

# HAYEK AND AFTER

Hayekian liberalism as a  
research programme

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# INTRODUCTION

## OVERVIEW

I will start by explaining the overall argument that is offered in this book and also the contribution that is made to it by each chapter.

Hayek is well known for having argued for the desirability of a market-based social order, both in broadly consequentialist terms and because of its relation to a particular conception of human freedom. He further argued that if we wish to live in societies in which our economic activities are coordinated with those of numerous other people with whom we cannot have face-to-face relations, we have no option but to make use of market mechanisms. These allow for the transmission of information in ways that cannot be simulated by central planning. In chapter two, I introduce these ideas in the course of a fairly detailed account of some aspects of Hayek's intellectual development. The reason for proceeding in this way, I will explain shortly. First, I will sketch what they look like, in more general terms.

On Hayek's account, a desirable social order turns out to be a complex whole which contains as intrinsic and ineliminable parts things which, in themselves, are not desirable. This idea is of interest not only in itself, but also because it turns out that, on his account, such a social order must be sustained on the basis of behaviour that in key respects is what I will call disaggregated. Hayek, like Hume and Smith before him, stressed the way in which actions in a society of any complexity are not—and can hardly be—taken with the intention of bringing about large-scale social consequences which we find desirable. Instead, they are taken on a basis that is intelligible to us in the concrete situations in which we act; situations in which our knowledge is inevitably very limited.

These ideas are of the greatest importance for social theory. Hayek's writings about the problems of economic calculation under socialism discuss the way in which, under certain conditions, we may be able to sustain some desirable social outcomes on the basis of such actions. But as Hayek himself suggested in what he wrote about social justice, we may not be able to realize other attractive social ideals at the same time. More generally, some features

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of life in large-scale societies of the kind within which most of us live, and to which Hayek has drawn attention, impose important constraints over what we can aspire to, by way of the realization of normative ideals. It is these ideas about the constraints upon the realization of normative ideals which seem to me of real significance for social theory. It is one thing to decide that it would be desirable if the society in which we live possessed certain characteristics. But it may be quite another thing for it to be possible for such effects to be brought about, as consequences of the actions of citizens within it. Not only may our adoption of any one way of solving certain problems preclude our also being able to solve others, but, as Hayek's work suggests, if individuals have freedom as to the actions that they will perform in the specific situations in which they find themselves, and they are, for the most part, not in a position to know what the relationship will be between their particular actions and the more systematic consequences of those actions, it may not be possible even to bring about consequences the realization of which they would consider desirable, and which they would like to realize if they could do so.<sup>1</sup>

In my view, such ideas pose some interesting challenges to the way in which many issues in normative political theory are customarily considered. At the same time, they also lead to some important problems for *Hayek's* own normative views; not least concerning how a social order of the kind that Hayek favours could be maintained in existence, when it has features which will strike the individual within it as unfair or unjust. If Hayek is right in his broader views, God might well be able to appreciate that all is for the best in the kind of society that Hayek favours. But it is not clear that ordinary citizens within such societies will do so, too.

The ideas to which I have referred may remind the reader of some themes from the work of public choice theorists. There is, there, the same concern with disaggregation.<sup>2</sup> But public choice theory is different in its approach to what one finds in Hayek; not least, because of his concern with individuals who are ignorant and who are influenced in their conduct by specific customs and habits. Later in this book, I argue that these Hayekian themes may usefully be extended beyond the economic style of argument which lies behind much of Hayek's own writing. For example, I suggest in chapter four that fruitful links may be made between these ideas of Hayek's, and ideas about 'street-level bureaucracy', and about the habits and rules of thumb that such bureaucrats follow in the pursuit of their tasks in various specific institutional settings.

The ideas to which I have referred above are introduced in chapter two. Their ramifications are pursued right through this work. But there is also another distinctive theme to chapter two. For I am also concerned there with the *development* of Hayek's views. In chapter two—and also in parts of chapter three—I argue that there are some significant differences between his views at different points in time. In consequence, I think that there is something wrong with those approaches to Hayek which have treated his work as if it were a jigsaw, with the task of the writer on Hayek being to show how all the

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bits fitttogether. Where there are differences, I do not think that his later ideas are, simply, improvements upon his earlier views. At the same time, I do not wish to argue that we can just return to his earlier ideas. Rather, we need to follow his development, see how his views change over time, and to look at the implications of some of these changes; implications which, in some cases, Hayek himself did not fully appreciate. Only when this has been done are we in a position to consider how we should, ourselves, proceed.

Three major problems are highlighted by such an approach to Hayek's work. The first relates to his ideas about economic calculation under socialism. Hayek had been impressed by Mises' critique of socialism. In the course of responding to some of Mises' critics, Hayek was led to some interesting ideas about the way in which prices affect the coordination of economic activity. He came to view markets as processes through which coordination takes place between the disaggregated activities of individuals whose knowledge is both limited and fallible. However, once Hayek comes to place emphasis upon such ideas it becomes difficult to see exactly what he can claim about the welfare characteristics of a society in which markets—so described—play a major role. Yet at the same time, Hayek is advancing, in his political writings, a broadly consequentialist argument for classical liberalism. Hayek thus arrives in the strange situation of being a consequentialist who thinks that we cannot say much about consequences; a view which is reinforced by some of his writings about the methodology of the social sciences.<sup>3</sup>

Second, in some of his earlier writings Hayek argues for the need for the reform of social institutions so that they will better play a functional role within a market-based economy. Yet some of his later work would seem to question the possibility of such rationally directed reform—reform which his own views none the less seem to require. There is, in fact, more to this issue than might meet the eye, because of its relation to an oddity about Hayek's political development. It is well known that, as a young man, Hayek was attracted to socialism and that under the impact of Mises' work on economic calculation and Hayek's own further developments of this line of argument, his views shifted in the direction of classical liberalism. There would seem to be two stages to this process: initially, his political sentiments remain much as they were before, but he advocates an approach to policy issues which looks more conservative because he becomes convinced of the indispensability of markets. Later—it seems to me not easy to tell quite when—Hayek's substantive views become more clearly classical liberal in their character. These moves I document in chapter two. What is strange, however, is that Hayek offers an account of the rationale for his shift from socialism which does not seem adequate to explain why he should have made the final move.

What I mean by this is as follows. Hayek, when he was a socialist (of sorts), was attracted to a mild form of Fabianism. He was also familiar with, and seems to have had some initial sympathy for, what one might call the market-wise interventionism of his teacher, Ludwig von Wieser; views which Wieser

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set out in a book, the proofs of the English translation of which he thanks Hayek for reading. Hayek, after the impact of Mises, depicts the key political choice as being between the use of markets, and central planning. However, there is an ambiguity about where he stands. For he has either become a classical liberal—but without having an argument against a view like that of Wieser, the very kind of view with which, earlier, he was in sympathy; or his repudiation of socialism must be understood to relate *only* to the advocacy of central planning and to certain ideas about the simulation of markets within a socialized economy. If this were the case—and there is some evidence compatible with such a view, at least up to the period of *The Road to Serfdom*<sup>4</sup>—it would give his ideas an ideological thrust rather different from that which they have been understood to have. For this latter interpretation would make his ideas much more compatible with *some* forms of socialism than many have supposed—and from how he usually presented them, himself.

