

VOLUMEN 18 • NÚMERO 34

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REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA

VARIA

¿Es adecuado el rawlseanismo para plantear los fundamentos constitucionales anti-discriminación?, Enrique Camacho-Beltrán

Hayek and the concept of freedom: a summary, Facundo Guadagno
Apuntes sobre el concepto de resistencia a la luz de los casos CRAC-PC y EZLN,
Hugo Martínez García

Sobre el estatus moral de la mujer en Kant: una lectura desde el carácter moral,
Luis Moises López-Flores

DOSSIER: ÉTICA AMBIENTAL Y ANIMAL

Introducción de los editores, Victor Hugo Salazar Ortiz y Daniel Oviedo Sotelo
Carencia social de una ética animal: la educación oculta, Elba Castro Rosales y
Javier Reyes Ruiz

Biopolítica, necropolítica, zootecnia y domexecración: el poder de la muerte,
Esther Adriana Arvizu Ruiz

Ecologismo y animalismo. De la tensión entre espectros ético-políticos al
entrecruzamiento de enfoques críticos, Ernesto Cabrera García

Kangaroos and Dragons: how much is a species worth?, Luis David Reyez
Sáenz

La animalidad en el pensamiento de Nick Land o la línea de fuga hacia lo
desconocido, Camilo Andrés Vargas Guevara

Ensayo animal, Rodolfo Bernal Escalante

Ser responsable por la naturaleza según Hans Jonas: el futuro de la humanidad
inseparable de la preservación de la naturaleza, Ericbert Tambou

Kamgue

Máximas éticas frente al desplazamiento y la inmovilidad climáticos, Bernardo
Bolaños Guerra

TRADUCCIÓN

Malcolm, Norman. "La concebibilidad del mecanismo", Marc Jiménez-Rolland



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Hayek and the concept of freedom: a summary

Hayek y el concepto de libertad: un resumen

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Resumen

Este artículo examina el concepto crucial de libertad en la vasta obra de Friedrich Hayek, que sirve como base para sus teorías políticas, económicas y científicas. La noción de libertad de Hayek es multifacética, abarcando la libertad política como la ausencia de coerción arbitraria, la libertad económica como el uso eficaz del conocimiento disperso a través de mecanismos de mercado, y la libertad científica como el reconocimiento del conocimiento subjetivo y los límites de la planificación centralizada. El estudio se divide en tres secciones: una introducción, un análisis detallado de la libertad en las obras de Hayek y una conclusión. Al analizar textos clave como *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948), *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1978), y *The Fatal Conceit* (1991), el artículo destaca la preferencia de Hayek por órdenes espontáneas en lugar de

construidas, su crítica a la centralización y su defensa del estado de derecho como esencial para la libertad individual y el progreso social. En última instancia, el análisis integral de Hayek subraya el papel crucial de la libertad en la promoción de una sociedad libre y próspera, enfatizando la superioridad de los procesos descentralizados y los mecanismos de mercado en la promoción del progreso social y la innovación.

Palabras clave: libertad, filosofía, epistemología, liberalismo.

Abstract

This paper examines the pivotal concept of freedom in Friedrich Hayek's extensive work, which is the foundation for his political, economic, and scientific theories. Hayek's notion of freedom is multifaceted, encompassing political freedom as the absence of arbitrary coercion, economic freedom as the effective use of dispersed knowledge through market mechanisms, and scientific freedom as the recognition of subjective knowledge and the limits of central planning. The study is divided into three sections: an introduction, a detailed analysis of freedom in Hayek's works, and a conclusion. By analysing key texts such as *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948), *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1978), and *The Fatal Conceit* (1991), the paper highlights Hayek's preference for spontaneous orders over constructed ones, his critique of centralisation, and his advocacy for the rule of law as essential for individual liberty and societal progress. Ultimately, Hayek's comprehensive analysis underscores the critical role of freedom in fostering a free and prosperous society, emphasising the superiority of decentralised processes and market mechanisms in promoting social progress and innovation.

