

**PHILOSOPHICAL TENSIONS IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION:  
CONSTRAINTS ON THE "GOOD LIFE"**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**Department of Political Studies  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

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**Philosophical Tensions in the Liberal Tradition:  
Constraints on the “Good Life”**

**BY**

**Stephanie Bradley**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
of  
Master of Arts**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Liberal thought is embroiled in an endless philosophical debate. This debate is precipitated by inherent tensions in liberalism that appears to be irreconcilable with its end of individual freedom. The two main contenders in the debate are the “classic” and “progressive” liberals. The point of philosophical tension between the two groups is in regards to the proper parameters of government. The “classic” liberals argue that the government in a liberal state must be limited, while the “progressive” liberals assert the need for government intervention in the economy as a means of creating an even playing field for all individuals. The underpinnings of the debate are present in the initial liberal discourse and writing and have grown in scope in the twentieth century, culminating in a wealth of literature and the birth of liberal criticism. Liberal critics have had a significant impact on the interpretation and acceptance of liberalism as a useful political theory. They argue that liberalism is unable to meet its end of individual freedom, in either its “classic” or “progressive” forms. Several liberal thinkers are key to the debate: John Locke is the first significant liberal thinker; J.S. Mill and T.H. Green are two of the most significant founders of “progressive” liberalism, and; Herbert Spencer and Milton Friedman are the most renowned and outspoken advocates of “classic” liberalism. Two seminal liberal critics who have also greatly contributed to furthering the liberal discussion are Ronald Beiner and Hannah Arendt. All of these thinkers have built and contributed to the development of liberal thought, as it currently exists. One striking fact to emerge from the liberal debate is that presently there appears to be no alternative to liberal thought other than to allow for the continual swing between “classic” and

“progressive” liberal thought as the dominant ideology. However, the important insight derived from the study of liberal thought and the debate that has ensued is that liberalism is a theory in progress. When examined in this fashion, the tension in liberal thought can be seen as something that is beneficial rather than harmful to both the theory and practice of liberalism; for these tensions help keep liberalism in a dynamic flux. Thus, the examination of liberalism is necessary to understanding and broadening the political discourse of individual freedom and community.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the following people for helping me complete this work: Mariela Ruetalo, Sonna Hahn, Joelle Mader and Anne Sedore who have always been of great support and comfort regardless of distance; Professor Davis Daycock for his ongoing advice and encouragement; Professor Michael Feld for being available to assist me in my progress and ideas, and; Professor Margaret Ogradnick for her patience and persistence. I would also like to extend my gratitude to: Professors Jim Fergusson and William Neville for encouraging me to challenge my assumptions; Jennifer Mustapha, Joelle Leclair, Jamie Rogers, Diana Forgione and Krishna Lalbiharie for their spirit, conversations and knowing when to rescue me; Patrick Nelson and David Turnbull for their gracious technical support and humour; Amanda Jones for bringing me much happiness, and; Kristin Good whose friendship and conversations have helped broaden my academic horizons as well as made me feel at home. Thank You.

*Classical liberalism, which took on its characteristic form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has with modifications become the conservatism of our time. But it was not always a remembrance of things past. The same doctrine which now feeds the defensive backfire of reaction once kindled the spreading flame of revolution.*

**Henry K. Girvitz, *The Evolution of Liberalism***

*All minimalists have spent much of their time and not a little of their ingenuity trying to dismantle institutions that promote community life and active political citizenship. A vigorous citizen, they feel, is a man who thinks he knows what there is no warrant for knowing: unmask him and send him back to the private sector where his activity will have no public effects. A public good is prejudice masquerading as a common end. Expose it and put in its place pseudopublic interests that are mere aggregations of private interests. Communal politics is a certain path to totalitarianism; reduce it to interest brokerage, and safety will be assured.*

**Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy***

*Talk of "Virtue" immediately strikes the modern ear as somehow illiberal, certainly antiquated, perhaps perverse. It must surely be galling to liberal moralists that this old-fashioned language is back in vogue to some extent; in any case, the liberal will inevitably see in all this Aristotelian talk something vaguely threatening to the much more familiar liberal notions of rights, autonomy, value pluralism, the primacy of moral conscience and the protection of moral diversity.*

**Ronald Beiner, *What's the Matter With Liberalism?***

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Since its inception liberal thought has been hampered by its intrinsic philosophical tensions. The tensions in liberalism have resulted in a seemingly endless debate as to how it is to be interpreted and practiced. In recent years the debate has extended to include liberal critics who assert that the internal tensions are irresolvable and, what is more, that liberalism is incapable of meeting its end of individual freedom and the needs of the community. The liberal debate is so extensive that it has produced a wealth of literature on the subject.

The fact that the tensions in liberalism are firmly ensconced and show no signs of disappearing has increased the need to examine liberalism. The underlying source of debate involves the question as to what form of government best provides individual freedom and the maintenance of a community that ensures the good of the whole. The liberal answer to this question is clearly divided into two streams. On one side of the debate are the “classic” liberals and on the other are the “progressive” liberals. In both theory and practice, neither side has been able to converge, thus leaving the outcome of the debate open and ongoing.

The main focus of debate in liberal thought between the “classic” and “progressive” liberals is on what form of government best provides for individual freedom. The “classic” liberals submit that a limited form of government is not only the most appropriate way to guarantee individual freedom, but it is also the only legitimate form of liberalism. Conversely, the “progressive” liberals contend that an interventionist state is necessary to provide for individual freedom. While there is an abundance of liberal writings, the crux of the discussion inevitably returns to the issue of individual freedom and the role of the state. The

issue of the state and its role in providing for individual freedom is the primary source of philosophical tension in liberal thought and thus the thesis will focus on this topic.

The specific task of the thesis is to provide an historical and critical analysis of liberal theory to demonstrate that the philosophical tensions in liberalism are permanent. In so doing it will also show liberalism's philosophical limitations which result in placing constraints on the liberal "good life." The liberal critics, most notably Hannah Arendt and Ronald Beiner, challenge liberalism from the perspective of its inability to meet its end of individual freedom and the "good life." It is their opinion that liberalism as a political ethos and practice is inherently philosophically flawed and must be replaced.

In the thesis the "good life" is defined as political freedom, or more simply put, the ability to actively contribute to the political decision-making process on a regular basis that is outside of the main economic framework. The role of the liberal critics is to offer an alternative account of liberalism so as to provide a means of transcending the constraints placed on individual freedom and political participation. Thus, the critics play an important role in highlighting the philosophical constraints within liberalism.

To discharge the task of illustrating liberalism's philosophical constraints on the "good life," the thesis will examine the main arguments presented by past and contemporary liberal thinkers. It will also challenge past and present liberal assumptions concerning the role of the individual and the community. The purpose of this task is to locate the possibility for broadening liberal discourse and to question whether one should accept the tensions as they are; for as of yet there is no alternative to liberalism as a theory, and despite the tensions, it appears to remain strong.

Throughout the thesis it will be demonstrated that the philosophical tensions are embedded in the first liberal theories and have proven to be a permanent fixture within liberal thought. This has resulted in an ongoing theoretical debate. However, in the discussion it will be shown that the “progressive” liberal tradition demonstrates a continued growth that both challenges the assertions of the “classic” liberals, as well as those of the previous “progressive” liberals. It will further be illustrated that the “progressive” liberal tradition, unlike its “classic” counterpart, has undergone several developments that have worked to bring the liberal discussion forward and reinvigorate the tensions.

The main point of contention between the two liberal camps is what role the state should play in the preservation and promotion of individual freedom. The “classic” liberals argue that a limited government is the only way to maintain individual freedom whereas the “progressive” liberals allow for government intervention in the economy as a means to freedom and community. The contrast in philosophical approach and interpretation is what spawned the liberal debate that has recently grown in both literature and prominence.

Due to the breadth of the topic, I have chosen to focus primarily on the liberal writings of John Locke, J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, Herbert Spencer, Milton Friedman and the liberal critics Hannah Arendt and Ronald Beiner. These authors have been selected for their seminal contribution to the development of the liberal debate. It will be shown that Locke is the first significant liberal and it is his writings that underpin the later philosophical tensions that were to emerge. Both Mill and Green are examined because they represent the emergence and solidification of the “progressive” liberal tradition.

Spencer and Friedman are also significant contributors to the liberal debate. Both Spencer and Friedman revitalized the “classic” liberal tradition and more importantly, despite

the difference in time and continent, they share strikingly similar liberal ideals. This is important because it indicates the continuity of thought amongst “classic” liberals. Finally, Arendt and Beiner will be examined because they offer substantial criticism of liberal thought and attempt to illustrate that the philosophical tensions in liberal thought are irresolvable and have grave consequences for the political freedom of individuals.

The fact that the debate and tensions have yet to be overcome has become the hallmark of liberal thought. Both “classic” and “progressive” liberal thought battle for primacy in both theory and practice, which serves to stimulate the debate. The lack of a foreseeable end to the debate and tensions makes for a worthwhile study and leads to the interesting question of how and why liberalism is able to remain a strong theory.

The objective of the thesis is to consider this question through an historical analysis of liberalism, its tensions, problems and cycles of debate. To do so the thesis will be divided into five chapters. Each chapter is intrinsically related to the next by offering one segment of the origin, nature and current manifestation of the liberal debate and the philosophical tensions that underscore it.

The first chapter is the current introduction, which serves to provide a general overview of the liberal debate and the manner in which it will be discussed. This chapter is important because it sets the parameters of discussion in an otherwise large and multifarious topic. It recognizes that the debate and players are much more vast and varying, but provides the essential details of the debate, and the current bifurcated state of liberal thought.

