



Dilemma of Individualism and Freedom in Neoliberal Understanding

Neoliberal Anlayışın Bireycilik ve Özgürlük İkilemi

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Abstract

There is a clear tension in the neoliberal approach to individualism and freedom. Focusing on the process of individualization and individual self-determination in markets, neoclassical approaches recognize that individuals are committed to social mobility and responsibility to act within market rules on, individual autonomy and the ability to set self-determined goals appear to be limited to market participation. The market is seen as an inherently dynamic system developed over time. According to Hayek, individualism refers to social progress and conformity to society. The aim of this paper is to respectfully examine the apparent inconsistencies and limitations of how individual freedom and choice have been conceptualized by neoliberal thinkers, through an analysis of the works of Hayek and Friedman. Neoliberal policies articulate the notion of free will and question the definition of freedom from a purely economic perspective. By further examining these nuances, the study hopes to reflect on the personal and societal political implications associated with neoliberalism's more limited understanding of self-government and voluntarism. Finally, an examination of balanced perspectives can add to the ongoing discussion on how best to organize social policies that maximize individual dignity and collective well-being in the long run at in a constructive manner.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Hayek, Friedman, Cultural Evolution Theory, Individualism, Freedom.

Öz

Neoliberalizmin bireyciliğe ve özgürlüğe yaklaşımı çelişkiler içermektedir. Bir yandan metodolojik bireycilik ve piyasa ekonomisinde bireye verilen önemi vurgulanırken diğer yandan, bireyin sosyal süreçlere bağımlılığı ve piyasa kurallarına uyma zorunluluğu öne sürülmektedir. Bireyin özgürlüğü ve hedef belirleme yetisi yalnızca piyasa alanıyla sınırlandırılmaktadır. Piyasa tarihsel ve evrimsel süreçlerle belirlenen doğal bir düzen olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Hayek'e göre bireyciliğin anlamı, bireyin sosyal evrime uyum sağlaması ve toplumsal süreçlere boyun eğmesidir. Bu anlamda çalışma, neoliberalizmin bireyselliğe ve özgürlüğe bakış açısındaki çelişki ve sınırlamaları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Hayek ve Friedman'ın eserlerinin içerik analiziyle neoliberal birey kavramı tartışılmakta, bireysel özgürlüğün ekonomik özgürlükle sınırlı yorumu eleştirilmektedir. Araştırma, neoliberalizmin dar anlamdaki bireycilik ve özgürlük yaklaşımını ortaya çıkardığı bireysel, toplumsal ve siyasi sonuçlar açısından sorgulayarak tartışmayı, bu sayede ilgili literatüre katkı sunmayı ve ileriye yönelik çalışmalara ışık tutmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neoliberalizm, Hayek, Kültürel Evrim Teorisi, Friedman, Bireycilik, Özgürlük.

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1. Introduction

In Hayek's worldview, the free market system is the unchangeable natural condition of human life (Lovasz, 2023). This perspective is based not only on Hayek's ideas, but also on two key assumptions of neoliberalism:

First, it is an undeniable part of human nature that individuals seek to maximize the use of existing resources. According to this view, there is not enough for everyone, and due to the selfishness of human nature, people strive to maximize all resources (Friedman, 2016). In the past, people fought over food, shelter, etc., but today this struggle for survival extends to life and relationships. Being human in the world has always meant competing with other humans.

Second, according to Hayek, the market is the appropriate institution for this presumed human nature (Garlick, 2023; Hayek, 2020). In the past, general competition necessitated trade with other people. For example, those who had plenty of surplus food could exchange it for other goods. The free market emerged organically from this struggle of human interests against each other (Dean, 2023). This compromise simply reflects personal interest. Later, state-like institutions emerged to facilitate the functioning of the market.