Key words: freedom, philosophy, epistemology, liberalism.

1. Introduction

The meaning of freedom in Friedrich Hayek's thinking is pivotal. Since the author's works are too many to develop each one particularly, this paper aims to summarise the idea of freedom in Hayek, which is the backbone of his writings entirely. From the mere notion of freedom, Hayek takes three different approaches: political, economic, and scientific. While each shares some common properties, significant differences complicate this author's ideas.

This work is divided into three parts: an introduction, an explanation of the meaning of freedom, and a conclusion. The second section is divided into three areas encompassing the political, economic, and scientific use of Hayek's freedom throughout his works. These labels are not separated areas; they will be in constant relation. The selected bibliography is *The Road to Serfdom* (2001), *Individualism and Economic Order* (1948), *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), *Law Legislation and Liberty* (1982), and *The Fatal Conceit* (2011).

To understand what freedom means, avoiding semantic vagueness and defining what the author is saying in every category is necessary to determine their basic properties. Under political freedom is understood: (i) absence of arbitrary coercion, (ii) bottom-up knowledge that is (iii) dispersed and evolved by (iv) unplanned actions. Economic freedom is given in a scenario of imperfect knowledge, and it consists of (i) dispersed knowledge and (ii) individuals who learn under trial and error, which sets (iii) traditions and values. Finally, scientific freedom is (i) different from natural sciences, (ii) subjective, (iii) and open to refutation – in a Popperian sense.

First, and as the minimum unity of analysis, we must understand what freedom means for Hayek if every concept derives from it. The author refers to freedom as: “The state in which a man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others” (Hayek, 2011: 58). This is more than important because, otherwise, it will not be understood that from this minimal action derives the others; therefore, claims such as Hoy (1984), stating that there is no precise semantic coercion in Hayek’s is not correct because it can vary in degrees or acts (Hayek, 2011: 214). It has to be arbitrary because, under common law, the author allows some restrictions; therefore, we have to stay with the original definition. With that definition settled, moving on to different concepts is possible.

Methodologically, this article aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of how Friedrich Hayek employs the concept of freedom within three fundamental dimensions of his works: economic, political, and scientific freedom. To achieve this objective, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the original texts authored by Hayek, carefully exploring the nuances and implications of his arguments. By systematically dissecting each of these key areas, I seek to illuminate the interconnectedness of his ideas and the broader significance of freedom in Hayek’s overall philosophical framework.

This article holds significant relevance in contemporary public discourse. In recent times, we have seen the emergence of far-right governments, notably Javier Milei’s administration in Argentina, which draws heavily on the economic philosophies of Friedrich Hayek. However, the influence of Hayek’s ideas extends beyond mere economic theory; it offers a comprehensive

framework for understanding life and the mechanisms through which society sustains and perpetuates itself. This perspective encompasses not only economic policies but also social values and governance structures, highlighting the profound impact of Hayekian thought on the political landscape and the ways in which societies shape their identities and futures.

2. Political Freedom

It is given in a common law society because, under Hayek's understanding, they are conceived organically, evolving through judges over time, reflecting people's customs and practices, based on case-by-case judgments and local knowledge, and better utilising dispersed information (Posner, 2005). According to Hayek, there is only one way of accepting coercion: by the existence of a constitution (Hayek, 1982: 105) because that is an institutional set that allows the trial and error of actions and ideas in a society. In that sense, the author avoids semantic vagueness using two different terms: *cosmos* and *taxis* (1982: 35). *Cosmos* is a spontaneous order that emerges naturally and evolves without a central direction. It is an organic, self-regulating system, where the resulting structure is complex and adaptive, often more sophisticated than any designed system, and some examples of that are language, common law, and market economies. These systems develop over time through human action but not human design.

