is no role for policy where monopoly is due to economic superiority. This result is simply the market doing what it does best, discovering how to do things efficiently. Although it would be better not to have monopolies, they are an inevitable part of an economy (CL, 265). The power to determine price or quality is a consequence of private property, and cannot be eliminated without abandoning private property. Neither size nor ability to set prices is a measure of harmful economic power. There is no economic standard for determining if a firm is too large (LLL:3, 77) Much enterprise monopoly is the result of better performance. Sometimes competition has done its best when it yields a monopoly (LLL:3, 73). So we must allow the monopolist the possibility of a monopoly profit. If there is no entry in these circumstances, this suggests that the monopolist is performing better than any potential entrant could. However, where monopoly is due to a government policy, then that policy should be changed to remove its monopoly result. The most effective policy is to deprive government of the power of benefiting particular groups or interests (LLL:3, 82). This would occur if government were bound by the rule of law.

The situation is different where market power is used to prevent others from serving customers better (LLL:3, 72). What is harmful is the ability of a monopolist to preserve its position after its source of superiority has gone (LLL:3, 84). The problem Hayek identified was collusive action (LLL:3, 90). Hayek suggested a number of ways for government to check collusion. One is the dissemination of information, for the "real issue is how we can best assist the optimum utilisation of the knowledge, skills and opportunities to acquire knowledge" (LLL:3, 68), for "there is no doubt that the utilisation of knowledge can be greatly increased by deliberate efforts" (CL, 376). His proposed reform of patents and copyright arrangements were relevant here, as well as the information responsibilities assigned to government in relation to collective goods (see below). Potential competitors could be used as watchdogs on performance by being given a remedy against price discrimination, such as a claim of multiple damages, and all agreements in restraint of trade could be declared invalid (LLL:3, 85-87).

There may be cases of what Hayek called "inevitable" monopoly, such as railways, road and air transport, and the supply of gas and electricity (RTS, 146). The policy issue is then a choice between the freedom of a market with no legal monopoly rights and the greater abundance of a market supplied by a producer with legal monopoly rights. The interesting feature of Hayek's discussion is that it was not conducted in terms of the undesirability of a monopoly, because of its reduction of market freedom and its inconsistency with the rule of law, but in terms of a social judgement to be made on the merits of the alternatives. Where society chooses to confer monopoly rights, Hayek's preference was for government supervision of private monopolists. Private monopoly is "scarcely ever complete and even more rarely of long duration or able to disregard potential competition" (RTS, 146). By contrast, government monopolies make competitive experimentation impossible and so prevent selection by evolution (FC, 103). Hayek expressed a preference for the control of monopolists through "stringent price control". He expected that this would make monopoly unattractive to entrepreneurs, who "will rediscover their taste for the bracing air of competition!" (RTS, 147). This expectation sits uncomfortably with his concern about the tendency to collusive action (LLL:3, 90).

**Stabilisation**

The focus of Hayek's work on stabilisation policy was that a market economy will always generate unemployment as a consequence of change, which may impact on industries
or regions, as well as the investment and consumption goods sectors (Hayek, 1933, 1925 and 1950). Economic change leads to a discrepancy between the distribution of resources and the distribution of demand. So the problem is one of inappropriate relative prices and wages: "Economic activity is not guided by totals but always by relations between different magnitudes, and the practice of always thinking in 'global' totals can be very misleading" (Hayek, 1952, 347). In those cases, additional expenditure may not create additional employment. Only a reallocation of resources in response to revised prices and wages solves the problem in a free economy (Hayek, 1950, 271-2 and Hayek, 1972, 201). Here the idea of the market re-emerges. The only way to secure full employment is for the distribution of labour to be consistent with the needs of the market, and this cannot be known beforehand. It is something to be discovered by letting the market do its job (Hayek, 1950, 275).

The structural unemployment that change produces is due to the freedom of workers. So long as workers have the freedom to choose their work, there will be delays in the adjustment process and so some unemployment. Workers will initially exercise their freedom by resisting the change, and this will lead to some of them becoming unemployed. A monetary expansion can serve to keep some in their jobs for longer than they otherwise would be. However, in the long run it becomes self-defeating and serves only to hold up the reallocation of labour made necessary by the changes in the market. The result is lower labour productivity and an increase in "the proportion of the working population which can be kept employed at present wages only by artificial means" (RTS, 154). The policy dilemma is that if credit expansion stops, unemployment would be greater than it would otherwise have been (Hayek, 1950, 273).