Liberalism is a very broad and complex field of study. It is for this reason that the analysis and scope of this thesis be clearly defined. The thesis does not profess to offer a solution to the liberal tensions and problems, but proposes instead to illustrate and account

for them. What is necessary to demonstrate is how liberalism came to have its tensions and how it deals with them. It is the belief of the thesis that an examination of these tensions and the nature of the debate are useful in the further study of liberal thought, thus serving to broaden the liberal discussion. This having been said, it is now possible to move on to outlining the main chapters and their role in delineating the philosophical tensions in liberal thought and their constraints on the “good life.”

The second chapter will examine the liberal works and contributions of Locke, Mill and Green. It will be shown that liberal theory is grounded in Locke’s philosophical works and it finds its first theoretical challenge in Mill. An even fuller philosophical debate emerges with Green. It will be further demonstrated that Green was the first theorist in the liberal tradition to posit the importance of community.

The intent of this chapter is to illustrate the origins and development within liberal thought. Thus, the chapter necessarily begins with an examination of Locke who is commonly held to be the progenitor of liberal thought. In analyzing Locke, several of the problems and philosophical tensions embedded in liberalism will be illustrated. This study of Locke is essential to the elucidation of the debate that inevitably arose in liberalism as his works provide the theoretical foundation of “classic” liberalism. The liberal constraints on the “good life” will be revealed in the analysis of Locke. In the chapter it will further be shown that Locke’s liberal theory laid the foundations for the liberal critics’ attempt to identify and transcend the tensions and constraints on individual freedom and community inherent in liberalism.

Following the discussion of Locke the chapter moves on to examine Mill’s contribution. Mill’s works are chosen as the next major point of analysis because he is

regarded as the first author of “progressive” liberal thought and for this reason he marks a significant shift within liberal thought. The roots of “progressive” liberal thought are located in Mill’s works and it is his foundations that are built upon by subsequent “progressive” liberal thinkers.

The chapter will demonstrate that Mill’s acclaim as the initial “progressive” liberal thinker is accurate on the basis that he was the first liberal thinker to recognize and attempt to find a solution to the philosophical tensions and problem of community found in Locke. As such, the chapter asserts that Mill’s theory is a watershed in liberal discourse as well as provides the foundation for the liberal debate. The chapter argues that Mill sought to alleviate what he considered to be the lack of community in liberal society and thought. In Mill’s opinion, what is lacking in liberal thought is a clear notion of the greater social good.

Mill criticized earlier liberal thought for its scant examination or inclusion of the role of community in the happiness of the individual. He sought to partially remedy the problem of community and the social good through the inclusion of a greater role of the state in education. In his view, an increased role of the state would assist in the creation of the greater good of the social whole as well as help facilitate an environment for individual development and exercise of one’s intellectual capacities. Mill’s endorsement of state support for education was a substantial deviation from a limited state advocated by Locke.

After the examination of Mill, the chapter will move on to discuss Green. It will be shown that Green is important to the liberal debate for his delineation of liberalism’s constraints on the “good life.” It will be demonstrated that Green expanded upon Mill’s notion of community and the need for the state to assist in the actualization of the social good. Green is important to the thesis for his solidification of the “progressive” liberal

tradition. He did so because, not only did he write after the liberal rejoinder of “classic” liberalism by Spencer, he also helped lay the theoretical foundation to John Maynard Keynes’ welfare liberal theory, which will be discussed in chapter three.

Also important is the fact that Green carried Mill’s concept of community and the social good further to critique natural rights theory and give the state a primary role in the development of the social good. The significance of this contribution is that it offers an apposite example of how “progressive” liberalism develops and builds upon the previous thinkers in its attempt to resolve liberalism’s inherent philosophical tensions.

The third chapter moves from the origins and tenets of liberal theory to an analysis of Spencer and Friedman. The chapter will show that C. B. Macpherson’s claim is correct that Friedman had nothing new to add to liberal discourse beyond Spencer. The chapter will clearly illustrate the continuity of this new “classic” liberalism with Locke. In so doing it will demonstrate that the new “classic liberalism professed by Spencer and Friedman is nothing but a re-statement of Locke, and thus situates liberalism in a fixed and unchanging context. This is significantly different from that advocated by “progressive” liberals who argue that some change in liberalism is necessary for liberalism to remain a viable theory. However, both Spencer and Friedman make the claim that the only authentic form of liberalism is “classic” liberalism. The chapter will also examine the specific criticisms offered by Spencer and Friedman in regard to the ramifications of state intervention on individual freedom. It will be shown that Spencer earmarks the resurrection of “classic” liberalism and fuels the liberal debate.

The fourth chapter will provide a critical assessment of liberalism’s constraints on the “good life.” The main authors studied in this chapter will be Beiner and Arendt. These

theorists were chosen because they offer a similar, yet varying criticism of liberalism. They assess the problems of the liberal tensions and assert the need to re-examine the liberal tradition for its theoretical merits. In their opinion living with the tensions in liberalism is insufficient on the basis that these tensions have not worked to resolve any of the real problems faced in the twentieth century. And what is more, they argue liberalism itself has been the cause of specific problems facing individuals and freedom. Thus, by providing an overall critique of liberal thought, they offer an alternative approach to its examination.

The chapter will also assess the liberal critics' claim that both "classic" and "progressive" liberals fail to meet their objectives of individual freedom and community. It will be shown in this discussion that, although the critics are able to offer some new and interesting insights into liberalism and its problems, they are unable to offer a viable solution to these problems. The inability to provide an alternative to liberalism constrains its own ability to resolve any of its noted problems. Moreover, the philosophical tensions that underscore liberalism remain.

The fifth and concluding chapter examines the liberal tensions from a holistic perspective. It re-examines all of the liberal arguments presented by the "classic" and "progressive" liberal thinkers as well as the ideas brought forth by the liberal critics. In essence, it aptly begins where the last chapter ended. It concludes that the liberal critics succeed in offering some intellectual challenges to liberal thought, but notes that without a clear and practical solution to the liberal tensions and problems it appears unlikely that liberalism will fully benefit from the cycle of debate. As a result, the same tensions will continue to reappear thereby failing to fully address the perennial problem of reconciling individual freedom with political participation and community.

In a further analysis of the subject, the final chapter argues that liberal thought appears to have found its own way to deal with its tensions. The method used by liberals to live and deal with its tensions is to continue to swing between “classic” and “progressive” liberal thought, thereby leaving the outcome of the liberal debate wide open. The chapter concludes that the liberal swing between “progressive” and “classic” liberal forms definitively reveals its tenacity of life. Most worthy of note is how the swing between the competing liberal forms has served to further and fuel the “progressive” liberal literature and approach. It further notes that regardless of the new theories emergent in the “progressive” liberal tradition, a response is always forthcoming from “classic” liberals seeking to reaffirm their status as the only representaives of authentic liberal thought and practice.

The thesis concludes that the tensions in liberalism serve a functional role in liberal thought. Both sides of the debate appear to benefit from the debate in their ability to gain primacy in practice at different times. It must be noted that “progressive” liberals perhaps gain the most from the debate, as they are able to build on previous ideas whereas the “classic” liberals maintain a set and unchanging liberal theory. In all, it appears that the manner in which liberalism deals with its inherent tensions is to accept, or at the very least live with them.

The liberal critics also serve an important function in steering liberal thought away from its traditional philosophical debate by examining the very principles of liberal theory. This opens up new ground for the furtherance of a liberal critical discussion that may soon find a viable solution to the liberal problems.

The thesis offers a critical examination of liberal theory that enables one to challenge liberal assumptions existent in its underlying principles and language. It believes that in

challenging liberal assumptions, one is once again able to ask core political questions. Moreover, in examining liberal thought, one is able to open the possibility for the creation of a political community and transcend the liberal constraints on the “good life.”

## CHAPTER II

### THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TENSIONS IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Social change is common to all societies. Usually, the social changes that occur do not disrupt the economic, political, and cultural underpinnings of the society, but complement the development of society. However, rapid economic change can accelerate social change beyond the capacity of the existing political, economic, and cultural structure of the society to adjust. In the mid-seventeenth century, England was undergoing a significant economic transformation that was shifting the prevailing political and economic structure of English society. In this context of change and social stress a new political and economic theory emerged. The new ideas in this theory favored the success and stability of the new economic order. The new theory proposed was liberal theory. This chapter will focus on the liberal theories of John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Green.

The purpose of this survey is to provide the historical context for modern liberalism and the tensions it must cope with. Three thinkers often taken as especially sufficient have been chosen here to illuminate the course of liberalism's history. The chapter begins with an overview of Locke's liberal theory as presented in his *Second Treatise on Government* and then moves on to examine Mill's contribution to liberal theory. It will be shown that Mill takes a different direction from Locke. Mill's theoretical innovation is to add a moral principle of community into liberal theory. Following the discussion of Mill, Green's liberal theory will be examined briefly. The examination of Green is important for understanding the present philosophical tension in liberal theory. For he furthers the notion of a moral ideal of community in liberal theory, which this thesis submits is the primary source of the philosophical tension in the liberal tradition.

In the *Second Treatise on Government*, Locke outlines the characteristics of liberal theory. C.B. Macpherson argues that, not only is Locke the founder of liberal theory, but he is also the originator of liberal democratic theory. According to Macpherson:

Locke's work invites this treatment, for it seems to have almost everything that could be desired by a modern liberal democrat. Government by consent, majority rule, minority rights, moral supremacy of the individual, sanctity of individual property—all are there, and all are fetched from a first principle of individual natural rights and rationality.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, Macpherson asserts that Locke's political theory contains all the "underpinnings of a modern liberal capitalist state."<sup>2</sup> Macpherson's assertions regarding the implications of Locke's work for the future of liberal thought and practice clearly illustrate Locke's role and importance to the development of liberalism.