On the contrary, *taxis* refers to a constructed order that is deliberately organised and controlled. It is an artificial, planned system where the order results from deliberate planning and

organisation by a central authority or a group of individuals; the structure is often simpler and less adaptive than spontaneous orders, as it relies on the knowledge and foresight of the planners. Examples of these organisations are bureaucracies, corporations, and government programs. These systems are intentionally created to achieve specific goals.

Hayek favoured spontaneous orders (*cosmos*) over constructed orders (*taxis*) because he believed that spontaneous orders effectively utilised dispersed knowledge within society. He argued that no central authority could possess the necessary information to design a complex system that could rival the efficiency and adaptability of a spontaneously formed order (Moroni, 2018). There are advanced and backward societies, which would refer to the Western tradition. Classical Greece, Renaissance, France, Germany, and Great Britain (Hayek, 2011: 50). This connects Hayek's to classical liberalism (Bohórquez, 2023).

Hayek differentiates between two categories of orders. Spontaneous Orders (Cosmos) emerge naturally from individuals interacting freely within society without any intentional design. Examples include language, customs, and markets. Constructed Orders (Taxis) are systems intentionally established by a central authority for a specific objective, such as laws created by a government or a hierarchically structured organisation. Hayek believes that spontaneous orders are preferable because they can harness dispersed knowledge. This concept refers to the idea that the information necessary for societal decision-making is spread across millions of individuals, each with unique and limited insight into their own situations. The market is the most prominent example of spontaneous order in Hayek's philosophy. Prices are

set by supply and demand, mirroring the dispersed knowledge of millions, without necessitating a central authority to determine what to produce, how much to create, or at what price.

There is, however, another clarification of concepts, and that is coercion: “We mean such control of the environment or circumstances of a person by another that, in order to avoid greater evil, he is forced to act not according to a coherent plan of his own but to serve the ends of another” (Hayek, 2011: 71). The benefit of freedom is adaptation, which creates unplanned novelties, such as new patterns for coordinating individual efforts and resource use, which are temporary and influenced by the conditions at hand (Hayek, 2011: 84). In every period, the individual is in relation with others, not isolated (Hayek, 2011: 75).

The Road to Serfdom's (2014) central thesis is that any form of centralisation will emerge into totalitarianism, which even considers the welfare state. That statement is unrealistic: welfare states did not become totalitarian. However, we have to consider the context of the writing. In the preface, the author warns that this “is a political book” (Hayek, 2014: vii), so there is no confusion with sophisticated philosophy; therefore, it is fair to say that this is a work written under the stress and pressures of the Second World War. The role of the state can be seen in *The Constitution of Liberty* as predictable rules by common law (Hayek, 2011: 123) and a rather vague: “security against severe physical privation, the assurance of a given minimum of sustenance for all” (Hayek, 2011: 376). There is more in *Road To Serfdom*: the author considers that according to our current wealth, it is possible to ensure food, shelter, and clothing to preserve work capacity (2014: 124-125). Hayek even advocates for unemployment transfers (2014: 125).

The author believes this method indicates coercion and planning but is “in the good sense” (2014: 125).

The predictions made by Friedrich Hayek regarding the relationship between welfare states and totalitarianism turned out to be incorrect; he posited that the absence of a welfare state would inevitably lead to totalitarian governance. However, it is crucial to interpret his views on totalitarianism within a hermeneutical framework. For Hayek, totalitarianism extended beyond the mere idea of a government controlling society through a centralised authority. Instead, he argued that totalitarianism could also manifest in how a state intrudes into the personal aspects of individuals' lives, particularly concerning their business dealings and economic activities. This perspective emphasises how state regulation can extend into various facets of daily life, shaping individual choices and behaviours through legislative measures. Hence, Hayek's definition of totalitarianism invites a deeper consideration of the state's influence in overt governance and subtler, more pervasive forms of control over personal liberties and market dynamics.