Hayek and the neoliberal ideology view the state and societal intervention in the competition that arises in the market as acceptable only to the extent that it ensures the market's sustainability. In other words, freedom is seen not as a political or social condition but rather as the situation of the individual vis-a-vis society (Hayek, 1944a). In this regard this study aims to critically examine the implications of this neoliberal understanding from individual, societal and political perspectives. The first chapter will outline the conceptual and theoretical framework. Then the research method will be explained. The third chapter will analyze how individualism and the concept of freedom emerged in Hayek and Friedman's works. The fourth chapter will open these neoliberal ideas to discussion. The study will conclude with discussion and conclusion.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a concept that emerged in political studies in the 1930s that envisions a radical shift in the understanding of public administration (Harvey, 2005) and is based on theories of individualism, freedom, and the market economy (Foucault, 2008). Unlike previous liberal traditions, neoliberalism does not advocate an economic system based entirely on free markets. Instead, it recommends that the state play a regulatory and supervisory role in the marketplace (Hayek, 1944b). Neoliberalism, introduced by thinkers such as Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman, has also gained political momentum under the leadership of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

The oil crisis of the 1970s and the subsequent economic difficulties that followed laid the groundwork for the rise of neoliberal doctrine (Klein, 2007). The collapse of Keynesian economics and the resulting increase in unemployment and inflation allowed the Reagan-

Thatcher policies to be used as a pretext (Stiglitz, 2008). Neoliberal politics have since become widespread and have maintained their dominance to the present day.

Among the core policies of neoliberalism are the restriction of the state's role, privatizations, the liberalization of markets, globalization, and free trade (Williamson, 1990). However, the assumption that savings on social policies, the restriction of workers' rights, and wealth accumulation can only be achieved through markets are also integral parts of the neoliberal ideology (Wacquant, 2012).

Alongside the process of neoliberal globalization, nation-states have weakened, while the influence of international institutions and multinational corporations has increased. Nevertheless, the 2008 crisis and the subsequent deepening of economic inequalities have also triggered criticisms of the neoliberal system.

2.2. Friedrich August von Hayek

Friedrich August von Hayek (1899-1992), an Austrian-British economist, philosopher, and social scientist, was a leading figure in the Austrian school of economics and an influential thinker in classical liberalism. In 1974, he received the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, shared with Swedish socialist economist Gunnar Myrdal.

Hayek was a strong advocate of individualism, free markets and a vigorous critic of socialism and interventionist economic policies. His major works explored these ideas and critically examined collectivist philosophies. In his 1944 published book *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek argued that centralized economic planning could enable authoritarianism and totalitarianism by concentrating too much power in the government. Another significant work, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* from 1952, analyzed deficiencies in applying scientific methods to study societies, which Hayek saw as complex systems resulting from independent human actions and interactions. His multi-volume *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, published consecutively in 1973, 1976 and 1979, further developed his perspectives on the evolution of societies, social justice, and limiting state authority constitutionally.

He also believed that basic values like private property, treaty and loyalty allow free societies to prosper in a spontaneous order, not through deliberate social engineering. He taught economics and related issues at the London School of Economics, University of Chicago and University of Freiburg. His most known book *The Constitution of Liberty*, published in 1962, framed personal freedom and a competitive free market based on supply and demand as mutually reinforcing.

He rejected the idea of distribution based on a sense of justice. He argued that actions based on consensus through voluntary agreements provided the only legitimate basis for justice in a free society. While individual liberty was important, the social order also sought to conform to moral principles governing the exercise of freedom and to conform to legal norms recognized by all citizens. For Hayek, democracy served freedom, not the other way around.

2.3. Milton Friedman

Milton Friedman, one of the most influential economists of the 20th century and a leading advocate of free market ideas, was born in 1912 in New York City to immigrant Jewish parents. He got his bachelor's degree from Rutgers University at age 20, and later acquire his master's from the University of Chicago in 1933 and PhD from Columbia University in 1946.

In 1951, he received the prestigious John Bates Clark Medal for economists under 40 for his outstanding contributions. Awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in 1976, Friedman was recognized for his contributions to consumption analysis, monetary history and theory, as well as stabilization policy. Serving as an economic advisor to President Nixon, Friedman also led the American Economic Association during his outstanding career.

Being retired from the University of Chicago in 1977, Friedman joined the Hoover Institution at Stanford University as a senior fellow. One of his early famous works was *Income from Independent Professional Practice* co-authored in 1945, which argued that licensing restrictions inflated doctors' fees.

Friedman's book "A Theory of the Consumption Function" written in 1957 challenged the predominant Keynesian view of consumption. He introduced the concept of "permanent income" to show that spending is based on long-term rather than current earnings. His 1960 work *Capitalism and Freedom* made a case for freer markets and influential ideas to a broad audience.

He is best known for awakening the quantity theory of money, defying Keynesian orthodoxy. He presented evidence that inflation depends on money supply growth, not economic output. His 1963 co-authored book *Monetary History of the United States* disputed that Fed policy exacerbated the Great Depression.