Locke begins his *Second Treatise* with a discussion of man in the state of nature. According to Locke, the state of nature is "a state of perfect freedom."<sup>3</sup> For Locke, the state of nature represents perfect freedom because it enabled men "to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they thought fit."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Locke also asserts that the state of nature was "a state of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another."<sup>5</sup> His contention that the state of nature was a state of perfect freedom is pertinent to understanding the essence of the liberal philosophical tension. For Locke, perfect freedom entailed the absence of coercion from another. Equality is necessary because it is what ensures and demonstrates that all are free from external coercion.

The essence of Locke's liberal philosophy rests on the idea of perfect freedom, that is, freedom from external constraints. Isaiah Berlin, in his book *Four Essays on Liberty* describes Locke's conception of freedom as negative freedom. According to Berlin, negative freedom is "simply not to be prevented by other persons from doing whatever one wishes."<sup>6</sup> Berlin's description of negative liberty is consonant with Locke's conception of freedom.

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<sup>1</sup>Macpherson, C.B. *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1962), p.194.

<sup>2</sup>John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* ed. C.B. Macpherson, (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing: 1980), p.xxi.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>6</sup>Berlin, Isaiah, *Four Essays On Liberty*, (Oxford University Press: 1986) p.xxviii.

Equally as important as freedom in the state of nature for Locke is man's innate ability to reason. In the state of nature Locke argues that reason is what binds all men to live freely and peacefully. He describes reason as something that "obliges everyone: and reason, which is that law teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."<sup>7</sup> Locke asserts that it is reason that naturally guarantees man's freedom. He believes all men will naturally use their reason as a means to be free from external constraints. He believes that men will rationally choose not to interfere or harm another man in his choice of life, health and allocation of possessions. Clearly, Locke was the progenitor of the concept of negative freedom.

The question to ask, then is, if man is perfectly free in the state of nature why would he choose to leave it to form civil society? In Locke's opinion, man's innate rational capacities are what enable him to know natural law. The strength of natural law, however, as Locke presents it, is only as strong as man's desire to adhere to it, although Locke argues that all men have the rational capacity to recognize it. This is a very interesting point because it leaves open the possibility that not all men desire to follow or consult rational law. In the state of nature the failure to abide by natural law presents a problem as to how to judge and punish those individuals who choose to violate natural law.

According to Locke, it is the fact that there are not any impartial judges in the state of nature that allows the transgressed individuals to punish the offender as they see fit. To emphasize this point he states: "the execution of this law of nature, is in that state, put into every man's hands whereby everyone has the right to punish the transgressor of that law."<sup>8</sup> Without the desire to follow natural law or impartially judge it there is a possibility that all men will fall into a state of war. In his view a state of war is one in which all men have the ability to punish others for offenses, punishment that can be severe as death. He argues that in this situation peace and reason become threatened because an impartial adjudicator cannot

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<sup>7</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, ed. Macpherson, p.9.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p.9

fix the appropriate penalty. In essence For Locke, the state of nature is analogous to anarchy, and in his view anarchy is the antithesis of freedom.

What is important to note in regards to Locke's analysis on the limitations of natural law in the state of nature, is the fact that, although he attributes rationality to all men, he recognizes that not all men, as noted above, chose to abide by it; otherwise there would be no need for any individual to punish infractions of natural law. This point is important because it indicates that man's innate freedom in the state of nature is a state of perfect negative freedom in which men can all do as they please, within the limitations of natural law. However, natural law is not always obeyed and is always prone to subjective interpretation.

Although the perfect state of negative freedom is desirable, the proclivity of the state of nature to fall into the state of war leads Locke to propose the creation of civil society. He argues that this solution allows for the maintenance of natural law and the protection of man's natural freedom.

However, if all men were rational in the state of nature there would be no logical reason why one man would choose to transgress on another's life, liberty or property. That men do transgress on others shows that there was something missing in the state of nature that is more than the absence of an overarching authority. Perhaps not all men in the state of nature were equal in the sense that not all possessed enough property by means of which they could sustain their perfect freedoms. Under such circumstances it becomes rational to defy natural law and to take what is necessary to preserve life. Such an act of self-preservation would also appear to be rational considering that Locke's first two laws in the state of nature are the preservation of life and liberty. This problem, however, is absent in his work and therefore it is necessary to follow his own argument further. It is this point that leads most clearly to the philosophical tension inherent in the liberal tradition.

Locke notes that the problems with natural law in the state of nature present an obstacle to the protection of freedom. The logical and necessary question to be asked is why did transgressions occur if all men were peaceful and free? The explanation found in *The*

*Second Treatise* is that Locke had to use the threat of transgression in order to justify the movement from the state of nature to liberal civil society. This motive is evinced in his ensuing statement that “civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature, which must certainly be great where men be judges in their own case.”<sup>9</sup> The fact that Locke views men as unreasonable judges connotes that individuals in the state of nature are not as rational as he initially contends.

After justifying the need to create a set of laws against transgression and arbitrary judgment, Locke returns to man’s innate rationality as the guide to the creation of civil society, a rationality that he earlier dismissed as being insufficient to prevent transgression in a previous state of perfect freedom. Despite this seeming contradiction Locke argues that man’s innate rationality is strong enough to guide men into civil society.

According to Locke, civil society was formed in a contract where men agreed “together mutually to enter into one community, and make one body politic...”<sup>10</sup> To explain the transition from the state of nature to civil society Locke introduces the state of war. However, it is important to note that the introduction of the state of war contradicts his state of nature. To reiterate, Locke argues that the state of nature is “a state of peace, good will, mutual assistance and preservation ... men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them.”<sup>11</sup> The peace of the state of nature is interrupted, he argues, “through the use of force. But force, or a declared design of force, upon the person of another, where there is no common superior on earth to appeal to for relief is the state of war.”<sup>12</sup>

In the *Second Treatise*, Locke points to the state of war to appeal to man’s rational capacities. He wishes to emphasize the fact that without adherence to natural law, a state of war inevitably emerges. In his opinion, once the state of nature has been interrupted by the

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

state of war man's natural freedom has been threatened. Thus, it can be said that he mentions the state of war to impose an element of fear among the supposed contracting individuals so that such an undesirable state as the state of war does not endure. The constant theme in Locke's work is the fact that civil society is the only place where individuals can retain their natural liberty. He argues that "[T]o avoid the state of war ... is one great reason of men's putting themselves into society and quitting the state of nature."<sup>13</sup>

In his opinion, civil society is the rational creation of the majority of individuals who voluntarily come together for the assurance of peace, life and the protection and free disposal of possessions. He writes that "[F]or where there is an authority, a power on earth from which relief can be had on an appeal, there the continuance of the state of war is excluded, and the controversy is decided by that power."<sup>14</sup> Thus, civil society, Locke asserts, ensures that every man will "have a standing rule to live by, common to everyone of that society ... a liberty to follow his own will in all things ... and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, and unknown arbitrary will of another man."<sup>15</sup>

The creation of civil society, according to Locke, resolves the problem of the absence of law in the state of nature through the establishment of a set of rules each individual voluntarily participated in creating. The notion of voluntarism is important as it indicates that the contracting individuals were free from any external coercion in the decision to form civil society and the laws that followed. Furthermore, Locke stresses the voluntary nature involved in the creation of civil society to ensure that the government created is one that protects each individual from any external coercion, that is, from either the state or other individuals.

The issue of property is the core of Locke's liberal theory. According to Locke, the creation of individual property is the basis of civil society. One reason why the state of war emerged was due to the transgression of one man upon another in the protection and disposal of property. Once civil society has been formed, property becomes Locke's central focus in

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p 271.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p 271.

<sup>15</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise* ed C.B. Macpherson, p17.

the protection of man's freedom. In making the possessions of property the benchmark for freedom, Locke ironically infringes on freedom. He does so by equating man's labour with the property of things, such as land, or a material item. Thus, man's labour is conceived as a commodity that can be bought and sold like any other possession. Locke's equation of men's labour with property contributes to the philosophical tension inherent in the liberal tradition. This is so because later liberals have argued that equating labour with property truncates man's human and political qualities.

In order to justify his conception of liberal civil society as just and natural, it was necessary for Locke to allow for equal property possession by all the contracting individuals. However, in Locke's conception of civil society not all individuals possessed sufficient property in the sense of land from which they could make a living. Locke needed to find another way of establishing equality. For Locke, this was to give men property in themselves. He writes:

every man has a *property* in his own *person*; this nobody has a right to but himself. The *labour* of his body and the *work* of his hands, we may say are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, joined it to something that is his own, and thereby makes it his own *property*. It being by him removed from the common state of nature it hath by his *labour* annexed to it, that excluded the common right of other men: for his labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer; no man can have the right to that...<sup>16</sup>

The other significant point of liberal philosophical tension contained in Locke's definition of property is that he defines property as the right to exclude. To further substantiate his justification of private property, Locke argues that:

God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniences of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational...<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p 19

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p 21.

What becomes obvious for Locke is the owners of property are rational and industrious. Private ownership, however, leaves out a large segment of the population that does not own any property. Individuals falling into this category are forced by the need to maintain their lives to sell their labour.