The major shift in Hayek's position was in relation to his views on monetary policy. In The Road to Serfdom Hayek had endorsed the use of monetary policy and (more cautiously) public works to combat unemployment (RST, 90-91). Six years later, he expanded on this simple endorsement by arguing that where there is general unemployment in the sense that resources of all kinds are unemployed, then monetary expansion is beneficial (Hayek, 1950, 271-2). In the Constitution of Liberty his position was that government should try to reduce cyclical unemployment as much as possible by monetary policy (CL, 302). This would preserve the impersonal method of market adjustment where people can choose their occupation. However, government should retain control of monetary policy, because business has come to rely on existing forms of money and credit, and monetary policy can reduce unemployment (CL, 324). The best monetary policy is one which follows a mechanical rule set according to long run considerations (CL, 333). The objective of monetary policy should be a stable price level, which is the best means to a high and stable level of employment (CL, 337).

Hayek's final position was to argue for the denationalisation of money combined with a fixed exchange rate, a position he had first suggested in a footnote in The Constitution of Liberty (CL, 520, note 2). Hayek proposed that governments should give up the monopoly of their own currencies in regard to legal tender, and should allow private contracts to be made in terms of any other currencies. Government had abused the monopoly power of issuing money, and a competitive market of private moneys would be a more effective check on inflation, because people would seek out the most inflation proof currency (Hayek, 1991). Hayek's argument for fixed exchange rates was that they constitute a "discipline on governments" (HOH, 150). The monetary rule Hayek proposed in The Constitution of Liberty represented an effort to find a rule of law for the market. Hayek felt the monetary rule had failed because it was too vulnerable to discretionary abuse by government. It was preferable to remove the monopoly of the issue of money from government to eliminate discretionary abuse.
Minimum Income Scheme

Hayek advocated an income maintenance scheme which provided "a constant minimum for everybody who cannot earn more than that minimum in the market" (HOH, 149). This minimum should be "more than is absolutely necessary to keep alive and in health" (CL, 285). It should be available to anyone who experiences misfortune from the risks "which are common to all". A minimum income scheme is a "clear moral duty" (LLL:2, 87), and a "necessary part of the Great Society". It is necessary in a large society where people do not have the private help of others, and it is possible in a prosperous community (LLL:3, 55). The level of protection depends on community prosperity, that is, the ability of the community to pay (CL, 101). Because of the uncertainty of "the common hazards of life", "few individuals can make adequate provision" against them, a problem of market failure. Insuring against these risks does not generate problems of moral hazard, so there is a very strong case for government "helping to organise a comprehensive system of social insurance" (RTS, 90). As a "recognised duty of the public", insurance would have to be compulsory (CL, 286). In addition, Hayek justified coercion on the basis that otherwise non-payers would become a charge to the public and because it forestalls greater coercion of the individual by those suffering "extreme misery" (CL, 286).

Hayek rejected any "deliberate redistribution beyond" the provision of a safety net (HOH, 149). Such a policy would require unequal treatment of people, because it represents particular benefits for specific individuals, which can never be just, and is inconsistent with the rule of law (LLL:2, 142). By requiring discretionary judgement by authority, it "suspends" the market (LLL:2, 87), which has "brilliantly" reduced absolute poverty: relative poverty must always exist outside of any completely egalitarian society (LLL:2, 139). In addition, the poor have no moral claim for a greater share of the wealth of society. The wealth of a community "may set a standard for what some ought to be willing to give, but not for what anyone can demand" (CL, 101). Finally, increasing the security of one group necessarily reduces the security of the rest, because the share of fluctuations they bear must increase, and "the essential element of security which the competitive system offers, the great variety of opportunities, is more and more reduced" (RTS, 95). In Hayek's view, the market game increases the chances of all of a high real income, and this, plus the assurance of a minimum income outside the market, "leaves no moral justification for a use of force to determine relative incomes" (LLL:3, 142). Hayek distinguished the minimum income scheme from any deliberate redistribution "beyond that" on the basis that his scheme was outside the market, whereas other schemes distorted the market (LLL:2, 87).