His arguments against long-run Phillips Curve trade-offs between unemployment and inflation gained acceptance as stagflation emerged in the 1970s. His ideas of monetarism and free markets had widespread impact among economists and the general public. Friedman remains one of the most important economists in shaping modern economic thought.

2.4. Cultural Evolution Theory

According to Hayek, natural selection acts according to the order of the group during the process of cultural evolution. Selection indirectly influences traits that may be acquired since group members' adherence to the rules somewhat determines the order. It should be emphasized that Hayek occasionally suggested that imitation, as opposed to natural selection, is the process by which cultures evolve.

The mechanism of imitation states that people from less affluent organizations either choose to become members of more affluent groups or follow their laws and traditions (Hayek, 1979, p.159; see also Vanberg, 1986, p. 85). Some observers have inferred that Hayek's theory of cultural evolution mostly depends on imitation as a result of these comments (Tomlinson, 1990, p. 48). But Hayek was very clear in saying that the most significant mechanism of cultural progress, in his opinion, is group selection. According to him, group selection is the only basis for cultural change (Hayek, 1984, p. 318; see also Hayek, 1979, p. 202). Hayek

continued by characterizing developed laws and orders as "efficient," "beneficial," and "advantageous," since groups survive and flourish because of differential advantages.

According to Hayek (1967, p. 77), for instance, "we are bound to explain the fact that the elements behave in a certain way by the circumstance that this sort of conduct is most likely to preserve the whole." He went on to say that when talking about spontaneous social organizations, the term "function" is essential (Hayek, 1973, p. 28) and that a spontaneous order "will always constitute an adaptation" (Hayek, 1973, p. 44).

He made the following argument in a later work: "The constructivist [socialist] outlook that dominates our time refuses to acknowledge is the truth that the inherited traditional rules should often be most beneficial to the functioning of society." (Hayek, 1979, p. 162). Adaptive and functional, as well as useful, efficient, and beneficial, are characteristics of evolved laws.

The evolution of the free market and its guiding principles are explained by the idea of cultural evolution. To put it succinctly, in the struggle for survival, those that followed the rules—respecting private property, for example—had an edge over those who did not. Moreover, the idea that the free market order is an adaptation clarifies why it functions so effectively and rejects the socialists' desire to replace it with an artificial order (Hayek, 1988, p. 6).

In his final publication, he stated that "civilization depends on these things for both its origin and its preservation." (Hayek, 1988, p.6). Hayek saw that group selection was losing its traction among biologists by the late 1970s. "Although the conception of group selection may now not appear as important as it had been thought after its introduction, there can be no doubt that it is of the greatest importance for cultural evolution," he wrote, maintaining that his theory of cultural evolution was still sound." (Hayek, 1979, p.202).

2.5. Individualism

In this section, historical development of Individualism and its reflection in Neoliberalism will be tried to be revealed.

According to Lukes (1995), individualism has been conceptually used since the 9th century, and has since become associated with various thoughts, lifestyles and beliefs. It refers broadly to defending individuals against society by freeing individual freedoms, beliefs and preferences from social control, and prioritizing uniqueness, entrepreneurship and economic independence over social solidarity. Individualism has also viewed society as a tool for individual interests instead of ensuring everyone's well-being or self-sufficiency. Foucault (2007) recognized three historical types of individualism based on philosophical accumulation: The first values individuals' uniqueness and independence from groups; the second emphasizes private life and property; and the third focuses on self-transformation, purification and development by regarding the self as an object of knowledge.

Over time, these different meanings of individualism began to lose significance and the concept became primarily associated with liberalism. Liberalism, according to Smith (1968), is a political system aimed at achieving individual freedoms, where developing and safeguarding individual liberties takes precedence over other aims. Liberals argue that the value of the individual is a higher priority than vague constructs like society and nation, and that the

individual comes before broader society (Ryan, 2017; Baier, 1988). Within liberalism, it is claimed that the individual cannot be reduced to a mere tool in pursuit of common goals, overall welfare, or public interest.