Locke argues that the accumulation of private property in the state of nature by one individual was unlawful if there was not enough for another individual. He states that “if the gathering of acorns, or other fruits of the earth, makes a right to them, then anyone can gross as much as he will. To which I answer this is not so.”<sup>18</sup> In this sense, every individual was equal in his ability to possess private property, but should have no more property than he can use. He writes:

the same law of nature that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too. ‘God has given us all things richly’  
...But how far has he given it to us? To enjoy. As much as anyone can make use of to any advantage before it spoils... Whatever is beyond this, is more than his share and belongs to others.<sup>19</sup>

However, this theory of property in the state of nature is incongruent with Locke’s property theory presented in his civil society. It then follows that some event had to occur in which this situation changed. According to Locke, this change occurred when money was introduced. He uses money as a justifying tool to support unlimited private property accumulation by individuals and, hence, unequal distribution of property. Locke states that:

the same rule of propriety that every man should have as much as he could make use of, would hold still in the world... to suffice double the inhabitants, had not the *invention of money*, and the tacit agreement of men to put a value on it, introduced by consent larger possessions, and a right to them...<sup>20</sup>

Money was the obvious solution for Locke because, by its very existence, it is “some lasting thing that men might keep without spoiling and by mutual consent men would take in

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<sup>18</sup>Locke, *Political Writings*, ed. by David Wooton, p.276.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.276

<sup>20</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise* ed by C.B. Macpherson, p.23.

exchange for the truly useful, some perishable supports for life.”<sup>21</sup> The creation of money and scarcity of property are justified by Locke on the basis that all agreed to it.

The invention of money also serves another important use: money not only accounts for inequality of possession, but also is an indicator of individual skill and achievement. Thus, it follows that not all men in the state of nature were equal in this sense. Locke comments on the material results of these different levels of ability: “different degrees of industry were apt to give men possessions in different proportions, so this invention of money gave them the opportunity to continue and enlarge them.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, the assumption of consent to money allows Locke to side step the egalitarian objections to his defense of the institution of private property.

However, his logic regarding mutual consent entails equal ability, which Locke admitted did not exist. This suggests that all individuals in the state of nature would not accept money. Drawing upon this logic it then follows that tacit consent to accept money, as a right to unlimited accumulation, is also false. It also suggests that not all individuals in the supposed state of nature tacitly agreed to form civil society. It is here that Locke’s theory of individualism and the state of nature can be open to criticism.

Locke’s theory of unlimited property accumulation meant that some men had to sell their labour to make a living. In this sense not all individuals were equal in civil society, nor did they have equal political power. Furthermore, these individuals would be considered irrational for disputing Locke’s civil society, as its dissolution as mentioned by Locke would lead to the state of war. The disparity in property and access to power is the foundation of the philosophical tension within liberal thought.

The essence of law in civil society, Locke explains, is to preserve and enhance individual freedom: “the end of all law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom.”<sup>23</sup> Freedom from restraint is essential because it ensures that individuals

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* p 28.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.* p 29.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.* p 32.

will be able to accumulate possessions and to make voluntary contracts without any outside interference. The role of the state is then to be limited to acting as “an umpire, by settled standard rules, indifferent and the same to all parties”.<sup>24</sup> According to Locke, it is essential to have a limited government to maximize individual freedom from external constraints. Thus, the State as an umpire exists to ensure that the contracting individuals followed the agreed upon laws created in the formation of civil society outlined above.

The strength of Locke’s liberal theory lies in the equality of all members. It must be noted that all men in his civil society were not equal because some men had to sell their labour for a wage. Thus, it is necessary for Locke to extend his notion of equality to include those wage labourers into the contractual agreement. Otherwise, the contract is not binding on all members and civil society is not secure.

Locke’s theory outlined in his *Second Treatise* forms the basis of all liberal thought and subsequent criticism. He laid the foundation of individual rights and freedoms that have become the hallmark of liberal practice. There are, however, many areas in his *Second Treatise* that open his theory to criticism. And so, not only did he begin and cement the liberal tradition, his social contract theory also contains the seeds of the philosophical tension in the liberal tradition that were to later grow and eventually begin a liberal debate. It is for this reason that Locke’s contributions are worthy of examination in any critique of liberal thought.

A good illustration of significant philosophical tension introduced in liberal thought is found in the writings of Mill. In the mid-nineteenth century the primacy of the individual above the community as a central precept of liberal theory began to be questioned by Mill. In *Utilitarianism*, Mill cites liberal good as something that is beyond the mere individual. He offers a different conception of good than does Locke, which is the point of philosophical tension. For Mill, good is a route to individual happiness: “the creed which accepts as the foundation of moral utility ... holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p 46.

promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”<sup>25</sup>

For Locke, on the other hand, the good is freedom itself. Also contrary to the liberal philosophy espoused by Locke, Mill notes that the greatest good or utility can only be realized in a community. By emphasizing the need for a more communitarian ethos, Mill is a watershed within liberal theory. According to Mill, the happiness of the individual and the social whole are important. Mill writes that, “the utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others.”<sup>26</sup> He says that “the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent’s own happiness, but that of all concerned.”<sup>27</sup> What is expressed in Mill is the assertion of a strong community composed of individuals concerned with the happiness of others. This is somewhat different from what Locke says. According to Locke, individual freedom is the only end or good. Community is only the sum of the individuals rather than something that transcends the collectivity of individual interests. Mill, on the other hand, locates individual happiness within a community.

In *Utilitarianism*, Mill asserts that each individual is endowed with intellectual capacities that require the opportunity to be developed. The development and exercise of intellectual capacities, according to Mill, is what enables man the greatest amount of happiness.

Man’s intellectual capacities are of greater pleasure in Mill’s view, because “few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals ... no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool; no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base...”<sup>28</sup> In his opinion, the reason why no intelligent person would submit to lower pleasures is because it would produce more unhappiness than happiness. Mill writes “[I]t is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a

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<sup>25</sup>Mill, J. S. *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Representative Government*. (London: J.M Dent and Sons; 1988), p.7

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p 17

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p 17

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p 9

pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied".<sup>29</sup>

For Mill, the individual pursuit of lower pleasures as a good is akin to the life of a pig. He further explains this sentiment in his statement: "[A] being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable of more acute suffering ... than one of an inferior type, but in spite of all these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence."<sup>30</sup>

The promotion of Mill's principle of moral utility resides in the cultivation of higher order tastes. Consonant with this is the greatest good for the social whole. In Mill's opinion, the greatest good for the social whole is the cultivation of a noble character, which he associates with individual happiness. To support this contention Mill writes:

and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it. Utilitarianism can therefore only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness of others, and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit. But the bare enunciation of such an absurdity as this last, renders refutation superfluous.<sup>31</sup>

A noble character, Mill argues, is one in which the agent develops and exercises the cultivation of higher order tastes. In so doing, the agent can attain the moral utility principle described by Mill, this being for the agent not to seek his "own happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness all together."<sup>32</sup>

One problem Mill wished to illustrate is that noble character requires the opportunity to be developed and exercised. In order to do so, he argues that there must be an environment that facilitates and encourages the development of these intellectual capacities. In his view:

men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, not because they have not time for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

the only ones which they are capable of enjoying.<sup>33</sup>

The point that Mill attempts to make is that the prior interpretations of liberalism have worked to foster the pursuit of lower or inferior pleasures. This is due to the fact that the ability to enjoy higher order pleasures has been absent in society, or access to them has been denied to a large number of individuals. All individuals, Mill wishes to convey, have the ability to understand and prefer higher order pleasures, but certain circumstances exist that prevent them from being enjoyed or developed.

The fact that Mill notes the existence of circumstances that inhibit the enjoyment and development of man's intellectual capacities and therefore noble character marks a transition in liberal thought. Previously, liberal theory was premised on the protection of negative liberty, as noted in the discussion of Locke. However, Mill recognizes that negative liberty is insufficient for man to have full access to freedom and the development of his intellectual capacities.

In Mill's view something more than pure negative freedom is needed for man to have access to and enjoyment of his freedom. He believes that liberty is something that can only be practiced and understood by "individuals in the maturity of their capacities."<sup>34</sup> Mill argues that for all men to be truly free, they must have access to the means of developing their intellectual capacities, as well as the freedom to exercise these capacities. Mill sees the negative liberty, of freedom from external constraints as essential to the preservation of man's freedom. However, he also notes that a different kind of liberty is also necessary for intellectual development. In his view, not only must man have freedom from constraints, he must also have the means to develop and exercise his intellectual capacities. Only in the resultant ability to act and exercise his intellectual capacities, in Mill's opinion, can man be happy.

In observing the prevalence of inferior pleasures over intellectual pleasures in liberal

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<sup>33</sup>Mill, *On Utilitarianism*, p.11.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p 78

society, Mill alludes to the fact that inferior pursuits occur because there is no other option, or at least a limited option. As a result Mill acknowledges the need for doors to be open in order for man to have access to the exercise and development of his intellectual capacities. An example of this recognition is Mill's commentary on education. In his opinion the current form of liberal education is not carrying out its function to promote the exercise and development of man's intellectual capacities. He notes that "the present wretched education, and wretched social arrangements, are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by all."<sup>35</sup>

Mill argues that if education were available to everyone then everyone would have the possibility of developing a noble character. Moreover, in so doing man could be productive and master of himself. Berlin supports this interpretation of Mill in his statement that Mill:

believed that all human progress, all human greatness and virtue and freedom depended chiefly on the preservation of such men and the clearing of paths for them...He thought that others like them could be educated, and, when they were educated, would be entitled to make choices...<sup>36</sup>

Mill's support for supplying individuals with the means to develop their intellectual capacities can also be seen in his commentary on poverty. Poverty, Mill argues, could be "completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals."<sup>37</sup> Mill believes that poverty could be eradicated through the education of individuals to pursue higher intellectual tastes. Mill believes that education can open up the possibility for social providence and wisdom that would dictate that the existence of poverty contradicts the social good, which for Mill is the promotion of the happiness of the community. For Mill, however, for poverty to be overcome, man must place the well-being of the community above himself.