I need, at once, to clarify this point. For there are two ways in which one might understand ‘socialism’. The first of these centres—understandably enough—on the idea of the social as opposed to the individual or corporate ownership of the means of production. Hayek has, I believe, telling arguments against socialism in this sense. There is, however, a second way in which one might understand ‘socialism’. This centres upon values rather than ownership. It is concerned with such things as material equality; with placing limitations upon the power that individuals or corporations are seen as being able to exercise as a consequence of the private ownership of the means of production; and with a concern, variously, that good administration, altruism or radical democracy should replace the chaos, domination and self-seeking that, in the view of socialists, characterizes ‘capitalist’ societies. This second conception of socialism—in various different variants—serves to explain socialists’ concern with the first kind of socialism. For the social ownership of the means of production is seen as necessary to realize socialist ideals—socialism in my second sense.

My point, for which I will subsequently offer detailed argument, is that Wieser was offering arguments about how certain (mildly) socialist ideals in the second sense, might be realized within an economy that was not socialist in the first sense. Hayek was familiar with these ideas of Wieser’s, and he exhibits some sympathy for some such socialist ideals, even in material written after his *Road to Serfdom*.

The problem which concerns me is that while Hayek has some strong arguments against socialism, these are against socialism in my first sense, and also against certain particular forms of economic intervention within a market-based economy. What is not clear is whether he has arguments against the kind of view that one finds in Wieser—what one might call a market-wise interventionism—or against the socialist values that might inspire it. In fact, Hayek’s argument largely seems to be of a technical rather than a value-based character. But, as I have indicated, his technical arguments do not

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seem to hit a Wieser-style approach; something with which, in the light of his own personal background, one might have expected Hayek to have been personally sympathetic. Indeed, one *might* read some of his writings—including aspects of his Inaugural Address at the LSE, and of *The Road to Serfdom*—as simply suggesting that any values (socialist included) should be pursued by means of markets, rather than central planning.

Hayek clearly did, in the end, come to favour classical liberalism. But we can ask what arguments he has for the change in his views. Hayek's values do seem to change over time, but not in a way that it is easy to pin-point; and, as I have indicated, the thrust of his argument is technical, rather than value-based. Yet, as I have suggested, this argument seems to me telling only against socialism in my first sense, and against certain forms of inept interventionism, rather than against a market-wise interventionism in pursuit of socialist values. Hayek does *later* advance an argument which would be telling against a Wieser-style interventionism. The problem is that it is an argument closely akin to those which have been offered by some public choice theorists. It calls into question any casual assumption that government can be relied upon to perform the kinds of intervention that would be required by a market-wise socialist. But, by the same token, it would seem to me also fatal to Hayek's own interventionism: to the idea—which, for example, one finds in his *Road to Serfdom*—that government can similarly be relied upon to perform various actions, including the reform of the legal system, which will make for the smooth running of a market-based social order. There are some indications that Hayek comes to appreciate this point himself, at least on specific issues; for example, as indicated by the fact that, in his later writings, he prefers a policy for the denationalization of money to one in which government is relied upon to run things in the public interest. But a key problem would seem to me to be that, as he argued in his earlier writings, received social institutions stand in need of reform if they are to play the kind of role that Hayek's overall views require of them. If one accepts Hayek's later argument against intervention, it is not clear how such reform is to be accomplished.

One might, I suppose, try to interpret Hayek's rejection of socialist values as based in argument about values themselves, rather than about economic, social and political organization. But this, it seems to me, is not how Hayek presents his argument himself. And if one did try to interpret his work in this way, one would, in my view, find what he had to say suggestive but almost painfully thin. In my view—for which I will argue later in the volume—a Hayekian case for classical liberalism stands in need of argument of both kinds, and thus for more, and better, argument about ideals than Hayek himself furnished.

From what I have said so far, it will have been clear that in the approach that I take to Hayek's work, a historically based form of appraisal plays a key role. This approach is somewhat unusual within political philosophy, although those who have an interest in the philosophy of science may recognize it as related to Popper and Lakatos's non-foundationalist approach to

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epistemology. What Popper and Lakatos offered—though it is seldom understood as such—is a way in which we may combine the rational appraisal of claims to knowledge with a repudiation of the idea that knowledge has reliable foundations. At its simplest, their argument is that we can appraise some new theory on the basis of whether or not it is an improvement upon what we had before. But to appraise theories in this way requires that we trace their development over time. At any point, we must ask: what are the problems towards which a theory is directed, and how successful is it in solving them? And if the theory is then modified, or if additions are made to it, we must ask: what implications has this for its ability still to address the problems to which it was initially addressed? In some cases, we may be happy to let a problem drop: we might, say, come to the conclusion that some problem that we have been attempting to solve rested upon mistaken assumptions, or upon an over-restrictive view of the options that were open to us. But in other cases it may be vital that we do not let a problem drop; indeed, our view may be telling to others only because of its ability to resolve some particular problem.

These ideas may seem uncontroversial. But they are, in my experience, not widely used in normative political theory. Indeed, in this context the historical approach to appraisal, to which they lead, may seem slightly strange. For this reason I set out the rationale for adopting them, in a more systematic manner, in the second and third parts of this introduction.

The approach that I am taking leads me to a distinctive perspective on Hayek's work. For it prompts me to follow his 'progress' carefully, and to ask: is each move that he makes one which, in fact, leads us to an improvement upon the position that he held earlier? As I have indicated, once one looks at Hayek's work in such a light, many things become problematic which have not seemed so to other commentators. A critic of my work has suggested that I am unwilling simply to accept that Hayek has changed his mind. This would be a reasonable enough point, if my concern were just with Hayek. But the title of this volume is *Hayek and After: Hayekian Liberalism as a Research Programme*. The 'after', here, does not refer to writers subsequent to Hayek. Rather, it refers to what would have to be done in order for a 'Hayekian' approach to be successful. And success would here involve these ideas being found telling by, say, the younger, socialist-inclined Hayek.

In my view, Hayek offered a distinctive way of interpreting classical liberalism. He suggested that we should place considerations of political economy and of political and social theory at the centre of the stage when we consider issues in normative political theory. Hayek's approach contrasts significantly with the rights-based approach to classical liberalism which may be found in such writers as Nozick. But it also differs from the kind of economic argument for classical liberalism that may be drawn from the Chicago School, or the proponents of law and economics. Rather, it represents something akin to the sceptical approach of David Hume and of Adam Smith. Hayek's ideas



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are not only distinctive, but represent an interesting programmatic approach to classical liberalism; one which is well worth further exploration. My concern, in the rest of the volume, is with how such a programme is best pursued.

In part, my concern is with the identification of the problems that those attracted to a Hayekian approach must address. Some of these, which emerge out of my discussion of Hayek's development in chapter two, I have already described. In chapter three, I raise some further problems by way of a discussion of his ideas about freedom, political economy and law. The rest of the book is concerned with discussing how these problems might best be addressed in a manner that would represent progress over Hayek's own views.