Liberalism's understanding of freedom entails defending everyone's right to express thoughts and beliefs freely, while also accepting tolerance for others and differences. Liberals argue ethically that there cannot be an objective singular view of what constitutes 'good' as each individual defines good for themselves (Üskül, 2003). Regarding negative and positive concepts of freedom, classical liberals favor negative freedom, which refers to freedom from interference (Filip, 2020). Any prevention of an individual achieving their goals due to external interventions, not internal limitations, violates freedom. Liberals hold that the state's duty is to legislate and enforce laws protecting freedoms and ensuring free market functioning (Haar, 2009; Yayla, 2012). Finally, liberalism asserts that when individuals pursue their self-interest freely in markets through work and competition, each person can be self-sufficient and overall welfare increases, assuming all have equal opportunity to participate as buyers, sellers or economic agents (Örs, 2015).

While neoliberalism refers to the principles of liberalism, it aims to have a broader and different impact. Emerging in the 1970s in the US and UK and later elsewhere, neoliberalism promotes expanding free markets and accumulation globally (Chandrasekhar, 2011). It sees the state's role as stimulating competition and private initiatives (Olssen, Codd & O'neil, 2004). Neoliberalism transforms not just old institutions but habits, perceptions and social relations and reconstructing them according to market functioning (Harvey, 2015). It influences ways of living, thinking and feeling to establish a "norm of life" where individuals design themselves as companies, shaping relationships accordingly (Dardot & Laval, 2012). Competitiveness encompasses all aspects of individual life, with successes attributed to entrepreneurship and failures to lack of self-investment (Harvey, 2015). Entrepreneurs use their potential and information commercially (Dardot & Laval, 2012). Thus, neoliberalism internalizes market logic more comprehensively than liberalism.

In the neoliberal social order, social relationships, in addition to economic ones, are based on flexible short-term contracts, causing individual relationships like marriages, friendships, and work life to become subject to constant change. As long-term planning and foresight lose significance, uncertainties become determining factors of life. This situation reveals an individualizing power that leads to the disappearance of thoughts and preferences such as partnership, togetherness, and solidarity (Bauman, 2011). Additionally, the lifestyle described by Sennett (2014) with the phrase "No Long Term" erodes feelings of security and loyalty in family and work environments through short-term thinking, ultimately eliminating solidarity behaviors.

In neoliberalism, the role of consumerism in socializing people is emphasized to enable the continuous growth of the economy, according to Bauman (2011). Consumption is portrayed as essential to well-being and existence. The past focus on equality loses importance, replaced by quantitatively boosting happiness levels. It is accepted that all individuals are freely and equally able to pursue happiness through consumption (Baudrillard, 2010). However, the stress on individual freedoms proves deceptive, as individual behaviors and interests are aimed at

conforming to markets and producer profit motives. The feeling of freedom is confined only to satisfaction from consumption choices (Baudrillard, 2010). Thus, while emphasizing personal liberties, neoliberalism ultimately subjugates individuals to adapting actions and desires to profit-making, limiting freedom to consumption experiences.

2.6. Freedom

The idea of freedom has been continuously examined and described over time in connection to evolving social, economic, and political situations (Berlin, 2013). In early periods, thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle mainly conceived of freedom as liberation from oppressive domination and unpredictable control by rulers (Aristotle, 1998; Plato, 2001). They believed true liberty could be found within well-structured societies and just systems of administration, rather than as an unlimited individual right detached from communal ties and responsibilities (Ferdinand, 1887). Freedom to them existed in consideration of society rather than for oneself alone. Their views located freedom not through complete lack of governance, but within fair, rule-bound communities (Taylor, 1985).

During the Enlightenment period, philosophers such as John Locke advanced a perspective that located freedom more within the individual. For Locke, inherent liberties involving self-determination, personal security and material possessions belonged intrinsically to persons prior to entering communal organizations and systems of rule (Yücel, 2023; Van Staden, 2020). This shift towards a rights-based, self-possessed notion of liberty helped propel emergent frameworks of liberal democracy which enshrined civil protections and constrained the grasp of political authority. Constitutions began upholding self-definition and self-ownership as foremost, minimally checked by collective entities (Locke, 1980). Locke's thinking influenced subsequent frameworks that decentralized freedom's meaning away from networks of mutual responsibility and towards recognizable entitlements of the single, sovereign person.

In the 19th century, with the rise of capitalism and free market economies, freedom increasingly related to economic participation and transactional freedom. Economics like Adam Smith and proponents of laissez-faire economics saw markets as the way to maximum individual liberty and societal wealth (Smith, 2008). On the other hand, philosophers like Hegel warned that uncontrolled capitalism could undermine true freedom if individuals became enslaved to their bodily desires and addicted to consumerism (Hegel, 1991).