The promotion of the happiness of the community, Mill argues, requires moral

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<sup>35</sup>Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, p.13.

<sup>36</sup>Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, p.198.

<sup>37</sup>Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, p.15.

obligation. Mill explains moral obligation, or duty toward another as utilizing one's conscience. According to Mill, "the pure idea of duty, not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances, is the essence of conscience."<sup>38</sup> Mill thinks that each individual has an obligation to respect another and ensure the good of all. Mill's idea of communal obligation is a watershed in liberal thought as previous discourse was grounded in the language of individual rights and negative liberty. Here Mill brings in what some would consider a non-liberal construct of duty.

What is also pertinent is the fact that Mill notes the importance of duty and its relation to the community and individual rationality. In a sense he combines liberal and non-liberal thought to form a balance of ideas, although maintaining the rights and good of the individual as central. The importance he attaches to duty is evinced in his definition of conscience as "the internal sanction of duty ... a feeling in our mind; a pain more or less, attendant on violation of duty, which in cultivated moral natures rises, in the more serious cases, into shrinking from it as an impossibility."<sup>39</sup>

A moral conscience, in Mill's opinion, is "not innate, but acquired."<sup>40</sup> Further to this, in his view, conscience is something that is developed and cultivated in the presence of others; it binds one individual to another in a fashion that demands an obligation to respect and assist in the exercise and development of the other person's freedom.

According to Mill an open and proper education can facilitate the development of a moral conscience connected to the community. More specifically, Mill argues that a strong community is essential to the good of the individual. Mill believes that morality requires a set of common interests. Liberal theory has previously been premised on competing interests. Thus, the question arises as to how one can move from a society of unlike interests to a society of like interests while simultaneously maintaining liberalism. Mill argues that this problem can be solved through moral education.

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<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p 29

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p 29.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p.33.

Mill says that when morality is realized through the cultivation of intellectual pursuits, it will result in the “strengthening of social ties and all healthy growth of society, [and] give to each individual a stronger personal interest in practically seeking the welfare of others.”<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Mill asserts that the promotion of community will:

give to each individual a stronger personal interest in practically consulting the welfare of others; it also leads him to identify his feelings more and more with their social good, or at least with an even greater degree of practical consideration for it. He comes, as though instinctively, to be conscious of himself as a being who of *course* pays regard to others. The good of others becomes to him a thing naturally and necessarily to be attended to, like any of the physical conditions of our existence.<sup>42</sup>

In providing for the education of individuals, Mill legitimizes a more positive role for the state to assist in opening the doors to those who do not have access to the development and exercise of their higher intellectual capacities.

The provision that Mill makes for the use of the state in the education of individuals is in reference to social unity. Mill argues that:

[I]n an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase, which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with all the rest; which if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself... if we now suppose this feeling of unity to be taught as a religion, and the whole force of education of institutions and of opinion, directed as it once was in the case of religion, to make every person grow up from infancy surrounded on all sides both by the profession and practice of it, I think that no one, who can realize this conception, will feel any misgiving about the sufficiency of the ultimate sanction for the happiness of morality.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, in reviewing the above discussion on Mill, it becomes clear that a strong argument can be made that he represents a watershed in liberal theory.

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<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

Mill represents a watershed in liberal thought and practice because he recognizes the need for a community as well as the need for man, not just to have freedom from constraints, but to also have the opportunity to exercise and develop his capacities. Moreover, in his discussion of the principle of utility, Mill gives as much weight to the development of the individual as he does to the moral development of the community. In so doing Mill shifted liberal theory away from Locke's upholding of negative freedom towards the realization of one's freedom through the possibility of development.

Despite his recognition of the need for community in liberal thought, Mill remained committed to the importance of negative liberty for individual development. Evidence of this can be seen in his statement that it is "unjust to deprive any one of his personal liberty, his property or any other thing that belongs to him by law."<sup>44</sup> In this sense, Mill's concept of negative liberty is commensurate with Locke's. This is evinced in Mill's defense of the liberty of the individual to accumulate as much as he can. He argues that:

a person is said to have a right to what he can earn in fair professional competition: because society ought not to allow any other person to hinder him from endeavoring to earn in that manner as much as he can.<sup>45</sup>

However, when this statement is examined in the context of his commentary on community and duty, a slight inconsistency in his previous argument appears. The inconsistency is the fact that, as noted in the above discussion on Locke, not all individuals have the same access to property and, as a result, the ability of some individuals to accumulate as much as they desire inhibits others from having access to property. Consequently, the development of a moral community is less viable. Mill endorsed unlimited property accumulation perhaps because he construed capitalism as serving the utilitarian end of promoting the greatest amount of individual happiness. Nevertheless, his contribution to the importance of community in liberal thought served to open the liberal discussion beyond the language of individual rights.

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<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 55

Mill argues that at all times governmental power should be limited. In his opinion if government is given too much power it has the anti-liberal potential of tyrannizing over the people. He writes, "the people who exercise the power are not always the same people with whom it is exercised."<sup>46</sup> Mill notes that the representatives of the people may have interests other than that of those whom they represent. In his view this could lead to tyranny. According to Mill if the government is given jurisdiction in the day to day lives of individuals it has the capacity to make decisions that adversely affect the good of the social whole. To support this contention Mill argues that:

Society can and does execute its own mandates: and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.<sup>47</sup>

To avoid social tyranny, Mill proposes a balance. He writes "[T]here is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good disposition of human affairs, as protection against social despotism."<sup>48</sup>

The balance of individual and collective power is essential. It is important for Mill that individuals be connected to the social good, but simultaneously be allowed individual thought and expression. If the balance of negative freedom and community is not maintained, he argues that eventually "individual liberty will probably be as much exposed to invasion from the government as it already is from public opinion."<sup>49</sup> The ideas expressed by Mill, in regard to the need to develop a noble character, coupled with his recognition for the need to balance individual liberty with the social good, makes him a watershed in liberal theory.

Mill did not just assert the rights of the individual separate and apart from the social

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<sup>46</sup>Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, p.72.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p.77.

whole, but rather he recognized and endorsed the need to maintain and develop a strong moral community in which individuals can assert their rights and freedom. As such, Mill marked a significant shift in liberal thought that remains pervasive in liberal discourse. One example of a thinker influenced by Mill's new ideas is Green.

Green is a central figure in the liberal theoretical debate. Green took what was implicit in Mill, in regard to the need for duty and community, and made it more explicit. Although Green does not make any direct reference to being a descendent of Mill's, a strong argument can be made that he carried Mill's liberal contributions forward.

Green extends Mill's liberal argument regarding the need for a strong community. This continuation of the "progressive liberal tradition initiated by Mill by Green is clearly seen in his assertion that "the only good thing is a good will."<sup>50</sup> According to Green, a good will is one in which one's individual will is connected to the good of the social whole. A further similarity between the two thinkers can be witnessed in Green's conception of liberal freedom. For Green "[F]reedom consists not simply in the absence of restraint but in the pursuit of those objects which "good will" presents to us, it consists in obeying the law of our own moral being."<sup>51</sup> Like Mill, Green argues that "freedom is not a negative thing but something positive. It is achieved not through annihilating our "natural impulses" but by uniting them with higher interests, in the realization of one's self as an idea of perfection."<sup>52</sup>

Green carries Mill forward by asserting that self-perfection "can never be realized apart from other individuals ... There can be no individual well-being apart from social well-being."<sup>53</sup> However, as Hallowell suggests, Green diverges from Mill in his belief that "[I]ndividuals derive their conception of what constitutes self-improvement from social morality, from a conception of a common good that is embodied in that morality."<sup>54</sup> Unlike Mill, Green is willing to place more emphasis on the importance of community and the role

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<sup>50</sup>John H. Hallowell, *Main Currents in Modern Political Thought* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1960), p.279.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p.279

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p.279.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p.279

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p.279.

of the state than he gives to negative liberty. For Green, the common good takes precedence over negative liberty for the purpose of maintaining a strong moral community.

As noted above, Mill foresaw that the common good, as the measure of individual happiness, might not always be a good because it has the potential to lead to tyranny, if the government acts to implement its version of the social good. Green dismisses Mill's fear of governmental tyranny as a genuine problem. His disagreement with Mill is made clear in his statement that "[S]ociety teaches us to prefer that which we ought, to that which we would like."<sup>55</sup> Cementing the difference between Mill and Green on the issue of state responsibility and control is Green's contention that the state "is the highest form of society, the completion of the idea of society."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Green argues that "apart from the state the individual can really be said to have no existence as a person."<sup>57</sup> In essence, for Green true individual identity cannot be known without the existence of community.

Along the same lines, Green asserts that individual rights are moot without a community: "it may still be true to say that the members of the state derive their rights from the state and have no rights against it."<sup>58</sup> Notwithstanding the importance Green places on community for individual identity and rights, he still shares Mill's notion of the need for individuals to develop a noble character. According to Green, a noble character is "an attribute of character, in so far as it issued in acts done for the sake of their goodness, not for the sake of any pleasure or any satisfaction of desire which they bring to the agent"<sup>59</sup> Here Green carries Mill's argument of moral utility forward to assert that morality itself is an obligation of the individual that achieves the good of the social whole.