That I take this approach relates to a further feature of Popper's philosophy of science, of which I am making use in this volume: his ideas about 'metaphysical research programmes'. It is well known that Popper, when discussing the character of scientific theories, stressed the importance of falsifiability. But, in addition, he drew attention to the role placed in the development of science by programmatic ideas which are not themselves in general falsifiable. Such ideas may play a key role in suggesting how we should understand our subject-matter, and the kinds of explanations for which we may usefully seek.

There are, obviously, connections between these ideas (which were subsequently developed by Lakatos) and Kuhn's ideas about 'paradigms'. However, there are also significant differences between them, some of which are important for our present purposes. In particular, as against Kuhn, Popper stressed that at any one time there typically would—and should—be several research programmes in contention with one another. Further, critical discussion between the proponents of a research programme, and also with the proponents of other programmes, both about the theoretical ideas involved in the programme itself, and the methodological ideas associated with it, can, and should, be undertaken.<sup>5</sup> (An example, outside of the field with which we are concerned here, would be the argument between Gerry Cohen and Jon Elster about the relation between Marxism and functionalist explanation.)<sup>6</sup>

All this is of importance for the approach that I take in this volume, because my concern, here, is with Hayek's approach to liberalism *as a research programme*. Accordingly, my focus is not just upon how Hayek's views changed over time, and thus with the current problem-situation facing those attracted to his work, but also on what approaches might usefully be taken by those who wish to develop this programme in the future.

I would not expect that those whose interest is largely in Hayek will relish my theoretical discussion of these issues in the last two parts of this introduction, and they may well choose to skip over it. But that this discussion is there has important consequences for what follows. For, in chapter three, I discuss critically some aspects of Hayek's later work. My discussion there includes a consideration of his ideas about why individual freedom is important (on which topic he offers more than just a consequentialist argument; but

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onewhich seems to me defective); of his ideas on law; and of some of his arguments in political economy. In each of these cases, my discussion reveals problems that, I think, need to be addressed if one is going to develop Hayek's programmatic approach to classical liberalism. In this chapter, I raise a bevy of problems; indeed, more than I am able to respond to in this volume, and I should also warn the reader that, in consequence, this chapter has a less systematic character than the other parts of the book.

The issue of how to take a Hayekian approach further then becomes the theme of the rest of the volume. In this connection, I discuss several issues. My discussion is largely of a programmatic character, just because perhaps the most important question facing those interested in Hayek's approach is: what *kind* of argument is now needed? In this connection, I first discuss Hayek's criticism of the idea of social justice, and Raymond Plant's response to it. I suggest that Hayek's argument may usefully be reinterpreted in terms of one aspect of the transition from a 'moral economy' to a 'great society': the commodification of grain. My argument is that certain economic changes have significant consequences for how we should understand our moral responsibilities towards others. My discussion is couched in terms of a specific historical example. But it is significant in that it marks the opening of an argument about the moral consequences of the development of an international market economy.<sup>7</sup> The relationship between my discussion here and current arguments about 'globalization' and its consequences is, I believe, too obvious to labour. In my view, it is the argument outlined here that also serves to explain why the ideals of even a market-oriented social democracy cannot be seen as morally compelling, and which, thus, offers the response to Wieser which was not, I believe, provided by Hayek himself.

The next issue that I discuss, in chapter five, relates to what would need to be shown in respect of the welfare characteristics of market-based economies of the kind that Hayek favours, for Hayek's appeal to them to be able to play the role that is needed in his political argument. My argument, here, should prove highly controversial among those who have been influenced by Hayek's work. For I suggest that his subjectivism in value theory—while in part correct—is in part badly mistaken. For if his economic arguments are to be able to play their proper role in his political argument, he also stands in need of an *objective* welfare theory; one which relates the likely outcomes of market processes to human well-being in a sense that goes beyond simply the satisfaction of individuals' preferences, and instead pertains to issues the moral importance of which can be recognized, intersubjectively.

I will leave the details of this argument to the chapter, but will here make two points. The first is that I am *not* arguing against the importance of subjective individual choice; indeed, in my view it is of the greatest importance for human well-being and flourishing. My argument, rather, is that this connection has to be *argued* for, in order for an appeal to the satisfaction of preferences to be able to play its proper role in Hayek's political argument.

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Yet it is from just this task that Hayek himself retreated if one compares his ideas with the (admittedly crude) views of Carl Menger, and from which some of those influenced by Hayek seem to have retreated further still.

The second point is that there is an ambiguity about the way in which these issues have been discussed, introduced by the fact that some of those who address them do so from a rights-based approach. Now if one has strong, prior arguments that individuals have a right to make subjective choices in certain areas, this in itself furnishes an argument as to why others should have to respect those choices, regardless of what their content is. But Hayek, and many other economists, wish subjective choice to stand as morally significant on its own. My argument, here, is that it cannot do this, and that it only becomes something that others have to respect if one can show its connection to other things that more obviously have moral clout, such as considerations of human well-being.

Should my argument here hold water, it is possible that some who are attracted to Hayek's subjectivism may react by saying: we do not wish to try to advance claims about the connections between preferences and well-being of the kind for which you ask. Rather, we will take the other option and pursue, instead, considerations of rights. This leads us to chapter six. I there discuss an issue which, I believe, is pressing, but which few liberals see as problematic: *why* we should treat *each* individual as something like an end in him or her self. I suggest that, historically, this idea had a theological basis, and that contemporary liberals face a problem of how to make such a view plausible in secular terms. In chapter three, I consider what seem to me some of the problems about Hayek's own ideas on this topic. But I also suggest, there, that there are important parallels between Hayek's ideas and those of Karl Popper (and that, where there is a clash, there are arguments for preferring Popper's). The *point* of this argument is brought out by my discussion in chapter six, in which I make use of Popper's ideas to try to extract as much as I think can be done from one of Hayek's ideas about why other people's freedom should matter to us. I believe that, by such means, I am able to improve upon Hayek's own argument, and in a manner which spells out some of Popper's own ideas, and also has some parallels with the later work of Habermas.<sup>8</sup> But at the same time, I think that what I am able to achieve is of somewhat limited value. At best, we can take this line of argument as one which, if added to other arguments as to why each individual matters, may go some way towards making plausible the liberal's view of these issues. But I am conscious of the fact that, even if my argument should work, the case still looks rather less than compelling. All this, in my view, serves to emphasize just how problematic the universalism of the liberal tradition is.

It could perhaps be argued that this is a purely theoretical problem, rather than a practical one, for there seems to be widespread agreement to proceed as if such ideas were unproblematic. Thus, the importance of treating each individual as something like an end in him or her self is one of the few areas in which there is no real conflict between classical and 'modern' liberals. It

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is also a topic on which many postmodernists seem implicitly also to be in agreement, though why they should be is itself a puzzle. At the same time, given that we are also facing a revival of forms of nationalism which are not morally universalistic in their character, it is important to admit the weakness of liberalism here. The argumentative vindication, rather than the presupposition, of liberal universalism is of pressing importance, and a task to which those who find liberalism attractive need to address themselves.