According to Hayek, democracy is the acceptance of the preferences or wisdom of the majority (2011: 175), which is not good since it is impossible to attain all of the individuals' dispersed preferences in the representation of a mere part of them. On the contrary, for the author, the essential engine for a society to develop is the few to convince the majority (Hayek, 2011: 176). Although these are core thoughts in *The Constitution of Liberty*, the reasoning is based on how impossible it is to embody individuality into some sort of collective action; these are reflections that Hayek leaves to the political philosopher because, in the end, democracy

is the best of the systems known at the time (Hayek, 2011: 183), even with the mentioned critiques.

How does a political order evolve, according to Hayek? Although the author does not advocate violence, there is a movement from tribal society to The Great Society. That is only by the price signal, private property, and law. Nevertheless, this applies to the Western tradition –a term previously clarified– but there is a vacuum about what happens in tribal societies that do not have a price system, private property, and law –in fact, common law. In that sense, one of Hayek's intellectual opponents, Karl Polanyi, was right: the market is an invention (Flip, 2012). It is clear that for Hayek, there is a passage from the tribal society to the open or Great Society. Still, besides the abovementioned properties, there is no sign of how this could happen in a tribal society without foreign intervention. The author clearly states that primitive and civilised man exists (Hayek, 2011: 79); some passages also have to exist, but they are never mentioned. We could make assumptions of what the author would have thought, but, in reality, this is a vacuum in the bibliography.

It is clear that Hayek has an individualistic methodology, but that is not to say that, as Galeotti (1987) states, he does not share a sense of community in his political theory. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek makes several claims about traditions and customs, which leads us to think that he considers society to be the aggregate of individuals that create this sort of shared culture. Even if the author is opposite to Émile Durkheim (Hayek, 1952: 187), he talks about the “social fact” without knowing it.

The British tradition against the French. Primitive society opposes civilised society in terms of dispersed knowledge to different degrees. Particularly, in primitive society, there is no

extensive order; on the contrary, it is a reduced group with limited complexity due to immediate survival issues (Hayek, 1991: 11). At the same time, there is no freedom in the sense of the extended order or Western civilisation; primitive societies are collectivists, not solitary, a fallacy Hayek attributes to Hobbes (Hayek, 1991: 12). The passing to an extensive order is due to the bourgeoisie's birth, which means that Italy, the Netherlands, and England were the birthplaces of our civilisation (Hayek, 1991).

Hayek's perspective on the evolution of political and legal systems underscores the importance of spontaneous orders, such as common law, in effectively utilising dispersed knowledge within society. He argues that these organic systems, which evolve through individual actions and local customs, are superior to constructed orders imposed by central authorities, which often lack the necessary information and adaptability.

Hayek emphasises the critical role of a constitution in legitimising coercion. It provides a framework for trial and error, allowing society to develop through a process of gradual adaptation. His distinction between *cosmos* (spontaneous order) and *taxis* (constructed order) highlights his preference for systems that evolve naturally and are more complex and sophisticated than those designed by planners.

He critiques centralisation and social engineering, exemplified by the ideas of Comte and Saint-Simon, for their failure to appreciate the complexity and spontaneity of social orders. According to Hayek, these ideas lead to totalitarian outcomes by ignoring the dispersed nature of knowledge and undermining individual freedom. Hayek's views on democracy and the state's role reflect his belief in the limitations of central planning and the need for a system that respects individual

preferences and market mechanisms. While he acknowledges the challenges and imperfections of democracy, he sees it as the best available system for promoting freedom and social progress.

Despite his individualistic methodology, Hayek recognises the significance of traditions and customs in shaping society, suggesting that he values a sense of community built on shared culture and social norms. His analysis of the transition from tribal to civilised societies underscores the importance of private property, law, and price signals in fostering the development of what he terms the Great Society. Overall, Hayek's work highlights the essential role of spontaneous orders in achieving a free and prosperous society, advocating for systems that allow for the natural evolution of knowledge and social institutions through decentralised processes rather than centralised control.