Green argues that the "good" cannot be held to a utilitarian standard as it is in Mill. For Green, the "good" is "founded upon interests which are other than the pure interest in being good, and governed by rules of conduct relative to a standard of goodness other than

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<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, p 279.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p 280.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, p 281.

<sup>58</sup>T. H. Green, *Principles of Political Obligation*, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1921) p 145.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p 30.

that which makes it depend on this interest ... Otherwise the ideal would be an empty one.”<sup>60</sup> Thus Green, like Mill, introduces illiberal terminology into his liberal theory, but much more strongly than does Mill. Green is pivotal in promoting “progressive” liberal thought that asserts the need for a moral community and allowance for state interference in the affairs of the economy, which most significantly earmarks the philosophical tension within the liberal tradition.

In promoting the need for state interference as a necessary means to the common good, Green argues against liberal utilitarianism with which Mill is still linked. Green argues that:

[U]tilitarianism proper, recognizes no vocation of man but the attainment of pleasure and avoidance of pain. The only reason why civil rights should be respected—the only justification for them—according to it, would be that more pleasure is attained or pain avoided by the general respect for them...They do not seek the ground of actual rights in a prior natural right, but in an end to which the maintenance of the rights contributes.<sup>61</sup>

Although Mill criticizes the strict utilitarian calculation of pleasure and pain as a measurement of the social good, his conception of the opportunity to exercise and develop one’s intellectual capacities is predicated on the fact that he believes the exercise of intellectual capacities is something that brings man the greatest amount of pleasure. Green disagrees, for he views the good as something that must be kept separate from the calculation of pleasure. In his view, the moral good is something greater and can only exist in the context of community. As such, it is outside of the purview of individual rights.

Green argues that there are no inalienable rights because “rights vary from time to time and from place to place in accordance with the moral consciousness of the community.”<sup>62</sup> It follows that he conceives no rights save that recognized and supported by

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<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>62</sup>Halloway, p. 282.

the community. This is again markedly different than the conventional liberal conception of natural rights. For Green, instead of having rights to protect the individual from the state, he argues that “[E]very right that an individual has is dependent on the social judgment of its compatibility with general well- being.”<sup>63</sup> He argues that as society progresses toward a more moral ideal, then individual rights will also change. Green’s rejection of natural rights is seen in his statement that:

[N]atural right, as equal right in a state of nature which is not a state of society, is a contradiction. There can be no right without a consciousness of common interest on the part of the members of society. Without this there might be certain powers on the part of individuals, but no recognition of these powers by others as powers of which they allow the exercise, not any claim to such recognition; and without this recognition or claim to recognition there can be no right.<sup>64</sup>

Green completely rejects the idea of natural right and therefore he rejects Lockean liberal thought.

In contemporary liberal societies the issue of individual rights has been debated as to their value to the well - being of the individual and the community. For Green, if rights are no longer useful, they should be changed or discarded. One final influence on liberal thought that Green has had is in regard to his conception of morality, or good. His notion of morality, which is conceived of as a good that exists and is maintained in the context of a community, rather than relying on liberal rights language as the determiner of the good, formally introduced non-liberal language into liberal thought for the purpose of promoting individuals’ access to the “good life.”

In sum, Green’s liberal theory is revolutionary in its scope of influence and perhaps is the most responsible for the philosophical tension in liberal theory. Green chose not to follow Mill’s example for a balance between negative and positive liberty. And more importantly,

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<sup>63</sup>T. H. Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* Introduction by A.D. Lindsay (London, 1941), p.43 in *Main Currents of Modern Political Thought*, p.282.

<sup>64</sup>Green, p.48.

Green advocated a change in liberal terminology, thus adding it to the language of liberal discourse. In placing a strong emphasis on the primacy of the community in determining the moral good of the individual, he also played a prominent role in the justification of social welfare in liberal societies.

Hallowell notes that “[T]he social problems that loomed large in Green’s thought were the problems of: education, temperance, and of poverty in land. In these matters he favored considerable intervention and regulation by the state.”<sup>65</sup> Hallowell continues his argument stating that “Green laid the intellectual foundations for the modern social welfare state, for old age pensions, unemployment insurance, health insurance, and all other legislative schemes designed to promote social security.”<sup>66</sup> All of these public policies have long been a part of contemporary liberal consciousness, which mark the liberal philosophical tension.

Locke articulated the liberal principles of individual freedom, as freedom from external constraints. As a philosophical and political doctrine, his conception of individual freedom has been pervasive in laying the foundations of conventional liberal thought, discourse and practice. However, as demonstrated in the discussion of Mill, liberalism as governed by the principle of negative freedom, was perceived to be inadequate to the fulfillment of an individual and community ideal of a moral good. To solve this problem Mill offered a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of the community. As such, Mill is a watershed in liberal theory.

Going further than Mill, in regards to the moral needs of community, Green chose to eschew the founding liberal principle of negative liberty in favour of community, or more specifically the endorsement of the state as the definer of the rights of man. The liberal suggestions offered by Green have resulted in the opening of a philosophical tension in liberal thought and practice. Following the writings of Locke, Mill and Green, there has

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<sup>65</sup>Hallowell, *Main Currents of Modern Political Thought*, p.286.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p 286

emerged a debate as to how liberal theory should be interpreted and practiced.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **SPENCER-FRIEDMAN: THE OTHER ROAD IN LIBERAL THOUGHT**

The fact that not all liberal thinkers agreed on the interpretation and practice of liberalism resulted in a schism within liberal thought. By the end of the nineteenth century, liberal theory, although remaining the predominant ideology in Western nations, offered two competing doctrines for practice. One doctrine saw and advocated the need for state interventions to promote individual freedom and a strong community, while the other remained committed to a limited government as the best guarantee of individual freedom.

Thus there were two possible roads open in liberal thought and practice. One available road allowed the state leeway in legislation for the promotion of the new positive concept of liberty. From this position liberals were led to stances close to those of social democracy. On the other hand, there were liberals who followed the track of John Locke. These liberals argued that the expanded role of the state posed a danger. Starting from the doctrine of inalienable rights, some liberals sought to preserve these in the face of increased state power.

In the decades following World War Two there was a resolution, of sorts, for the tensions in liberal practice and thought as the “progressives” (T.H. Green and John Maynard Keynes) version of liberalism gained ascendancy. “Classic” liberals, such as Freiderich Hayek and Milton Friedman were perceived only as voices in the wilderness. Despite the apparent victory of “progressive” liberalism the tension in liberalism was never truly overcome. In the early 1980’s the supporters of “classical” liberalism re-emerged to challenge the orthodoxy of “progressive” liberalism. One of the major figures in the resuscitation of “classic” liberalism was Milton Friedman. Yet, Friedman’s liberal claims, far from being fully accepted, also found their critics. Prominent among these was C.B. Macpherson.

Macpherson argued that Friedman's writings were nothing more than the repetition of the arguments made earlier by the classic liberal and social Darwinist Herbert Spencer. The intent of this chapter is to illustrate the points of tension in liberal thought through an examination of Macpherson's criticism of Friedman. Thus it is necessary to conduct an examination of the liberal writings offered by Spencer and Friedman in order to evaluate Macpherson's charge that Friedman is a liberal in the tradition of Locke and Spencer. It is Macpherson's contention that Friedman does not offer a new defense of liberalism but merely reasserts an old liberal position.

In contrast to Macpherson, however, Friedman argues that progressive liberal thought attacks the very essence of liberal freedom itself through the imposition of a large and intrusive state. What becomes apparent in the unfolding of the liberal debate between Friedman and Macpherson is the fact that liberal thought is ensconced in an endless cycle of philosophical debate on the tensions that became apparent during the last half of the nineteenth century.

To substantiate his claim Macpherson asserts that "the first thing that strikes the political scientist about [Friedman's book] *Capitalism and Freedom* is the uncanny resemblance between Friedman's approach and Herbert Spencer's:"<sup>1</sup>

Eighty years ago Spencer opened his *Man Versus the State* by drawing attention to a reversal which he had believed had taken place in the meaning of liberalism: it had, he said, originally meant individual market freedom as opposed to state coercion, but it had come to mean more state coercion in the supposed interest of individual welfare. Spencer assigned a reason: earlier liberalism had in fact abolished grievances or mitigated evils suffered by the many, and so had contributed to their welfare; the welfare of the many then easily came to be taken by liberals not as a by-product of the real end, the relaxation of restraints, but as the end itself. Spencer regretted this without offering any evidence that market freedom was ever more basic, or more desired than the maximization of wealth or of individual welfare.<sup>2</sup>

Macpherson believes that Spencer and Friedman restricted the liberal meaning of freedom and lost all sense of the ethical dimension for liberalism:

the liberals ultimate goal in judging social arrangements...[say] in effect that the liberal is not required to seriously weigh the ethical claims of equality (or any other principle of distribution). let alone the claims of any principle of individual human development such as was given in the first place by liberals like Mill and Green, against the claims of freedom (which to Friedman of course means market freedom).<sup>3</sup>

Macpherson supposes that the liberal claims made by Mill and Green are more conducive than Friedman's to the realization of the liberal end of political freedom and the ethical requirements of liberal democratic societies. What Macpherson sees in the liberal writings of Friedman is nothing other than the reiteration of an outdated view of individual freedom. Therefore he refers to Friedman's defense of classic liberalism as "not a defense but an elegant tombstone of liberalism."<sup>4</sup>

In Macpherson's view Friedman's claim is false that "a free private enterprise economy ... is ... a direct component of freedom."<sup>5</sup> It is false in his opinion because Friedman's postulates are predicated on the fallacious proof that "freedom of the capitalist market is individual economic freedom...and his fallacious defense of the ethical adequacy of capitalism."<sup>6</sup> According to Macpherson, capitalism itself is unethical and for this reason it cannot be defended. Moreover, he argues that far from achieving the liberal end of individual freedom, capitalism constrains individual liberty by forcing individuals to labour for subsistence. In his view individual freedom requires that one be able to surpass subsistence and develop one's intellectual and political capacities. Thus, contrary to Friedman, who asserts that "capitalism is a necessary condition of political freedom..."<sup>7</sup>, he asserts that capitalism serves to truncate political freedom.