The final chapter explores a further issue to which Hayek's work gives rise, and which is particularly challenging. As I have already mentioned in this introduction, in the exploration of Hayek's ideas in chapter two I discuss the way in which his work highlights two distinctive problems. His writings on markets bring out the way in which the liberal 'great society' that he favours rests upon actions which may be morally unlovely. It also involves the operation of rules which may generate consequences which are morally problematic. Hayek is not arguing that, in the phrase from *Wall Street*, 'greed is good'. Rather, he is arguing, with Mandeville, that greed *can* have good consequences—which is a rather different matter. Similarly, Hayek argues, with Hume, that the system of justice upon which a 'great society' rests may also generate specific legal decisions which may look grim, from a moral point of view. The problem here, in short, is that Hayek is arguing that we should appreciate that a desirable social order may have, as *ineliminable* parts, mechanisms which are morally unlovely, or rules which generate morally unlovely conclusions.

Why this matters is brought out by the other theme in Hayek's work with which we will again here be concerned: the way in which the kind of society that he favours—and which he argues is the best that we can attain—is maintained by the actions of individuals who are, for the most part, blind to the systematic consequences of their actions. By this, I do not just mean that Hayek's vision of a good society is one in which an important role is played by 'invisible hand' mechanisms. Rather, the problem is that the overall character of the society, and what the relation is between particular individuals' actions, their following of particular rules, and the society's overall character, is not one that is, in general, transparent to them. Indeed, it is only the social theorist who will see what is involved, and even he or she will be able to understand these things only in general terms.

These two ideas, together, generate an interesting problem; namely, that if Hayek is right, there is a problem of moral legitimacy haunting the 'great society'. For if people start to look critically at the institutions within which they are living, they will see much wrong with them: that they are living in forms of social order that may seem morally unjust. If Hayek is right—and if the arguments that I offer in this volume are along the right lines—they would be wrong in making this judgement, if making it is taken to involve the idea that the fundamental organization of society should be changed, such that these problems will not arise. Rather, if Hayek is right, the best that can be

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done is to palliate these problems, in so far as this can be done without disrupting the large-scale mechanisms which underpin the social order of a liberal society.<sup>9</sup>

However, and here is the rub, the problem is that this judgement—if it is correct—is one that will be appreciated only by the social theorist. It seems unrealistic to believe that such ideas can be made part of popular day-to-day knowledge, and thus of the basis on which we act as we go about our ordinary affairs. (Or, more to the point, it is not clear how ordinary citizens in Hayek's favoured society will possess the resources to enable them to resist the arguments of those who suggest that change is needed; especially when such ideas are developed in the setting of consciousness-raising groups, or other forms of contemporary activism, which remove those involved from the pressures towards conformity that are part and parcel of everyday life.) This presents the liberal political theorist with a difficult problem. It is akin to that which faced Plato's guardians, and there is a danger that it may lead them to think of solutions in terms of a regime which, from the perspective of ordinary citizens, is as repressive as was that of Plato. But such a response is of course utterly unacceptable to the classical liberal.

In chapter seven, I offer a suggestion as to how such problems might be addressed. The fundamental idea is that one might do so by way of citizens being offered choices between more specific forms of life within the setting of an underlying political regime which would have a character close to that of Robert Nozick's liberal metautopia. Classical liberalism, it would seem to me, differs from 'modern' liberalism in that it sees no problem in people choosing to give up certain of their civil rights; for example, as one of the conditions of being on the property of other people. Just as, say, if one chooses to enter a theatre, or to visit Disney World, one becomes subject to regulations that are imposed by the owners of the theatre or of Disney World, so, I would suggest, we may think of people's being able to choose to enter regimes which impose upon them certain specific forms of conduct. Those entering Disney World may well not understand the rationale for specific rules being imposed, but they accept them as part of the conditions of being there, because they like the overall atmosphere that is created by people following them. I would suggest that we may think of specific rules and codes of conduct of the kind that Hayek advocates, as, similarly, being things that people may choose because they like their large-scale products, without being able to *understand* their overall rationale—which is, indeed, the situation that Hayek argues that we must, typically, be in. At the same time, the wider but minimalist liberal setting within which such arrangements would operate would imply that, in a sense, individual rights and individual choice are preserved, and are given priority over the specific demands of any particular social formation. However, the priority would involve not the individual's being able to demand that a specific social formation be changed to meet his or her demands, or, even, the free exercise of their 'civil rights' within it, but, instead, that they have the liberty to take themselves and their property elsewhere. The reader

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familiar with Hayek's work will spot that I am, here, offering a reinterpretation of some of the 'evolutionary' themes of Hayek's later work upon a somewhat more rationalistic basis. Such ideas would also offer a framework within which Hayek's own more specific ideas—including his arguments for certain forms of governmental intervention—could themselves be tried out, but in a situation in which people retain the right to exit.

In chapter seven I am able to discuss these ideas only in a programmatic manner; and they clearly raise many more problems than I can sensibly attempt to resolve in a context such as this. But they seem to me personally the most suggestive of the ideas that I discuss in this volume. For, despite the obvious problems to which they give rise, they suggest distinctive ways of approaching several other and difficult problems facing contemporary liberalism.

The first of these relates to an issue raised by communitarianism. This concerns the way in which individuals, families or groups of people may favour a specific social order, the generation of which depends upon the following—and if necessary the imposition—of specific codes of conduct or ways of life, to which the individuals insistence on the exercise of particular rights may be disruptive. I think that communitarians are completely correct in their view that specific ways of life may demand specific such disciplines (although there are also forms of moral accountability that may work perfectly well within a 'great society').<sup>10</sup> But I also think that communitarians are completely wrong-headed in looking to political solutions to these problems, not least as there may be genuine diversity as to what forms of life people within a specific *political* community want, or as to what their preferred trade-offs are between individual liberty and the imposition of such codes. My suggestion is that one might more usefully think of such issues as being addressed by way of voluntary membership of proprietorial communities; communities set up and run by entrepreneurs (although there is nothing to stop these communities being of a cooperative or a democratic character, if would-be members are particularly interested in such things). This would allow individuals in principle to choose the form, degree and substantive character of the social control to which they would wish to be subjected. Although, clearly, their choice would be limited by economies of scale, and by the wider liberal setting of the arrangements within which I am suggesting that such forms of organization should operate.

The second issue relates to problems of identity. These arise in a striking way for liberalism, for two reasons. First, liberalism is universalistic in its character, and so has no built-in concern for the preservation of any specific identity. Second, people's identities within a liberal political economy have, as a material basis, the specific arrangements under which people are living: their ways of life, culture, habits, language and so on. Yet all these things have, in their turn, an economic basis, and one which, within liberalism, is not sacrosanct. Rather, it is open to change in ways that may depend on the decisions of people who may be remote from the people in question, and

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who, more generally, may have no way of knowing what the consequences of their actions will be in this regard, and no special reason for caring.

These contingencies must be squarely faced: they are the other side of the freedoms of the countless other people with whom we are cooperating through the international division of labour. In the face of them, we seem to me to face a choice. We may decide to go with the flow, and to open ourselves and our characters up to how things may turn out. Alternatively, we may feel that this is unsatisfactory, and face the problem that what we want may have to be created artificially, by way of the creation of social arrangements which foster specific ideals, and forms of organization upon which specific identities may be sustained. This is something that, in my view, is again best addressed in entrepreneurial terms, rather than seeing it as something that can occur spontaneously,<sup>11</sup> or through democratic initiatives. There is also a particular advantage to looking at these issues in such a manner. For it would allow more easily<sup>12</sup> for the imposition, on the character of such arrangements, of the requirement that what they foster should not be at odds with the underlying liberal character of the wider setting within which they are operating. It may also—though this is a difficult business—be more easy to exercise moral pressure such that the rules that are imposed do not move too far from the discrimination that is needed to keep specific identities intact, towards discrimination in a more unlovely sense.