3. Economic Freedom

For Hayek, the economic order is *catallactics*, a term coined by his master, Von Mises (1949). Nevertheless, this notion implies that the market is not perfect and is organised in an impersonal matter, and no central planning or omniscient mind can purposely impose an order (Hayek, 1991: 92). The market, in this case, is perfect by being imperfect, contrary to the notion that it has to be in equilibrium (Hayek, 1948: 46): understanding this is essential to comprehend Hayek's theory of capital (1941), which refers to the length and complexity of production stages, emphasising the importance of understanding capital as a dynamic, interconnected system rather than a static, homogeneous quantity. However, for

this to be possible, a cosmos organization supported by the rule of law is necessary (Hayek, 1982: 36).

Therefore, according to Hayek, society operates within a set of rules impersonal to the individual and based on tacit knowledge or tradition. This dynamic process constantly changes and allocates resources regarding how demand can be satisfied, not necessarily by merit but because of these market forces. This is why the author considers social justice a mirage: the market is not just or unjust; it is what it is (Hayek, 1982: 102). Nevertheless, there is always a spectrum of individuals who cannot assure a living. Hayek explicitly says that, within a free society, there must be a safety net, a minimum income for those who did not do well in the market, and that should not be a reason to interfere with the Rule of Law or *cosmos* (Hayek, 1982: 87). The government must also provide sanitation and roads (Hayek, 2011: 209).

In one of his most renowned works, Hayek (2013) established that knowledge is dispersed in society; therefore, it is impossible to centralise it. Considering that this knowledge is subjective, such as social facts for Hayek (1943), then the value in economics is always subjective because it is relative to the specific needs of the individual. This is part of a market process that consists of discovering, trial and error, and impersonal relationships that are outside the individual and where he can only allocate his resources the best way possible according to his needs and preferences, which are not perfect and, in essence, they are signals of information that allow a market to function.

Individuals can make informed decisions based on their localised knowledge through the price mechanism. This decentralised decision-making process leads to a more efficient allocation of resources than central planning. Each person's

actions, guided by price signals, contribute to overall economic order and coordination. Hayek described this as a spontaneous order, where complex and efficient outcomes emerge without any central direction (Hayek, 1982: 36-37). The knowledge problem also highlights the importance of innovation and adaptation in a free market. Since individuals constantly experiment and discover new ways to improve processes, products, and services, a decentralised system allows for rapid adaptation to changing circumstances. Entrepreneurs and businesses respond to price signals, consumer preferences, and technological advancements, driving progress and innovation. In contrast, central planning stifles this dynamism by imposing rigid structures and stifling individual initiative.

Hayek's insights into the knowledge problem have significant implications for economic policy. They suggest that attempts to plan and control an economy centrally are inherently flawed and likely to result in inefficiencies and failures. Instead, policies should create an environment where free markets can operate, allowing prices to reflect true supply and demand conditions and enabling individuals to use their dispersed knowledge effectively.

The Rule of Law is directly related to economic freedom. According to Hayek, a vital benefit of the rule of law is creating a predictable environment. When individuals know that laws are stable, transparent, and consistently enforced, they can confidently make long-term plans and investments (Dietze, 2013). This predictability reduces uncertainty and risk, encouraging economic activity and fostering social cooperation. The rule of law facilitates the coordination of activities in a society. Individuals and businesses can plan and coordinate their actions more effectively

by providing a clear and stable set of rules. This coordination is essential for complex economic systems where numerous agents interact and depend on each other's decisions. For instance, entrepreneurs can invest in new ventures knowing that their property rights will be protected and that contracts will be enforced.

Hayek believed that the rule of law is fundamental to protecting individual freedom. Arbitrary or discretionary power by authorities undermines personal liberty. By ensuring that everyone, including government officials, is subject to the same laws, the rule of law limits the potential for abuse of power and preserves individual rights. This protection is crucial for maintaining a free society where individuals can pursue their goals and aspirations without undue interference. The rule of law contributes to both economic and social order. Economically, it provides the legal certainty necessary for markets to function efficiently. Businesses and consumers can engage in transactions, sign contracts, and invest in future projects with the assurance that their rights will be respected. Socially, the rule of law promotes justice and fairness, reducing conflicts and fostering cooperation among members of society.