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1 C.B. Macpherson, Elegant Tombstones: A Note on Friedman's Freedom in *The Canadian Journal of Political Science* (March 1968, no 1), p. 95

2 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 106 underlined Emphasis mine.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Macpherson disagrees with Friedman and Spencer that a strong interventionist state is incompatible with individual freedom and democracy. He argues in contrast to Friedman and Spencer that government controls in the economy that correlate with some tenets of socialism are a necessary and vital aspect of individual and democratic freedom. Moreover, capitalism is the antithesis to the maintenance and provision of individual democratic freedom that liberalism exists to provide.

Macpherson submits that, according to Friedman, all “controls, or support of, any prices, wages interest rates, rents, exports, imports and amounts produced would all have to go; so too would present social security programs, housing subsidy programs and the like.”<sup>8</sup> What is curious is that these are indeed exactly the same arguments against progressive liberalism that Spencer offered.

The central focus of Spencer’s political writings is the espousal of the merits of limited government and the coercive possibilities of the state facilitated by the legislation of positive liberty. For Spencer, any increase of power and scope of the state is by its very essence illiberal and consequently illegitimate. In order to demonstrate his assertions, Spencer, in his most renowned book, *Man Versus the State*, chose to reexamine and define the proper boundaries of government within a liberal state.

The title of Spencer’s book illustrates his view that man’s freedom requires him to oppose the power of the state. Throughout this book Spencer repeatedly expresses his belief that freedom is a natural and necessary quality of man. However, he also asserts that man’s freedom is fragile if the state is given too much power. For Spencer, as the title of his book suggests, the preservation of freedom resides in man’s continued opposition to the coercive tendencies of the state.

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*Ibid.* p 96

In order for one to be a liberal, Spencer argues that one must first understand the proper boundaries and limitations of the state. He says that, “it becomes of vital importance to know, what institutions are necessary to the prosperity of the nation; to discover the duties of those institutions; to trace the boundaries of their actions, to take care that they perform their functions properly.”<sup>9</sup> For Spencer, outlining the boundaries of the liberal state defines the terms of liberalism and also serves to reinforce his belief that a limited government is the only legitimate form of government and the only form of government that is consonant with liberalism.

To convince liberals that a limited government is necessary for the preservation of individual freedom, Spencer remarks that increased state authority destroys:

the beautiful self-adjusting principle, which will keep all elements in equilibrium; and moreover, that as the interference of man in external nature often destroys the just balance and produces greater evils than those that can be remedied, so the attempt to regulate all the actions of the community by legislation, will entail little else but misery and confusion.<sup>10</sup>

In Spencer’s view, the world and man operate in accordance with specific natural laws. The law of nature, Spencer argues, stipulates that man must be free. Moreover, he states that the law of nature creates a natural equilibrium for man to live in the world. Consequently, Spencer asserts that, not only does an increase in state authority disrupt the natural equilibrium; it unnaturally places constraints on man’s innate freedom, which in turn creates misery in men.

For Spencer, because the equilibrium is natural, it is also a key component of man's freedom. As a result, he argues that any disruption of the natural equilibrium constitutes an evil. Therefore the proper sphere of government, Spencer argues, is to “defend the natural rights of man-to protect person and property - to prevent the aggressions of the powerful on

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p 5

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p 6.

the weak - in a word to administer justice.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, in accordance with these criteria, Spencer asserts that the only just form of government is a limited government. Spencer shares some theoretical postulates with Mill. Their common ground is their belief that an increased role of the state often creates more ills than any good. However, as noted in chapter one, in contrast to Spencer, Mill recognizes the benefit of the state in providing individual access to liberty.

According to Spencer, any degree of state power, beyond protecting negative freedom, results in tyranny. Thus Spencer diverges from Mill. Further, unlike Mill, Spencer contends that any form of legislation other than the protection of man’s natural rights is an injustice. He writes that:

[C]an any individual, whose wickedness or improvidence has brought him to want, claim relief of his fellow-men as an act of justice? Can even the industrious labourer, whose distresses have not resulted from his own misconduct, complain that his natural rights are infringed unless the legislature compels his neighbours to subscribe for his relief? Certainly not. Injustice implies a positive act of oppression, and no man or men can be charged with it when maintaining a negative position.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore Spencer distinguishes negative and positive liberty. This distinction is important in terms of the present discussion, as it demonstrates the existence of a theoretical divide in liberal thought. Of equal importance is Spencer’s dismissal of positive liberty as a just practice of liberalism.

After rejecting positive liberty, Spencer leads the discussion in situating the contemporary liberal debate. For Spencer, justice is negative liberty. To cement this view he asserts that, “[J]ustice comprehends only the preservation of man’s natural rights.”<sup>13</sup> In order to dissuade us from the realm of positive liberty, he writes that the preservation of justice “requires that there be no enactment of any law, unless it can be shown that natural rights have been infringed.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.* p 7.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.* p 9.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.* p 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p 8

Contrary to Mill and Green, Spencer contends that all interventionist laws are unjust because they create more misery than the good that they are legislated to promote. The implication and importance of this position is that misery is created because individual freedom is infringed. Spencer is thus in the Lockean, rather than in the Mill/Green liberal tradition.

As noted in chapter one, Green argues that individual rights can change as society progresses toward a more moral state. Spencer attacks this notion of rights. According to Spencer, all rights are inalienable because they are natural; that is, they are the rights of man as he existed in the state of nature. In his view “a natural right may usually be easily defined. Its boundaries are self-evident.”<sup>15</sup> As such, Spencer argues that any change to these rights is unjust. This is the nexus of Spencer’s argument for a limited liberal state.

However, according to Green, in the late nineteenth century, a large number of individuals did not have adequate access to freedom (as a result of low wages). That so many individuals were prevented from realizing their freedom indicated that not all men had access to their rights. Because of man’s inability to make what he perceived to be real choices Green suggests the need for positive liberty, or a freedom to do, rather than just the negative form of liberty. He advocates positive liberty because negative liberty is without meaning for the poor and the wretched.

For Green, freedom means the ability to do and not merely the right to be left alone. However, in Spencer’s view, natural rights are inalienable, and the only way they can be limited is through the use of external force applied to individuals to prevent them from acting in the manner of their own choosing. Thus for Spencer, negative liberty is the only form of liberty. Man’s natural rights, as the base of justice, require the protection of the individual from the coercive power of the state, and therefore there is no case to be made for the legislation of positive liberty.

For Spencer, since liberal justice is the protection of individual freedom, he can

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.* p.18

argue that morality or justice is the protection of natural freedom. On the other hand, the “progressive” liberal thinkers, such as Green, view “the good” as a principle in the community that requires society to uphold the rights of every individual to live a full and free life. As a result, liberal theory is divided on the issue of the role of the individual and the community.

In order to support the maximization of individual freedom, Spencer asserts that monetary supplements given to the poor erode liberalism because they unnaturally support those who are naturally weak. It is his belief that those individuals who cannot support themselves are not fit to survive, and hence, should be left alone to suffer their plight. This is just for Spencer because, if these individuals are assisted, they will weaken the human race with their “unfit” traits. Thus, he argues that it is an injustice to use state regulation to assist these individuals. This belief is observed in his following question and response:

[C]an any individual, whose wickedness or improvidence has brought him to want, claim the relief of his fellow-man, as an act of justice? Can even the industrious labourer, whose distresses have not resulted from his own misconduct, complain that his natural rights have been infringed? Certainly not. Injustice implies a *positive* act of oppression, and no man, or men can be charged with it when merely maintaining a *negative* position. To get a clearer view of this, let us again refer to a primitive condition of society, where we all start with equal advantages. One part of the community is industrious and prudent, and accumulates property; the other idle and improvident, or in some cases perhaps unfortunate. Can any of the one class demand relief from the other? Can even those whose poverty is solely the result of misfortune, claim part of the produce of the industry of another? No. They may seek commiseration; they may hope for their assistance; but they cannot take their stand upon the ground of justice.<sup>16</sup>

Spencer shows little compassion towards the less fortunate. He accepts private charity, but regards even this form of assistance to the less fortunate as unjust, serving only to weaken the human race. In his opinion, nature has endowed every individual equally, but some individuals, for whatever reasons, are not as productive as others. For him this is a

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9 emphasis in italics mine.

natural situation and the poor should have no special props in the natural contest of life. To grant special supports through the use of state legislation would interfere, not only with the natural rights of man, but also nature itself. For this reason he concludes that state regulation to assist the poor is an act of injustice.

Spencer argues that the greatest accomplishment of liberalism is that it replaced the “Tory” tradition of power, privilege and coercion. In his critique of “progressive” liberalism, he asserts that the exercise of state regulation is nothing other than new fangled “Toryism”. He writes, “most of those who now pass as Liberals are Tories of a new type.”<sup>17</sup> What Spencer means by this label is that some liberals have endowed the state with power and privilege to assist individuals who are unable to provide for themselves. For Spencer, such an exercise of “Toryism” is coercive, unnatural and an act of tyranny against the freedom of individuals.