I will not explore these matters further in this volume. But it seemed to me worth indicating what this strand of the argument in the book is leading towards. These are issues for further research, rather than ones upon which I can here hope to contribute more than programmatic suggestions. At the same time, the broader approach within which I am working argues not only for the importance of the explication of such programmatic ideas, but also for their criticism—which I am, obviously, now happy to receive.

## THE METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

As I have mentioned above, my approach to Hayek's political thought has been influenced by the criticism of foundationalism and of the programmes of justification that are associated with it, within epistemology and the philosophy of science.<sup>13</sup> These ideas do not necessarily bring with them relativism, or the end of philosophy.<sup>14</sup> For it is possible to make a comparative appraisal of competing theories on a basis that is not foundationalist in its character.<sup>15</sup> Such appraisal, however, brings a historical dimension into normative appraisal, as it is concerned with the assessment of a theory or a research programme as progressive in respect of its problem-solving powers, over time.

The ideas to which I am here referring were developed in the work of Karl Popper and of various writers associated with him, and have been elaborated upon by Imre Lakatos. My own views are closer to those of Popper, in a

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respect that is of some importance for the overall character of this volume, and which I should therefore explain.

Popper is well known for his ideas about the appraisal of scientific theories. Popper argued that if ideas are to be counted as scientific they must be an improvement upon our previous ideas, and also open to falsification. For something to be an improvement on previous ideas means that it must not diminish from the content of what we knew, previously. It must also say something new; either by way of resolving some problem that we had not been able to solve previously, or—perhaps even more challenging—saying that something that we had previously taken to be unproblematic is, in fact, false. Openness of theories to falsification involves it being possible to test them against a (revisable) intersubjective consensus as to what is the case. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the proponent of a theory to explain how it can be put to such empirical tests, in terms of publicly accessible objects. In the event of such a test going against a theory, what happens? We need to make some change to our views. It may be the case that the new theory is incorrect; alternatively, it may be all right, but some other assumption that we had made may need to be revised. It is open to us to conjecture where an adjustment is to be made. But the same criteria to which I referred above—improvement on our previous knowledge, and testability—must again be brought into play. Popper also discussed the way in which, in science, we may also require that there be a simple and unifying idea behind the development of our theories, and he also discussed the way in which, at various times in science, untestable theories, such as atomism, formed research programmes for the development of scientific explanations.

Lakatos, in his writings on the ‘methodology of scientific research programmes’, offered what was, in effect, a generalization of these ideas. However, he suggested that one might be able to appraise the performance of research programmes in terms of their ability to generate progressive sequences of scientific theories. He also discussed the way in which elements of scientific theories themselves might be treated as programmatic ideas, by way of a methodological decision to direct criticism not to these theories, but to our other ideas.

Popper developed the ideas to which I have referred as an account of natural science. But he also offered a generalization of his ideas about falsifiability, so that they might be applied to ideas which are not testable, too. Essentially, he suggested that we might ask the proponents of theories which are not falsifiable, towards what problems the solution of which they are directed, and appraise them as such. This brings out an additional dimension to Popper’s work; one which, in my judgement,<sup>16</sup> is lost sight of in Lakatos, whose ideas about the appraisal of programmatic ideas are largely restricted to the appraisal of their empirical success. Popper, by contrast, opens up the possibility that we may discuss programmatic ideas as such, and appraise them also in terms of their ability to resolve the problems to which they are addressed. Such an idea is of



the greatest interest and importance; not least, as it points to the way in which we may gain through the discussion of programmatic ideas as such, and in broad terms, rather than having to restrict ourselves to the discussion of specific empirical or technical results.

It is this approach which underlies the overall procedure that I adopt in this book, in which I generalize Popper's approach to the study of normative political theory. For not only am I concerned—as were Popper and Lakatos—with historically based appraisal. But my discussion focuses upon Hayek's ideas as a research programme, and with the question of what would have to be done in order that we make progress in its development. In addition, the latter part of the book is concerned with the discussion of programmatic ideas. Not only—following Popper—do I believe that this is a legitimate activity, but I also believe that it is important. For one key respect in which Popper's approach differs from that of Kuhn, is that it allows us to ask: is the pursuit of normal science within some specific paradigm something that we *should* be doing? Does it make sense in terms of where we wish to go? And my concern, in the latter chapters of the book, will be to suggest that we should think again about some approaches that have been pursued by those interested in Hayek's work, while at the same time urging the importance of work on some issues that are not, to my knowledge, currently being pursued.

The approach that I am taking also involves the acceptance of Duhem's argument that our ideas face the world as a system.<sup>17</sup> From such a perspective, we cannot appraise a solution to a problem if it is offered in isolation, just because the relevant constraints on the solution are constituted by the other problems that we also wish to solve, and the kinds of solutions that we are proposing to adopt towards them.

I will now explain what all this amounts to in the context of the appraisal of normative political theory. I will set out these ideas by way of a systematic, yet self-contained, argument, rather than in a manner that depends on the further invocation of ideas from the philosophy of science.

### APPRAISING NORMATIVE POLITICAL THEORY

How should we appraise the work of a normative political theorist?

First, we might ask whether what is being said is logically consistent. Consistency is obviously a virtue. If a work contains inconsistencies, then, on the basis of our most usual logical ideas, anything can be deduced from it. However, if little is being asserted, and an author is not offering us a solution to an interesting problem, it is no big deal that he is consistent in what he says. However, I would be surprised if any of the major works in the history of political thought were internally consistent. But this, while showing that such works are flawed, plainly does not show that they are worthless. Indeed, the existence of such inconsistencies may generate a research programme for those attracted to an author's main ideas, or to a particular tradition: the

programme of showing how such inconsistencies can be removed in ways that do not diminish—and, ideally, improve—the attractiveness of the more general view.

Second, we might note that the author is advancing certain theses. Should we then appraise how his theses are justified? It will clearly be a point against an author if he claims that some consequence follows from particular premises and it does not in fact do so. At the same time, it is easy to overrate such matters. On a purely technical level, the fact that the argument that he has offered does not do what he had hoped does not, of itself, show that there is not some other argument that could do the trick. But more important, the idea that justificatory argument in political theory should be about such proofs and disproofs is, in my view, mistaken.

If we want to establish some thesis, it simply will not do to show that it can be deduced from something else. If such an argument is valid, all that this would tell us is that the premises from which we have deduced it are (at least) as contentious as the thesis that we wished to establish. If our thesis were itself contentious, all that we would have done is to show that our premises (which, presumably, we had taken to be unproblematic), in fact have hidden content to them which makes them contentious, too. The root of this problem—our desire for proof, and the belief that such proof can be obtained by reasoning from axioms, of the correctness of which we can be assured—is, I suspect, an old error, the role of which in recent times may well stem from a misunderstanding in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of the epistemological character of Euclidian geometry.<sup>18</sup> For it is this—and the attachment of Descartes and Newton to a generalization of mathematical reasoning, understood in such a way, as a method of argument—which left us with the epistemological project of the discovery of rational and empirical foundations of knowledge which dominated Western philosophy for so long.