Into the 20th century, two strands different types of freedom emerged - negative and positive. Negative freedom involved freedom from constraints or interference from others or authorities (Berlin, 2002). Positive freedom referred to having adequate options, power, and resources to pursue meaningful self-determination (Gilbert, 2020). These ideas influenced debates around welfare states, redistribution, and collective duties and rights.

Neoliberalism, arising in the late 20th century, adopted a primarily negative conceptualization of freedom closely tied to economic participation. For neoliberals like Hayek and Friedman, maximum individual liberty could only exist in free markets with minimal government intervention (Hayek, 2014; Friedman, 1953). Freedom equaled ability to participate freely in commercial exchanges without obstacles.

However, critics argue the neoliberal framing overlooks how choices and autonomy are shaped by non-political forces like social conditions, lack of alternatives, and economic compulsions like debt and precarity (Bauman, 2013; Harvey, 2007). True freedom may require more positive enablements to cushion individuals from forces that limit meaningful choice and self-determination (Sen, 2001). The neoliberal understanding of freedom remains a contested concept with ongoing debates around its implications (Stilwell, 2012).

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretive phenomenological approach to explore the conceptions of individualism and freedom within the neoliberal understanding. Phenomenology, as a research methodology, is well-suited to investigating the lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on the philosophical writings of prominent neoliberal thinkers, this study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how they conceptualized and experienced the notions of individualism and liberty.

The primary data sources for this study were the seminal works of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, two of the most influential figures in the development of neoliberal theory. A thorough document analysis was conducted, during which the researchers closely examined these theorists' key texts to identify and interpret their perspectives on the relationship between individualism and freedom. This approach aligns with the phenomenological emphasis on the detailed exploration of textual data to uncover the essential meanings and nuances embedded within (van Manen, 2016).

The data analysis process followed the iterative steps of phenomenological inquiry, involving the careful reading and re-reading of the source materials, the identification of significant statements, the formulation of meaning units, and the synthesis of these elements into overarching themes (Moustakas, 1994). This systematic, interpretive approach enabled the researchers to capture the complexity and contextual richness of the neoliberal conceptualization of individualism and freedom, as articulated by Hayek and Friedman.

Throughout the data analysis and interpretation, the researchers remained cognizant of their own preconceptions and biases, engaging in ongoing reflexivity to ensure that the findings were grounded in the perspectives of the neoliberal theorists themselves, rather than being unduly influenced by the researchers' own assumptions (Finlay, 2008). This commitment to reflexivity and the phenomenological tradition of "bracketing" one's preconceptions strengthened the trustworthiness and credibility of the study's findings.

By employing a phenomenological methodology, this study provides a nuanced, in-depth examination of the neoliberal understanding of the relationship between individualism and freedom, as expressed through the seminal works of two of its most prominent architects. The findings contribute to the broader scholarly discourse on the philosophical underpinnings of neoliberalism and its implications for individual liberty and social organization.

4. Findings

4.1. The Understanding of individualism and freedom by Friedrich von Hayek

Throughout his different works, Hayek presents a comprehensive understanding of individualism as a foundational principle for a free and prosperous society. By examining some of his key ideas and examples from his works, we can gain insight into Hayek's perspective on individualism and freedom.

Hayek argued that individualism is not merely a political or economic doctrine, but a fundamental aspect of human nature.

“What individualism teaches us is that society is greater than the individual only in so far as it is free. In so far as it is controlled or directed, it is limited to the powers of the individual minds which control or direct it” (Hayek, 1980).

In his book "The Constitution of Liberty," Hayek emphasizes that individualism recognizes and respects the unique and diverse knowledge and preferences of individuals. He contends that individuals possess implicit knowledge, which is contextual and difficult to articulate, making centralized decision-making inefficient. According to Hayek, individualism allows for decentralized decision-making based on this dispersed knowledge, leading to better outcomes and a more adaptable society.

“We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage... Unless we can make the philosophic foundations of a free society once more a living intellectual issue, and its implementation a task which challenges the ingenuity and imagination of our liveliest minds, the prospects of freedom are indeed dark. But if we can regain that belief in the power of ideas which was the mark of liberalism at its best, the battle is not lost” (Hayek, 1949).