4. Scientific Freedom

Science is essential regarding freedom in Hayek because, according to him, there is a misconception about the role of science that is confused with the very different one of "scientistic," which supposedly knows the human subject and can predict its behaviour as if was in the mind of an engineer (Hayek, 1952: 16).

The gnoseology behind Hayek is individual subjectivism, based on his subjective theory of value, the dispersed nature of knowledge, limits of centralised planning, spontaneous order, and the recognition of human limits in science (Caldwell, 2019). In other terms, when we talk about science, according to Hayek, it is not accurate to think of something rational or irrational because the issue here is how our knowledge arises: is not acquired through direct personal experience or observation but rather through the continual process of examining a learned tradition, which involves individuals recognising and adhering to moral customs that cannot be justified using traditional rationality, as detailed in Zanotti (2003). This tradition results from a selection process from among irrational, or more accurately, 'unsubstantiated' beliefs that, unbeknownst to anyone, unintentionally supported the proliferation of those who followed them (Hayek, 1991: 75).

As we can see, the core issue in Hayek's thought is how knowledge is possible, and it cannot happen based on rational understanding; it is custom and tradition instead. This type of knowledge *is a posteriori*; the researcher must be open to phenomena and not impose a theoretical framework on the facts under research. According to Hayek (1991: 51-52), this approach happened in sociology, which became a socialist science since the positivism of Auguste Comte that supposedly would demonstrate a social ethic based on reason and science, therefore, a true, authentic ethic that society must follow. The same happened with legal positivism and Bentham in the sense that there is a system of

laws, and the validity and significance of these items rely entirely on the desires and intentions of the individuals who created them¹.

In Hayek's treatment of science, there is a distinction between natural and social sciences: merging them is impossible. In social sciences, we are not dealing with measurable objective facts, but instead, we have to examine how individuals believe in them and act upon them (Hayek, 1952: 30). The subjectivist approach in Hayek is explicit, as we can see in the following paragraph:

The new world which man thus creates in his mind, which consists entirely of entities which our senses cannot perceive, is yet in a definite way related to the world of our senses. It serves, indeed, to explain the world of our senses. The world of Science might in fact be described as no more than a set of rules which enables us to trace the connections between different complexes of sense perceptions. (Hayek, 1952: 20)

However, these beliefs or attitudes are not the object of explanation; they are the elements that build relationships between individuals (Hayek, 1952: 39)². This means that to

¹ According to Hayek, the central premise is that the works of these authors were fundamentally grounded in the notion of reason. They advocated for the organization of society in a manner that aligns with the preferences and ambitions of a select group of intellectuals. This perspective suggests that rather than allowing spontaneous social order to emerge from the actions and choices of individuals, these thinkers sought to impose a structured system that reflects their own interpretations of rationality and progress. In doing so, they aimed to reshape societal norms and institutions according to what they believed to be the best solutions, ultimately sidelining the complex, dynamic forces that naturally govern human interactions and social cooperation.

² Some authors claimed that Hayek is part of the interpretive turn in social sciences (Madison, 2008). That could be possible, however, there are some nuances. The interpretive turn is consolidated by postmodern thought, and

understand society, we must consider the aggregation of individuals. As Friedman (2005) emphasises, Hayek's interpretive approach to social facts bears a strong resemblance to the methodology of Max Weber, particularly in his emphasis on the subjective nature of social phenomena. For both Hayek and Weber, the social world is not merely an objective structure that can be understood in terms of measurable facts or universal laws. Instead, it is a realm shaped and sustained by individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and actions.