This project, which has led us into many extremely interesting issues, also led us on a wild goose chase for subjective indicators of objective validity, and thence into an epistemology which was one-sidedly individualistic and subjectivistic. More striking still, it would seem that could ‘foundations’ be discovered that would satisfy the epistemic demands of this tradition—that we could know them to be true beyond the possibility of error—they would not be of much use to us as foundations. For they would be of little use to us in the process of justification for which they were destined, just because of the inevitable poverty of their content.

But does this mean that the project of discovering that something in which we are interested follows from particular premises must be dismissed as worthless? I think that if this is understood after the fashion of foundationalist justification, then indeed that is correct. Happily, however, this is not the only way in which such a ‘proof’ might be understood. To give these points some specificity, let us consider a concrete example.

Someone interested in political philosophy might ask: what is the point of

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those sections of Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* which explore what follows from premises about the rights of individuals that most readers would not themselves accept? Some might say that their value is technical. But while Nozick's argument is often ingenious, this is hardly adequate as an answer in itself. For there is no reason why we should be interested in technical sophistication *per se*. It is only if the argument has some bearing upon our problems and concerns—intellectual or practical—that the activity would have been worth undertaking in the first place.

A better response is that such work is clearly of interest to those people who are attracted to the particular normative ideas which Nozick discusses, and who are, perhaps, concerned about the compatibility of these ideas with others. Consider a radical individualist who believes that people have rights in the sense of something close to Nozick's reading of Locke. Suppose that such a person is repelled by the anarchistic conclusions which others have drawn from such views. Suppose that he wishes to be reassured that his radical individualism is compatible with a minimal state, but is concerned lest—as arguably in Locke—a state that is generated to defend individuals' rights seems, in the end, to threaten to devour them. In such a case, the strongest proof of compatibility is if the possibility of a minimal but no more than a minimal state can, in fact, be derived from these ideas, together with other innocuous premises. Thus, what gives such results their interest is a normative concern for the claims that are being made.

From such a perspective, the rationale of the first parts of *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* would be to reassure a radical, rights-based individualist who wants to accept a minimal, but not more than a minimal, state. Or, alternatively, to challenge another such individualist who wishes to claim that no state could be legitimated upon such a basis. And indeed, it is striking that much of the critical commentary upon those sections of Nozick's work has been written by individualist anarchists.<sup>19</sup>

Such argument would thus be read avidly by individualists. But it is not clear that, in itself, it would be found interesting by anyone else, other than because its perspective was—to many—novel, and also because Nozick is a brilliant and inventive philosopher, such that what he says on these issues may be suggestive of applications elsewhere. However, someone who is critical of such an individualistic perspective—perhaps the later Nozick?—might also be interested to see what can be done within the ambit of such an approach. Nozick's work, if understood in these latter terms, exemplifies a meta-level approach to philosophy which is attractive, and which is close to that set out in the Introduction to Nozick's *Philosophical Explanations*.<sup>20</sup> On such a view, the theorist would be judged not on the basis of whether he had justified some idea, but, rather, on the basis of whether he had shown some idea to be compossible with others to which he is also attracted. One task for the normative political philosopher is thus to show how it is possible to have what he wants—in the face of objections from others that he is trying to have his cake and eat it,

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too. This also allows for the possibility of someone's discovering that ideals which they had hoped to espouse are in conflict with one another.

Such an approach may seem to have little critical bite. And this is indeed the case if we consider our ideals just one by one. But it starts to become more interesting once we bring together more and more of our ideals, and also pertinent factual information, too (including, of course, ideas from social and economic theory).<sup>21</sup> It may prove much more difficult than we at first thought to have all the things that we want at the same time. And by exploring ideas—empirical and theoretical—which we had supposed to be compatible, we may make discoveries which surprise us. We may also discover that what we had taken to be the 'obvious' means to the realization of some ideal will not, in fact, be effective. Or we may discover that there may exist historical examples of things which we had assumed not to be possible.<sup>22</sup>

This marks a point of contrast with more usual 'analytical' approaches within moral and political philosophy. For, against them, it suggests that seeing our task as the explication of relationships between particular concepts is radically defective. It is defective, first, because such a view underspecifies the task upon which the theorist is engaged. It is only if *other* assumptions and desiderata are explicated that the theorist's task becomes properly formulated. Just as Duhem argued in respect of the empirical, so it is in respect of the normative: any specific element of our knowledge can be preserved in the face of difficulties, if we are willing to make appropriate adjustments elsewhere. Accordingly, when seen from a non-foundationalist perspective, it is the systematic philosopher who is *more* rigorous than the analytical particularist, committed to the analysis of particular concepts upon a piecemeal basis. It suggests, further, against the current practice of leading journals in moral philosophy, that work that situates itself within the theoretical perspective of a historical or current theorist is *more* rigorous than the 'analysis' of only isolated problems or concepts, because it is only the systematic approaches that explicate the constraints in relation to which their solutions to particular problems are to be evaluated.

Second, such an account is defective in so far as it presents itself as involving an appeal to, or an analysis of, 'our' concepts, or 'our' ways of using language. Two arguments are pertinent here.

The first is that the 'our' of 'our concepts' or 'our intuitions' may stand in need of critical scrutiny. For it may reflect a history of domination exercised by one class, sex or status group over another. Concepts and intuitions may, for this reason, be rooted in various kinds of domination, rather than representing a neutral tribunal to which issues can be brought for settlement. What had been assumed to be a consensual judgement on the acceptability of some theory—and thus for the preferability of certain concepts—may be questioned from the point of view of the epistemological acceptability of the social processes that served to form or to preserve the integrity of the judgement. To make such a point, however, is not to presume that there is some neutral perspective

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immediately available to us, or some key to our situation the possession of which will remove all prejudice and leave truth manifest to our inspection. Rather, such an approach should be understood as an extension of fallibilism, and its programme of the piecemeal improvement of our knowledge. In taking it up—and in thus suggesting that the way in which some consensus has been reached stands in need of a particular kind of critical scrutiny<sup>23</sup>—we should recognize that we will be involved in the messy business of the investigation of the interplay between the historical, the empirical and the theoretical. Further, any claim that our previous ideas have been defective due to the existence of some socially maintained barrier must be argued on the basis of our usual criteria for the acceptance of empirical and theoretical claims and their revision.

To maintain this is not to be unnecessarily conservative. For in our own day, powerful and illuminating criticism has been offered in such a manner of the work of some of the greatest figures in the history of political thought, from a feminist perspective. It is indeed striking, in retrospect, how it had been possible to overlook discrepancies between arguments conducted in purely general terms concerning the characteristics of human beings, and institutional arrangements which treated first slaves and then women in ways that were flatly at odds with such arguments. I suspect that we have a lot more yet to learn from feminist criticism of the assumptions of political theory, and I believe that we must always be open to the possibility that further such revisions may be necessary from other and as yet unsuspected directions. Further, for reasons to which I have already alluded in my discussion of disaggregation earlier in this chapter and which I will discuss in more detail later in this volume, the very idea that the analysis of social institutions is usefully to be conducted in terms of the analysis of shared concepts,<sup>24</sup> is open to criticism. There may be such concepts, which are even used by all parties to give an account of what they are doing. But to presume that this 'official' account actually illuminates what is going on runs the risk of serious misunderstanding. This will be the case notably in so far as the concepts pertain to what are, in fact, the emergent products of meaningful action, of negotiation or of coercion.