One example of Hayek's emphasis on individualism is his critique of central planning. In his book "The Road to Serfdom," he argues that central planning inherently limits individual freedom and stifles the dynamic and spontaneous order of a free society (Hayek, 1944a). Hayek contends that the complexity of the market, with its countless interactions and feedback mechanisms, cannot be effectively replicated by central authorities. He warns that attempts to impose a planned economy lead to unintended consequences and the erosion of individual liberty.

“What is called economic power, while it can be an instrument of coercion, is in the hands of private individuals never exclusive or complete power, never power over the whole life of a person. But centralised as an instrument of political power it creates a degree of dependence scarcely distinguishable from slavery” (Hayek, 2001).

Hayek also explores the concept of freedom in his works, particularly in "The Constitution of Liberty" and "Law, Legislation and Liberty." He distinguishes between two types of freedom: a negative conception of freedom as the absence of coercion or interference, and a positive conception of freedom as the ability to pursue one's own goals and aspirations.

"Freedom in this sense is, of course, not the absence of any coercion or constraint, nor the absence of any burden or cost in doing what we want. It means rather that coercion is limited to prevent interference with what each individual person regards as his good or his duty" (Hayek, 1960a).

According to Hayek, negative freedom is crucial for individual autonomy and the prevention of coercion by others or the state. He argues that a free society should be built on a legal framework that protects individuals from arbitrary power and ensures equal treatment under the law (Hayek, 1960b). Hayek's concept of negative freedom aligns closely with the classical liberal tradition. However, Hayek also acknowledges the importance of positive freedom. He argues that a truly free society must provide individuals with the means and opportunities to exercise their freedom effectively. This requires an institutional framework that allows for social cooperation, voluntary exchange, and the accumulation of wealth. Hayek contends that a dynamic market economy, with its mechanisms of competition and innovation, is the most effective way to create the conditions for positive freedom (Hayek, 1960c).

Central to the defense of individuality and freedom is his belief that it promotes human development and prosperity. He argues that individualism can recognize and exploit dispersed knowledge, encourages voluntary cooperation, and enables individuals to pursue their goals and aspirations. Hayek's ideas had a profound impact on political and economic discourse so, it shaped individualism and the understanding of liberty in liberal libertarian thought.

Friedrich von Hayek's understanding of individuality and freedom focuses on the recognition of individual knowledge and unique preferences. He argues that individualism coupled with a legal system that protects negative freedoms leads to a prosperous and adaptable society (Hayek, 1960d). Furthermore, Hayek acknowledges the importance of positive autonomy, which requires the creation of conditions that enable individuals to pursue their goals and aspirations (Hayek, 1960e). Through his works, Hayek offers a strong defense of individuality and freedom as basic elements of human development and social well-being.

4.2. The Understanding of individualism and freedom by Milton Friedman

Individualism and Freedom are the most fundamental positions that Milton Friedman deals with in his works. He consistently argued for limited government intervention, economic freedom, negative freedom, and individual responsibility.

In his work "Capitalism and Freedom," economist Milton Friedman emphasizes the role of the state as an instrument that assists citizens in achieving their personal objectives. However, he argues that the state should not be seen as a provider of favors or handouts. Instead, Friedman places the individual, or the human being, at the center of his arguments. He asserts that the market serves as the primary mechanism for realizing personal freedom.

"Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself".

..... "It is this feature of the market that we refer to when we say that the market provides economic freedom. But this characteristic also has implications that go far beyond the narrowly economic. Political freedom means the absence of coercion of a man by his fellow men. The fundamental threat to freedom is power

to coerce, be it in the hands of a monarch, a dictator, an oligarchy, or a momentary majority. The preservation of freedom requires the elimination of such concentration of power to the fullest possible extent and the dispersal and distribution of whatever power cannot be eliminated - a system of checks and balances” (Friedman, 1962a).

According to Friedman, it is essential for both personal growth and social progress. He believed that individuals should be free to seek their goals, make their own decisions, and face the consequences of their actions. Friedman emphasized negative autonomy, which means being free from undue coercion and constraints on personal choices and actions (Friedman, 1962b).

In his book "Capitalism and Freedom," Friedman made the case for minimal government intervention. He believed that excessive governmental power hindered individual freedom and economic growth. Instead, he advocated for a minimal government role, focusing on protecting individual rights, guaranteeing treaties, and maintaining the rule of law. Friedman argued that free markets, driven by competition and individual choice, are the most effective ways to allocate resources and promote economic prosperity.