At the heart of Hayek's approach is the understanding that social facts emerge from individual subjectivity. Social phenomena, such as markets, traditions, or institutions, do not exist independently of those who participate in and perpetuate them. They result from countless individual decisions, each guided by a person's unique perspective and knowledge. For Hayek, studying society requires us to grasp the meanings individuals assign to their actions. In this respect, his methodology aligns closely with Weber's concept of *Verstehen*, or interpretive understanding, which seeks to uncover the subjective meanings behind social actions. However, his seeds are developed in Lachmann (1977; 2007), a Weberian in a strict sense, which considers the existence of two types of institutions: formal and informal. The first one can be related to what Hayek remarks as the rule of law, but the second one is *cosmos*, that is, tacit knowledge that influences behaviour.

Hayek never discouraged the relationship between natural and social sciences, as can be seen in *The Sensory Order* (2012); the distinction is that, according to Hayek, we must not treat social phenomena as in the realm of natural sciences, which is different to categorise him as a postmodern or hermeneutic author.

Comte and Saint-Simon are one of the most attacked individuals by Hayek because they consider society as an entity or a “social being” (Hayek, 1952: 57), and those are ways that pave the road to social engineering. Hayek critiques Comte and Saint-Simon for advocating a form of social organisation based on applying scientific principles to societal governance, which Hayek views as a precursor to modern technocracy and socialism (Hayek, 1952: 124-125).

Hayek argues that Comte and Saint-Simon’s vision involves a dangerous conflation of scientific and social phenomena. According to Hayek, these authors believed that society could be engineered with the same precision as the natural sciences. This led to a system where a technocratic elite would decide for the masses. Hayek sees this as a fundamental misunderstanding of the complexity and spontaneity of social orders, which cannot be effectively controlled or planned by central authorities without leading to totalitarian outcomes (Hayek, 1952: 129).

As interpreted by Hayek, Comte and Saint-Simon’s ideas contribute to the intellectual foundations of collectivism and centralised planning, which Hayek opposes. He believes these ideas ignore the dispersed nature of knowledge and the importance of individual freedom and market mechanisms in promoting social progress and innovation (Hayek, 1952, Chapter IV).

On the side of historicism, according to the author, it would be a misleading way to find alleged laws of social development (Hayek, 1952: 70). What is behind these theories, embraced by Hegel, Marx, and Spengler, among others, is that they all give properties of necessity to history trying to copy models of natural sciences. In that sense, history would have the basis to predict the

future as a natural experiment, and the same mistake can be pointed out regarding “purposive” social formations, that is, the existence of social entities that are supposedly the product of human design (Hayek, 1952: 72-80).

The combination of theories that can accurately predict the future with the existence of purposeful designs regarding human action allows Hayek to conclude that they are tools for social engineering and, in consequence, to the advance of socialism or, to be more precise, to attack the freedom of the individual. This happens in the realm of philosophy and social sciences in general. Still, the author's primary concern is the influence of the economy (Hayek, 1952, Chapter X) whether it happens in Soviet Russia or welfare economics.

There are struggles in the field of economics as well, for example, to consider it impossible to talk about a market in equilibrium, basically because the “datum” is what people receive in a dynamic process of actions and perceptions, which is a permanent flow in information impossible to predict and, if that was the case, it would require an omniscient individual (Hayek, 1948: 46). The same can be said about the word “competition” that, following the author, it is a term that gives the individual no agency; on the contrary, it sets a model of planning minds that is far from reality (Hayek, 1948: 93).

In conclusion, Hayek's examination of the role of science concerning freedom reveals a critical distinction between genuine scientific inquiry and what he terms “scientistic” approaches. He argues that science, grounded in recognising the dispersed nature of knowledge and human limitations, fosters individual freedom and progress. However, scientistic methods wrongly assume that human behaviour can be precisely engineered. This erroneous

belief, exemplified in the ideas of Comte and Saint-Simon, leads to technocratic and collectivist systems that undermine individual liberty and the spontaneous order of society.