There are two sets of issues in relation to the scheme. The first is whether the scheme is consistent with Hayek's rules for government, and the second is what the scheme reveals about the rules. The scheme could be seen as being consistent with the rule of law, because it provides a known, general and uniform kind of safety net. The content of the rule could be seen as a "recognised duty of the public", recalling Hayek's notion of the "ingrained moral tradition". On this basis, the government would be justified in using coercion to enforce the scheme, if the scheme meets Hayek's requirement that it is necessary for the abstract order by identifying and protecting the private domain. However, the interesting feature of Hayek's presentation of the scheme is that it was not justified for its contribution to the competitive order. In fact, Hayek acknowledged that people are prepared to give up some freedom, rather than bear "too great" a risk (RTS, 99). If the scheme is not necessary for "protecting the individual domains" (LLL:3, 111), then the use of coercion is not justified. Hayek's case for coercion was a concern for the viability of the scheme and the protection of society from those in "extreme misery". Neither of these concerns is related to Hayek's insistence on limiting coercion to the enforcement of the rule of law.
It is not clear that an entitlement to a minimum income in the event of misfortune is “outside” the market, whereas any other income entitlement in specified circumstances "beyond that" is "inside" the market and a distortion of the market. Nor is it clear that Hayek was correct in expecting that “suitable” private institutions could evolve, so avoiding a government monopoly (CL, 287-288). The importance of benefits “based on need” (CL, 293), and problems of moral hazard and adverse selection would make viable private insurance arrangements unlikely.

The scheme reveals some fundamental weaknesses in Hayek’s rules for the role of government. Hayek’s discussion of the moral duty of the community to those who suffer misfortune reveals the problem of knowing what an “ingrained moral tradition” is. The community has a moral duty to provide “more than is absolutely necessary”, while the poor have “no moral claim for a greater share of the wealth of society”. Where is the line drawn between the moral duty of society and the moral claims of the poor? The recognition of a moral duty does more than simply supply the content of the rule of law, because it affects the amount of freedom. Hayek here implicitly advocated the sacrifice of an amount of freedom for a gain in social welfare, a trade-off he was not prepared to consider when arguing the case for freedom. Second, it is not clear that a rule, which specifies people’s eligibility according to certain misfortunes, is general whereas a rule which specifies people’s eligibility according to other defined events, like "structural adjustment", is not. Hayek’s notion of the generality of a rule is a fiction, because it did not recognise the need for policy to specify the categories of people and circumstances to which the policy rule is to apply.

**Collective Goods**

Hayek recognised that there are goods the market may not provide at all or not provide in sufficient quantities. He called these goods collective goods. Hayek’s understanding of what constituted collective goods changed markedly. In the 1944 work, The Road to Serfdom, he identified the need for collective goods as occurring where there is an “important” “divergence between the items which enter private calculation and those which affect social welfare” (RTS, 29 - emphasis added). The problem is the absence of property rights in external benefits and costs. In these cases, "some other method than competition may have to be found." Hayek’s examples of this Pigovian concept were signposts, roads, deforestation, some methods of farming, smoke, and noise (RTS, 29), and knowledge, information and mobility (RTS, 71).

In the 1960 work, The Constitution of Liberty, Hayek shifted the emphasis of the concept of collective goods. There he argued, following the concept of public goods introduced by Samuelson and Musgrave, that it is “essential for government to provide all those services which are clearly desirable, but would not be provided competitively because it is impossible or difficult to charge the beneficiary for them” (CL, 223 - emphasis added).

The examples Hayek cited were sanitary and health services, construction and maintenance of roads, municipal urban services, public works, military preparations, and the advancement of knowledge; things which facilitate the acquisition of reliable knowledge about facts of general significance, including a "reliable and efficient" monetary system, standards of weights and measures, surveying, land registration, and statistics (CL, 223). There is another group of cases as well, comprising natural parks, museums, theatres and sports grounds. According to Hayek, “there can be no objection to the government providing such amenities ... so long as the community approves this, in full awareness of the cost, and realises that this is one aim competing with others and not a unique objective overriding all other needs. If the taxpayer knows the full extent of the bill he will have to foot and has the last word in the decision, there is nothing further to be said about these problems in general terms” (CL, 375).
In *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1976) the concept of collective goods changed again, as did the examples. For the first time Hayek used the term collective goods synonymously with public goods (*LLL*:3, 44). The discussion of collective goods emphasised the difficulty of confining benefits to those willing to pay for their costs (*LLL*:3, 43). There was also the problem of consumer ignorance, reducing the demand for knowledge below what would be socially beneficial. There is a case on this ground, and the low cost of the reproduction of information, for information to be free (*LLL*:3, 60). The government's monopoly on the issue of money was removed from the category of collective goods (*LLL*:3, 148). Long distance roads, on which tolls could be levied, were excluded as collective goods, but quality certification was included (*LLL*:3, 44), as were some “public institutions”, which were close to being merit goods:

Building regulations, pure food laws, the certification of certain professions, the restrictions on the sale of certain dangerous goods (such as arms, explosives, poisons and drugs), as well as some safety and health regulations for the processes of production and the provision of such public institutions as theatres, sports grounds, etc., certainly assists intelligent choice and sometimes may be indispensable for it....All that is required for the preservation of the rule of law and of a functioning market order is that everybody who satisfies the prescribed standards has a legal claim to the required certification, which means that the control of admissions authorities must not be used to regulate supply (*LLL*:3, 62).

The provision of a collective good was subject to two criteria. The first was a consistent position of Hayek: the collective good must be supplied subject to the rule of law. Hayek's first preference was for government to fund provision but to leave supply to the private sector (*CL*, 224). Second, in *The Road to Serfdom* and *The Constitution of Liberty*, the benefit of the collective good must exceed its cost. This is the test of "expedience" (*RTS*, 28 and *CL*, 222). In *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, this criterion was replaced by a test of whether the good itself satisfies the defined requirements of a collective or public good (*LLL*:3, 43-44). The term "expedient" took on a pejorative meaning in *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, where it was used to describe the practice of making decisions based on the merits of the case, and thereby sacrificing the principle of freedom (*LLL*:1, 56). This change left open the question of how decisions would be made about which public goods to supply, and in what quantities. However, Hayek’s concept of the test of "expedience" was consistently vague.

Expediency was a matter of whether "it is thought worthwhile". For instance, Hayek cautioned against regulating the method of production, because such rules limit experimentation and raise the cost of production. "But if this effect on cost is fully taken into account and it is still thought worthwhile to incur the cost to achieve a given end, there is little more to be said about it" (*CL*, 224). Similarly, while the rule of law excludes government from making decisions about who will produce, and at what prices and quantities, it does not exclude admitting to certain occupations only those with specified qualifications (*CL*, 227). The practical problem is that of determining what those qualifications should be without making a judgement about merit, which would violate the generality condition of the rule of law. However, a decision about qualifications does require that the categories of acceptable qualifications be specified. Interestingly, the examples of this entry restriction in *The Constitution of Liberty* were the control of the sellers of poisons and firearms, which in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* was a matter for the restriction of sales (*LLL*:3, 62).

The provision of collective goods entails coercion, because they must be funded by taxation, but they are not equally available to all, and so are "unjust" in Hayek's sense (*LL*:1, 139), and therefore inconsistent with the rule of law. Significantly, Hayek did not use this inconsistency as a ground to argue against collective goods. His solution was that so "long as
each may expect to get from this common pool services which are worth more to him than what he is made to contribute, it will be in his interest to submit to the coercion" (LLL: 3, 45 - emphasis added. See also LLL: 2, 6-7).

Hayek's endorsement of coercion violated the limits of the liberal government, because it was not justified by the need to enforce the rule of law, and sits uncomfortably with the central value of freedom. As with the minimum income scheme, Hayek justified the use of coercion on practical grounds, and did not confine coercion to the policies meeting the requirements of the rule of law.

Education

Market intervention in relation to education is required for two reasons. The first is the problem of consumer ignorance. Children cannot make informed decisions and parents may not make decisions in the children's best interests. For adults, education may awaken capacities they did not know they had (LLL: 3, 61). Hayek advocated compulsory general education for all. The case for coercion is that the catallaxy is stronger if everyone shares some basic knowledge and values (CL, 377). If all families are compelled to send their children to school, then the community should pay for those families for whom the "cost would be a severe burden" (CL, 378). The period of compulsory, publicly funded education depends on the prosperity of the community, the character of the economy, and the "climatic conditions affecting the age of adolescence" (CL, 382). Hayek supported a voucher system to avoid a government monopoly of the provision or control of the content of education, which would be dangerous for freedom due to its power over men's minds (CL, 380-381). He suggested that government schools could be confined to cases of small isolated communities where the numbers of children are too small for the economic provision of private education (CL, 381).