“If they believe that the government can provide the service better than the market, they should favor a government concern to issue annuities in open competition with other concerns. If they are right, the government concern will prosper. If they are wrong, the welfare of the people will be advanced by having a private alternative” (Friedman, 1962c).

Friedman's understanding of freedom extended beyond economics. He emphasized the importance of civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, association, and religion. These freedoms, according to Friedman, are crucial for a vibrant and diverse society.

Friedman also stressed the concept of individual responsibility. He believed that individuals should be accountable for their actions and not rely solely on the government to solve all problems. Friedman promoted personal responsibility and self-reliance, arguing that they lead to individual growth, innovation, and overall societal well-being.

*What does it mean to say that government might have a responsibility?
Government can't have a responsibility any more than the business can. The only entities which can have responsibilities are people (Friedman, 1975).*

Throughout his career, Friedman applied his understanding of individualism and freedom to various policy areas. He advocated for free trade, deregulation, and lower taxes, as he believed they would unleash individual creativity and drive economic prosperity. Conversely, he criticized policies that he believed infringed upon individual freedom, such as excessive government spending and regulations.

“Two things seem clear. First, if the objective is to alleviate poverty, we should have a program directed at helping the poor. There is every reason to help the poor man who happens to be a farmer, not because he is a farmer but because he is poor” (Friedman, 1962d).

Friedman's ideas on individualism and freedom continue to have an important impact on economists, policymakers, and individuals worldwide. His writings, including "Capitalism and Freedom" and "Free to Choose," provide precise analyses and arguments supporting his understanding of these concepts. Milton Friedman's understanding of individualism and freedom centered around limited government intervention, economic freedom, negative freedom, and individual responsibility. He highlighted the importance of allowing individuals to pursue their own goals, make their own choices, and face the consequences. Friedman's ideas continue to shape discussions on the role of government and the significance of individual liberty in society.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Neoliberal theorists Hayek and Friedman offered an approach that placed the individual at the center and emphasized market regulation. Both thinkers see individuality as fundamentally human, and are strongly opposed to any limitation on individual freedom.

Hayek (1944) argues that dispersed and context-specific knowledge held by individuals cannot be effectively implemented by specialized systems. He therefore argues that a free market system is the best way to achieve social welfare. On the other hand, Friedman (2016) recommends reducing the role of the state and expects individuals to take responsibility for their actions. Both have a negative libertarianism, which focuses on protecting the individual from external interference. However, there are important critiques of the neoliberal understanding of individuality and freedom. These critiques emphasize the isolation of the individual from the social context, the neglect of other aspects of freedom beyond economic freedom, and the unthinkable limitations of structural forces on individual freedom.

Thinkers such as Bauman (2011) and Harvey (2007) argue that neoliberal perspectives disconnect the individual from social reality and ignore the socioeconomic and political circumstances that shape individual choices: factors such as economic needs, debt burdens, and lack of job security can inhibit individual "free" choice.

Sen (2001) emphasizes that the neoliberal concept of "negative freedom" does not give true freedom to the individual. He argues that individuals need "positive freedom," meaning real choice. This involves ensuring that individuals have access to basic social, economic and political resources.

Stillwell (2012) also argues that neoliberal understandings of freedom ignore values such as democracy, equality, and social justice. According to him, freedom cannot be limited to economic participation and property rights; It should also incorporate political, social and cultural dimensions. Considering these criticisms, it is clear that neoliberal notions of individuality and freedom have serious limitations. This approach alienates the individual from social reality, prioritizes economic autonomy, and ignores the individual's true autonomy.

True freedom should include a broader range of elements, such as individual autonomy, social equality, and democratic participation. The social, economic, and political conditions that shape individual choices must be taken into account, and policies that ensure the "positive freedom" of individuals should be developed. This can involve measures like the welfare state, improving income distribution, and expanding access to education and healthcare. Furthermore, the concept of freedom should be considered not only in its economic dimension but also in

terms of democratic participation, political representation, cultural diversity, and social justice. This can contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of freedom that better supports the well-being of both the individual and society.

In conclusion, the limitations of the neoliberal concept of individualism and freedom should be recognized, and there is a need to reconceptualize the individual within their social context, encompassing various dimensions of freedom. This can lead to the development of more holistic and equitable policies that enhance the well-being of both the individual and the society.

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