Hayek's epistemology emphasises the importance of tradition and custom in developing knowledge, challenging the notion that rational understanding alone can account for social phenomena. This view underscores the limitations of centralised planning and the dangers of conflating social and natural sciences. Hayek highlights the risks of applying natural science models to social development by critiquing the deterministic historicism of thinkers like Hegel and Marx.

Ultimately, Hayek's work defends individual freedom against the encroachments of social engineering and centralised control. He champions a subjectivist approach to social sciences that respects the complexity and unpredictability of human action, advocating for a system where knowledge arises organically through decentralised processes rather than being imposed by a central authority. This perspective is crucial for understanding Hayek's broader opposition to socialism and his support for free-market mechanisms to promote social progress and innovation.

5. Conclusions

Friedrich Hayek's exploration of freedom forms the backbone of his extensive work, highlighting its central role in political, economic, and scientific contexts. His multifaceted approach to freedom is critical for understanding his broader arguments against central planning and favouring free markets and individual liberty. In a nutshell, the idea of freedom in Hayek is

the absence of arbitrary coercion; nevertheless, as we saw, there is a web of meanings that spans politics, economics, and science.

As this is an article that attempts to summarise Hayek's thoughts, it cannot be forgotten that there are fierce critiques. Many critics of Hayek reject his defence of unrestricted free markets and his scepticism towards state intervention in the economy. They argue that this approach leads to extreme social inequalities, economic instability, and labour exploitation (Plant, 2002). There is a distrust in Spontaneous Orders: Hayek's idea that complex social orders emerge spontaneously without the need for central planning is met with scepticism by those who believe society requires conscious direction to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change (Whyte, 2019). Finally, one can see a rejection of methodological individualism: Hayek's individualist methodology, which emphasises the role of individuals in shaping social institutions, is criticised by those who argue that social structures have an independent existence and cannot be reduced to the sum of individual actions (Neck, 2021).

Hayek's political freedom is rooted in the absence of arbitrary coercion, where laws are general, abstract, and equally applied. He emphasised the importance of common law, which evolves organically through judges' decisions, reflecting society's customs and practices. This spontaneous order, or *cosmos*, contrasts with constructed orders, or *taxis*, which are centrally planned and less adaptive. Hayek argued that spontaneous orders better utilise dispersed knowledge within society, leading to more efficient and adaptable systems. He also highlighted the necessity of a constitution to legitimise coercion, ensuring that society develops through trial and error rather than central control.

In economic terms, Hayek viewed the market as an imperfect, dynamic process where knowledge is dispersed among individuals. He argued that central planning fails because it cannot effectively gather and use this dispersed knowledge. Instead, the price mechanism in a free market allows for efficient resource allocation and innovation. Hayek emphasised the importance of the rule of law in providing a predictable environment for economic activities, facilitating coordination and fostering social cooperation. He acknowledged the need for a safety net for those who struggle in the market but maintained that this should not interfere with the overall free market system.

Hayek's perspective on scientific freedom clearly distinguishes between genuine scientific inquiry and "scientistic" approaches that erroneously treat social phenomena as predictable as natural sciences. He argued that social sciences should recognise the subjectivity and dispersed nature of knowledge, emphasising tradition and custom as sources of knowledge. This approach challenges central planning and social engineering, which Hayek believed undermines individual freedom and society's spontaneous order. His critique of historicism and deterministic theories further supports his argument against applying natural science models to social development.

Hayek's comprehensive analysis of freedom underscores its essential role in fostering a free and prosperous society. He championed spontaneous orders and decentralised processes over central planning, highlighting the superiority of systems that evolve naturally and utilise dispersed knowledge. His emphasis on the rule of law, individual liberty, and the limitations of central control remains influential in contemporary debates on governance, economics, and social policy. Ultimately, Hayek's

work provides a robust defence of individual freedom and market mechanisms as drivers of social progress and innovation.

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