Hayek's presumption was that higher education should focus on a "comparatively small elite" (CL, 382). Advances in knowledge depend on research, and increasingly, Hayek felt, fewer universities were doing this. This was due to the universities' "utilitarian bias" for conferring professional qualifications, and the "democratic preference" for better material opportunities for large numbers over the advancement of knowledge. In order to advance knowledge, universities should not provide what customers demand (CL, 389). Hayek proposed subsidy assistance for general education and cases where the contribution education generates becomes freely available to all, and is not reflected in the price scientists and scholars receive for their services. This, therefore, excludes vocational and professional training from subsidies, which the individual can fund by loan arrangements, despite their practical difficulties (CL, 382-383).

The entry of students to higher education should not be by the "subjective merit" of "effort and sacrifice", but capacity and aptitude (CL, 385). Those who display the greatest ability should be allowed to develop their talent irrespective of family means, though how ability is to be determined is extremely unclear (CL, 386). This means certain advantages are to be limited to some, which may be "unfair", but making the best use of the "accidents of the environment", which includes some having more ability than others, is the source of the "growth of civilisation" (CL, 385). Having all start with the same chances is "literally impossible to realise" (CL, 385), and undesirable, because it would tend to repress the ability of people to take advantage of their "unfair natural gifts" and "opportunities", which are the source of progress (CL, 388).

Hayek on education raises two issues. First, his views on higher education represent a significant qualification to his idea of the market as the best means of determining resource allocation. His recognition of consumer ignorance in relation to education, but not in other areas like health (CL, 299), seems arbitrary. Second, Hayek's rejection of equality of
opportunity, because it requires unequal treatment of people, and his desire to encourage those with ability to develop their talent irrespective of family means (CL, 386), seems inconsistent. More fundamentally, the inconsistency reveals the ambiguity of the requirement that government policy have a uniform application. The uniformity needs to be specified in relation to selected circumstances. This selection requires other, unspecified, criteria.

Town Planning

The first recognition by Hayek that competition does not "adequately solve" the problems created by a town was in The Road to Serfdom (35), and developed in greater detail in The Constitution of Liberty, where it was recognised that a significant number of the costs of city life are "communal" (341). Whereas with "mobile property" the advantages and disadvantages accrue to the owner, the use of land "often necessarily affects the usefulness of neighbouring pieces" (CL, 349). The value of land reflects the uses of neighbouring land and the services and regulations of authorities, and economic decisions require that these effects be taken into account (CL, 349). Hayek's argument was that the market should be retained, because of its effectiveness in mobilising private initiative and dispersed knowledge and foresight, but that a more detailed "framework of rules" is required (CL, 350). Town planning establishes the "general conditions to which all developments of a district or neighbourhood must conform, but which, within these conditions, leaves the decisions to the individual owner [and makes] the market mechanism more effective" (CL, 350). Essentially, Hayek's approach was to internalise the externalities by increasing the size of the planning unit from the private property owner to the community" (CL, 351-352).

The problem of town planning is that planning measures will increase the values of some property and reduce others. To ensure a measure is beneficial, gains must exceed losses. The practical problem is to measure the costs and benefits. Hayek accommodated this problem by making the planning authority responsible for the gains and losses, so that it could capture the benefit of increases in value and compensate those whose property value has suffered. The means is the power to expropriate at "fair market value" from those who oppose the measure. So long as this is the only coercive power, it is acceptable because of the obligation to compensate at "fair market value", and provided disputes are only settled by "independent courts", meaning that planning authorities have no discretionary power (CL, 351).

Once again, compensation was used to justify coercion, even though such compensation was not part of Hayek's general rules for the role of government. Hayek ignored the practical difficulty of determining the impact of a planning measure on property value, even though a recognition of this kind of problem was part of his strong attack on the British Town and Country Planning Act (Hayek, 1949a, 334). In any event, coercion is not justified in relation to Hayek's rules for government. The problem Hayek addressed was the impact of changes to land use plans. Changes cannot be known in advance, so land use planning does not satisfy the requirement of the rule of law that the policy be known in advance.