The second argument is that—to elaborate on a point of Karl Popper's—it is poor practice for the theorist to focus to too great an extent upon concepts. To be sure, we may need to do this, *ad hoc*, if it turns out that we seem to be arguing at cross purposes and we suspect that this might be a result of a term's being used in different ways (indeed, my brief discussion of different interpretations of socialism, earlier in this chapter, was a response to just such a problem). But beyond this, to focus upon concepts is counter-productive just because, faced with disagreements about concepts *per se*, there is little that can be said. In my view, the approaches both of those who talk about concepts being 'essentially contested', and the 'restrictivists' who oppose them,<sup>25</sup> are equally unhelpful (I also do not think that the distinction between 'concepts' and 'conceptions' helps things much, either). Rather, we should treat the theorist's choice of concepts as being akin to the choice of theoretical terms.<sup>26</sup>

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On such a view, the adoption of one rather than another concept would be given its point by our judgements about substantive theories and states of affairs, both factual and moral. The decision to use one rather than another concept is thus something that should depend on our comparative assessment of theoretical argument about matters of substance: what concepts we adopt should, in my view, be determined by what theories we find most telling.

To make all this a little more concrete, I would suggest that there is nothing much to be gained for the theorist by ruminating over different concepts of liberty or coercion. Rather, any theorist should simply say what he is proposing he thinks we should consider desirable, and why; giving us an argument at such point as one is needed. And this, clearly, will occur in part just at those points in which he is urging that we should depart from theories and judgements which are hitherto widely held. We can argue the merits of the idea that each individual should be entitled to positive assistance from others, should, say, they be in certain specified conditions of need. But nothing is gained by whether or not this entitlement is to be conceptualized as a right or, say, as related to the liberty of that individual, except in so far as this serves simply to explicate in more detail how it is being claimed that they should be treated. It is with respect to *this* issue that *arguments* can take place. How, *conceptually*, we handle matters is something that should be decided in light of what theories and what (consensually redeemed) intuitions in the end win the day, and also pragmatically in terms of what vocabulary comes most easily to those involved in such disputes.

If such ideas were accepted it would, in the first instance, leave the political theorist the task of showing that the various views that he wants to hold are consistent, and of investigating the trade-offs between the realization of one ideal and others. To this task, empirical material will clearly be relevant; and normative political theory will be clearly bound up with empirical investigation. Particular empirical results may be important for the assessment of the tenability of some combination of ideals. But normative theory will also generate research programmes or ‘paradigms’ for empirical study: we may be led by our normative ideas to try to show that a problem can in fact be solved in some particular way. (Thus, a socialist who is attracted to Marx’s ideas about the overcoming of alienation in his early writings might be pressed into theoretical and empirical investigations as to how—or whether—a modern society could work in ways which realized Marx’s ideals. Similarly, the classical liberal might be led into historical investigations of the strengths and weaknesses of the voluntary or cooperative provision of social services and of medicine, and into theoretical work as to how—or whether—such problems as were encountered historically could, in fact, be resolved in ways compatible with his view of the proper limits of state action.)

In so far as our concern is with compossibility—in the sense of showing the logical compatibility and the empirical co-realizability of different ideals—then it is worth noting that our normative concerns will properly play a

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major role in our empirical investigations (indeed, if an issue is unrelated to our normative concerns, we should ask ourselves why we are pursuing it). We will be concerned with what is compatible with them theoretically, or with whether they can be realized in what we take to be pertinent factual circumstances. They will thus quite properly play a leading role in the direction of empirical research. Such research, however, may serve not only to confirm the normative views that inspire it, but also to render them problematic. And one may see the success—or otherwise—of empirical and historical research inspired by normative ideals as one of the significant ways in which such ideals may be criticized.

So far, however, there has been something largely missing from our account; namely, other people. Our deliberations so far could well have been performed by Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe would come to his island already socialized, informed about the world, and with ready made ideas (such knowledge itself being the product of investigation that is, essentially, intersubjective in its character; but this need not concern us here). But (until Friday) he would not be concerned about the compatibility between his views and those of other people (except in so far as an implicit reference to the judgement of others is presupposed in the making of both factual and moral judgements), and with the issue of whether they would find his ideals and other constructions acceptable—except in so far as he had a carry over of ideas about the acceptability of his views from his previous life. Similarly, he would have no incentive to reappraise his ideals, other than on the grounds of their compossibility with his other ideals and pertinent matters of fact.

However, normative political theory is obviously concerned with other people, too: and not only in the obvious sense that we are involved in cooperation, competition and conflict with others. We are also concerned to show others that they ought to share the views that we favour, or at least to tolerate them. We may—and I think that we should—believe that we should hold certain views ourselves only if our holding them is also judged reasonable by others. Clearly, some of our concerns may be understood by us simply as matters of contingent taste and circumstance, such that we would not be disturbed should we have had preferences with respect to those things other than we do. But other preferences are only held by us because we believe that there is a compelling case for us to have such preferences; an idea that may usefully be cashed out by saying that, ideally, there should be an interpersonal consensus that we should hold them. Such judgements should ideally pass not only the scrutiny of other people in situations different from our own, but also that of our own self at different stages in our life. Suppose, in the end, the idea that there is only *one* approach which we should have taken is unrealizable, and that there is a pluralism of different competing approaches to moral and political life which people may wish to try out or to enjoy, between which no cognitive argument can help them decide. We will, at the very least, wish to discover the limits of such pluralism, and to offer cogent

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arguments as to why we—and others—are entitled to be left alone to pursue particular choices, within it.

In this task, in so far as it is part of normative political theory (as opposed to simply fighting off those who are not interested in argument, or coming to prudential compromises with rational economic men), we must start with things that our interlocutors accept—or which we can persuade them into accepting. Our task is then to show how the things that we favour follow from things which our interlocutors accept. (We may also, of course, be concerned to show our interlocutors that things that they had believed to be compossible are not, in fact, so.)

It might be thought: but such argument cannot work—for the very reasons that were advanced against the ideal of justification, above. If your interlocutor discovers that your ideals (which he never liked) follow from premises that he had previously accepted,<sup>27</sup> he may well then give that as grounds for rejecting those premises. But at that point, he faces a problem himself. Not only will he be reluctant to give up things which, presumably, are able to capture many things that he favours. But he, also, will be concerned with the acceptability and the plausibility of his ideas to others. And the fact that a proposed approach is not compossible with some quirk of his ('But it will still allow people to have dogs!') will cut no ice with anyone else. This will give him an incentive to couch his own arguments—and his own objections—in currency which is acceptable to others. (Where these may be matters in which they are in agreement with him, or in respect of which there is agreement that it is reasonable to differ.) One is not, here, appealing to things that are beyond question. For the 'foundations' of such arguments are matters in respect of which there is an open-ended, intersubjective consensus. And in the event of someone finding any element of this consensus to be unacceptable, it is open to them to argue that our judgements should, at this point, be revised (as is the case with respect to Popper's ideas about the 'foundations' of empirical knowledge). Such a consensus is not a matter of pure convention. For the consensus concerns the truth of a factual statement, or the moral acceptability of some normative statement. While it is only because that upon which there is agreement is not seen as purely conventional that argument is possible (that is, about such statements directly, rather than about them as a means to an end).