Taxation

Taxation is an allowable coercion by government, providing it is exercised in accordance with the rule of law. However, Hayek was strongly critical of progressive income taxation. There were four elements to this view. First, progressive taxation abandons the principle of equality before the law (CL, 310). It constitutes an invalid coercion of the rich, even though the rich can "survive" under progressive taxation, which would suggest that on Hayek's test of coercion that progressive taxation is not coercive (CL, 136). For Hayek progressive taxation was a distributional decision imposed by a majority, which violates the rule of law (CL, 311). Second, it interferes with the working of the market. Progressive taxation limits the ability of successful people to accumulate a fortune. This impacts adversely
on investment and technical progress, the allocation of resources, incentives, and reduces social mobility by making it "practically impossible" for a successful man to rise by accumulating a fortune (Hayek, 1947, 118 and CL, 308). Third, it eliminates an important part of a free society, the man of independent means (Hayek, 1947, 118). Fourth, the "scientific" argument in favour of progressive taxation, the decreasing marginal utility of consumption, is flawed. This is due to the difficulty of comparing utilities between people, and because it is doubtful whether the concept of decreasing marginal utility has any meaning, if "we count as income all the advantages a person derives from the use of his resources (CL, 309).

Hayek advocated proportional income taxation. It is consistent with the rule of law because all are treated equally. It is also a rule on which all people, "those who will pay absolutely more and those who will pay absolutely less", are likely to agree (CL, 314). There are three difficulties with Hayek's proposal, which also relate to his criticisms of progressive taxation. As a longstanding system of taxation, progressive taxation may be said to constitute an "ingrained moral belief", in which case it is arguably an appropriate abstract principle for the rule of law to embody. Second, progressive taxation is consistent with Hayek's rule of law, interpreted in the sense in which he uses the concept in cases like control of occupational entry - there may be a different rule for a group with special features. Finally, there is the problem of the incompatibility of Hayek's objections to progressive taxation and his support of a minimum income scheme and government funding of general education. The funding principle of the income scheme and education was the community's ability to pay. Their rationale was vertical equity, by providing specific assistance to those who suffer misfortune under the minimum income scheme and assisting families not able to pay for compulsory education.

4. Conclusion

Hayek's system comprised the value of liberty, the idea of the market as an efficient means of solving the knowledge problem, and the position that freedom and the market are best promoted by a government which identifies and enforces the rule of law, and is itself bound by the rule of law. This is Hayek on a minimum, but active, government. And yet, as this paper has shown, Hayek advocated a significant set of policies which went beyond what was necessary for a properly functioning competitive market.

Hayek on policy often discarded elements of his "constitution of liberty", depending on the merits of the situation. In some cases, like income maintenance, values other than freedom constituted the goal of policy. The commutative justice of the market, which Hayek argued strongly was a consequence of freedom and necessary for the efficiency of the market (Hayek, 1940, 203, 1946, 21-22, and 1963, 258), was qualified by a scheme which cushions people against errors and misfortune. In others, like education, ignorance by consumers justified regulating the market by making schooling compulsory. The work of universities should not be driven by the market, despite Hayek's view that the market is the source of information about social value. The notion of collective goods was broadened considerably by Hayek in a way that reflected the development of the ideas of public goods from Pigou to Musgrave. However, adoption of a Musgravian notion of public goods funded by taxation created difficulty for Hayek's concept of coercion. Hayek's choice between extending public goods, or limiting public goods and preserving the rule of law, was to choose the former and change the justification of coercion.

Keynes' observation, that for Hayek the practical issue of policy was where to draw the line, leads to the idea presented in this paper there were two Hayek's on government. The presence of two views on government constitutes an inconsistency in Hayek's position. It also reveals the difficulty of designing a "constitution of liberty" which provides a workable policy
framework. Hayek’s policy views show the problems of confining policy by a permanent set of rules. Contrary to Hayek’s purpose, his policy position revealed the impacts of values other than freedom, historical circumstances, an awareness of the problems of market failure, and a reliance on comparisons of costs and benefits in policy making. These are elements of time and place, and judgements about merit, which elude efforts to confine policy to a set of rules for government.

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Note

1 The following abbreviations are used for the most commonly cited Hayek texts.

Hayek on Hayek: HOH
Law, Legislation and Liberty: LLL
The Constitution of Liberty: CL
The Fatal Concess: FC
The Road to Serfdom: RTS

References