As I suggested above, such an approach allows for a new twist to be given to arguments about compossibility. For rather than compossibility's being restricted to the ideas and views about matters of fact of a single individual, this argument may be generalized to the attempt to show how particular ideals are compossible with (or to discover that they are not compossible with) ideas which are acceptable not only to oneself and a particular interlocutor, but to any interlocutor. (To emphasize this point again, this does not mean that they are conceived of as sharing the views in question, but merely as seeing these views as unexceptionable for someone in particular circumstances to hold.)<sup>28</sup>

Such a task may also generate a further problem for the political theorist,



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which is well illustrated by a challenge that Raymond Plant has made to the classical liberal.<sup>29</sup> Plant says, in effect: show me the basis on which you are suggesting that individuals are entitled to the kind of treatment that you favour, and I will show you that they are then also entitled to welfare rights of the kind that I favour.

What might such argument look like? The classical liberal may say that coercion is bad. His interlocutor may say: why? This should be understood not as a demand for a justification, but as a request for a further explication of features of the object in respect of which the judgement is being made, which serve to discriminate between it and other objects of judgement or—if the interlocutor is puzzled as to why the judgement has been made at all—which help to render it more comprehensible. Once this has been done, however, it may prove difficult to explain, say, why the judgement should not have been extended; say, from the respecting of negative rights to a duty to give positive assistance, against the classical liberal's initial intention. Thus, argument of the kind with which we are here dealing must show not only that one can get what one wants upon some suggested basis, but also that others can't use it to get more than one wants, too. (The 'too' here does not assume that the two sets of claims are consistent; rather, your critic may wish to claim that your argument, if pursued rigorously, leads to his conclusions rather than to yours.)

If someone is engaged in a task within normative political theory of the kind that I have described above, they may be involved with a particular set of problems that they wish to solve. They may, say, have taken on the task of showing that a market-based political economy will serve to realize certain values. But it is not enough just to see what some author is doing in a particular piece of work. For he may have lost sight of some larger task that he had set himself. Thus, in the task of the evaluation of the work of a political theorist, one may legitimately engage in the enterprise of discovering and then reminding him what it was that he was supposed to be doing. It may well be that some task on which he is currently engaged—which, in itself, may seem fine, plausible and well-argued—may be criticized on the grounds that it does not meet up with the standards set by his original task or concern.

Now, clearly, it is possible for someone to renounce some earlier attachment. But this may have implications for how their work is to be appraised. For while someone may change their views, they may also lose sight of the fact that their argument was originally addressed to other people who shared their earlier concerns. If, as a result of changing their views, they drop their earlier line of argument, the cost may be that their new argument is no longer telling to those other people. But this is something of which the theorist himself may lose track.

This is why, in studying Hayek's work, and in seeking to appraise it as normative theory, I believe that it is necessary to look at the history of his ideas. For only this, in my view, enables one to discover what the problems are to which his work is addressed, and also to whom he is making his claims.

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And this may be crucial. For someone may end up following the logic of some argument, and reaching a position that is consistent, but where the crucial point that must be made against them is that in the course of their argument they have—perhaps inadvertently—given up some claim that was vital for the larger enterprise in which they were engaged.

Such an approach may be extended beyond the individual, to the intellectual tradition within which he or she is working. Historical investigation may serve to disclose a problematic with which people working within some tradition may have lost contact. It may show them that what differentiated the tradition within which they are working was a claim that it could solve a certain group of problems—but where the latter-day spokesmen of this tradition may have lost track of the fact that it is important for them to accomplish this task. (As a concrete example here, one might consider what Marxian socialism was originally wishing to do, and contrast that with the views at which some theorists who still regard themselves as Marxists have now arrived.)<sup>30</sup>

Such historical investigation may also help us in the task of rendering commensurable theories and traditions which, as we currently encounter them, seem simply to be talking past one another. For if one looks at the historical origin of some theory, one can discover problems that existed prior to and external to that theory, to the solution or resolution of which the theory was being proffered. This may enable one to explain to the later proponent of that theory what it is that he or she is doing, to provide a basis on which their work can be fairly assessed, and also enable one to bring into contact diverse intellectual traditions.<sup>31</sup>

In approaching Hayek's work, therefore, my concern is not just with whether views that he is offering at some point are consistent. My concern, rather, is to disclose the broader argumentative structure within which he is operating. I have paid attention to the way in which he is—or is not—able to solve the problems that he set himself, or which are set for him by the tradition within which he is working. These are matters that can only be disclosed by historical investigation. And—as in Hayek's own particular case—the most serious criticism that one may have to make of a theorist is that, at some point in his work, he has forgotten what he was doing. He may, and I believe that this is the case with Hayek, introduce arguments into his work without assessing what consequences the use of these will have for his larger enterprise. Or he may, equally, follow an argument to its conclusion without stopping to assess what consequences this, in turn, has for his more general views.

In this volume, I only touch the surface of these matters. Even if the arguments offered in what follows should prove to be correct, more detailed investigation of Hayek's own intellectual history and its context will surely lead to revisions of the picture that I have painted. I am also all too conscious of having offered merely one side of—and a rather odd perspective upon—what is clearly a many sided conversation. Hayek, after all, was an Austrian;

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but I have been able to place him in that context only to a very limited extent. He was also a polymath. The proper appreciation of his problematic, and thus the real basis for the assessment of his work, would involve the reconstruction of the whole range of conversations to which he was party. In addition, he was a professional economist, and much of his work needs to be situated within the technical problem situations of that discipline before it can be properly assessed. In particular, I will not discuss Hayek's work on monetary and capital theory in the 1920s and 1930s, despite the fact that it was his major concern at the time, and that it clearly relates, in interesting ways, to his political ideas. I will also refer only in passing to his writings on methodological issues, although I have written about these elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> A more systematic engagement with his writings, however desirable, must in my view wait until further work has been undertaken on other aspects of Hayek's work, not least by others.

One final point. As I have indicated in the acknowledgements to this volume, and as will be clear to any reader of this work, I have benefited immensely from the work of Norman Barry and John Gray on these topics. However, the approach that I have taken to Hayek has differed from theirs, and in a manner that would make direct engagement with their writings somewhat counter-productive on this occasion. Later work—notably that of Kukathas—was published after the main lines of my interpretation of Hayek were developed, and it has proved useful to refer to it only on occasion, given the rather particular purposes of the present work. I would, though, wish to stress that the fact that I have not been concerned, on this occasion, with the major secondary literature on Hayek does not mean that I have found it uninteresting, only that coming to terms with it would be a task for another occasion. I would say, though, that what I would take to be the thrust of Kukathas's conclusion to his work—that Hayek's main contribution to liberalism is by way of his contributions to social theory—is a view with which I would strongly concur, and also that it is a viewpoint around which Roland Kley's approach to Hayek is structured, albeit in a volume that came to my notice too late to be discussed in this book.<sup>33</sup>