To counteract what he perceives to be the growing acceptance of “Toryism”, Spencer deems it necessary to restate the fundamental principles of liberalism:

it seems needful to remind everyone what Liberalism was in the past that they may perceive its unlikeness to so called Liberalism of the present. It would be inexcusable to name these various measures for the purpose of pointing out the character common to them were it not in our day men have forgotten their common character. They do not remember that, in one way or other way, all these truly Liberal changes diminished compulsory co-operation throughout social life and increased voluntary co-operation. They have forgotten that, in one direction or another, they diminished the range of government authority, and increased the area within which each citizen may act unchecked. They have lost sight of the truth that in past times Liberalism habitually stood for individual freedom *versus* state coercion.<sup>18</sup>

Spencer hopes that by his reiterating “classic” liberal precepts the trend toward positive liberty in liberal thought and practice can be stopped. What is most pertinent to the discussion at hand is that Spencer attempts to situate liberalism into a definite and unchangeable context.

Spencer is a natural rights theorist. In so being, he holds the belief that the world and

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<sup>17</sup>Herbert Spencer, *Man Versus the State*. (London: Watts and Co.: 1909) p.7.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* p.9.

man are subject to specific laws determined by nature. Thus, for him, man must at all times live in accordance with these natural laws and forces to retain freedom. For Spencer, the determining laws of nature are such that man is and always will be a subject of their control. To support this belief he writes:

[A]ll these evils which afflict us, and seem to the uninitiated the obvious consequences of this or that removable cause, are unavoidable attendants on the application in process. Humanity is being pressed against the inexorable necessities of its new position - is being molded in harmony with them, and has to bear the resulting unhappiness as best it can. The process *must* be undergone, and the sufferings must be endured. No power on earth, no cunningly devised laws of statesmen, no world rectifying schemes of the humane, no communist panaceas, no reforms that man ever did broach, can diminish them one jot. Intensified they may be, and are; and in preventing their intensification, the philanthropic will find ample scope for exertion. But there is bound up with the changes a *normal* amount of suffering.<sup>19</sup>

Spencer uses his belief of man as being determined by uncontrollable external natural forces to attack the use of state regulation as a remedy to man's sufferings. The legislation of laws to mitigate man's suffering at the hands of natural processes is, for Spencer, irrelevant, because man is incapable of escaping this condition.

Liberalism in its pure negative form, for Spencer, is the only just practice because it enables man to freely develop in accordance with the natural process of nature. All forms of suffering, in his opinion, are just one step in the natural progress of man and nature. In applying Spencer's argument it follows that man's power is derived from nature. Those individuals who suffer are the unfortunate by-products of nature and should remain so. The men who endure are those best suited to continue nature's progress.

Spencer attributes the decline of liberalism to the moment that positive liberty "was conceived by Liberal statesmen and Liberal voters as the aim of liberalism."<sup>20</sup> Liberalism declined because some liberal thinkers proposed the need to promote community rather than

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13

remaining focussed on the individual. For Spencer, the promotion of community can only come at the expense of the individual. In such a promotion he claims that liberalism, in its true form, has been fundamentally altered. He writes that the “popular good has come to be sought by Liberals, not as an end to be indirectly gained through the relaxation of restraints, but as the end directly gained. And seeking to gain it they have used means opposed to those originally used.”<sup>21</sup>

The self-appointed task undertaken by Spencer is to rescue liberalism from reform tendencies. In recognizing the growing consensus in liberal thought for positive liberty, he considers its merits. He analyzes the positive liberty argument directed against him. He presents the argument as follows:

you forget, he wishes to say, the fundamental difference between the power which in the past, established the restraints that liberalism abolished and the power which in the present, establishes the restraints you call anti-liberalism. You forget that the one was irresponsible power, while the other is responsible power. You forget that if by the recent legislation of Liberals people are variously regulated, the body which regulated them is of their own creating and has warrant for their acts.<sup>22</sup>

In response to this argument he counters:

In the first place the real issue is whether the lives of citizens are more interfered with than they were; not the agency which interferes with them...In the second place, if it not be objected that the analogy is faulty, since the governing body of a nation to which as protector of the national life and interests, all must submit under penalty of social disorganization, has a far higher authority over the citizens than the government of any private organization has over its members; then the reply is that, granting the difference, the answer made continues valid....Finally... these multitudinous restraining acts are not defensible on the ground that they proceed from a popularly chosen body; for the authority of a popularly chosen body is no more to be regarded as an unlimited authority than the authority of a monarch; and that the true liberalism of the past disputed the assumption of a monarch's unlimited authority, so true liberalism in the present will dispute the assumption of an unlimited parliamentary authority.<sup>23</sup>

In effect, Spencer argues against the strong possibility for the loss of freedom arising from an increase in state authority, regardless of the intentions behind the increase. He thinks it is

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17

more important to recognize the detriments attached to state authority than to attempt to justify tyranny through an appeal to democracy.

Continuing his critique of positive liberty, Spencer returns to the notion of “Toryism” as the only legitimate name for an interventionist state. He writes:

standing as it does by coercion of the State *versus* the freedom of the individual. Toryism remains Toryism. whether it extends this coercion for selfish or unselfish reasons...The altruistic Tory as well as the egoistic Tory belongs to the genus Tory; though he forms a new species of the genus. And both stand in direct contrast with liberals as who were defined in the days when Liberals were rightly so called, and when the definition was “one who advocates greater freedom from restraint, especially in political institutions.”<sup>24</sup>

After labeling any legislator or theorist who advocates the need for positive liberty in the name of individual freedom a “Tory”, Spencer then argues that state intervention is the same as slavery and socialism. It is worthy of note that Spencer refers to positive liberal practice as socialist after he refers to it as “Toryism”. The possible explanation for this apparent inconsistency is that he did not see any real difference in state practice between the two theories or that the coercive effect upon the individual by the two systems of government is the same.

Despite the inconsistency in terms noted above, Spencer was explicit in his delineation of slavery. He defines a slave as “one who is owned by another ... the ownership must be shown by control of the slave’s actions - a control which is habitually for the benefit of the controller.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Spencer argues, a slave “is a prisoner whose life is at the mercy of the captor ... treated as an animal he must spend his entire effort for his owner’s advantage.”<sup>26</sup> For Spencer, “classic” liberalism is the obverse of slavery, and thus, “classic” liberalism must be maintained to prevent the slide of freedom into slavery.

However, from the perspective of positive liberal theory, slavery can also result from

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.* p 19.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* p 32.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.* p 32.

an excess of negative freedom. In a limited liberal market state, individuals are forced to sell their labour in order to earn a minimal wage to enable the owner to maximize his profit. Moreover, merely by being in an economic situation in which one has to sell his or her labour to another, one has lost some of his or her freedom. In having to sell one's labour, one becomes akin to a slave. Using Spencer's words, the worker, through the selling of his or her labour relies on the mercy of the owner to remain alive, and as such lives a life of a slave. It is for this reason that some liberal thinkers support the use of positive liberty to enable individuals access to the realization and enjoyment of freedom.

For Spencer all such thinking is erroneous. He argues that "the changes made, the changes in progress, and the changes urged will carry us not only towards state ownership of land and dwellings and means of communication but state usurpation of industries ... and so will be brought about by the desired ideal of the socialists."<sup>27</sup> Socialism, he contends, will result in the decay of society, because legislators who failed to abide by the past practices of liberalism made mistakes in legislation creating more social problems than were previously present.

Spencer's belief in the determinism of natural forces is reflected in his philosophical association to Darwinism. As noted earlier, he contends that assistance to the less fortunate serves to weaken the human race or more poignantly, promotes "the survival of the unfittest."<sup>28</sup> According to Spencer, "the beneficial results of the survival of the fittest, prove to be immeasurably greater."<sup>29</sup> In his presentation of liberalism he appears to endorse weeding the gene pool of individuals who suffer on the basis that they have proven *unfit*. This is illustrated in his statement that:

[O]f man, as of all inferior species, the law of conformity to which the species is preserved, is that among the adults the individuals best adapted to the conditions of their existence shall prosper most, and that the individuals

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1899), p. 17.

least adapted to the conditions of their existence shall prosper least - a law which if uninterfered with, entails survival of the fittest, and the spread of the most adaptive varieties.<sup>30</sup>

One need not look far to see the practical problem with Spencer's survival of the fittest assertions. In the liberal market he describes, not all those who are wealthy will be able to retain their wealth because the nature of the system is such that wealth is accumulated into fewer and fewer hands. If this type of natural selection were to continue the logical outcome would be a situation in which more and more people will become poor and *unfit* to survive. In short, if this process were to exist, eventually only a few wealthy or fit men would inhabit the world.

Spencer's thoughts on natural liberty are closely related to the Lockean tradition. He believes that limited government is the best and only way to promote and ensure man's natural freedom. For this reason he criticizes "Tory" social policies because they extend the sphere of government, which in his opinion serves to infringe on man's natural liberty. He believes that an extended government inherently destroys liberty by taking away some of man's power and liberty and placing it in the hands of the state. For him, liberalism sought to end these practices. Moreover, his dislike of "Toryism" is also related to his social Darwinistic views.

Spencer regards all men as having equal natural rights. He argues that the state should not in any way interfere with these rights. According to his writings, state assistance to the poor not only infringes on man's liberty, it artificially supports a group of people whose existence limits the liberty of others. For this reason, natural selection, or survival of the fittest is the only way to ensure and promote individual liberty.

Spencer elevates the individual, especially the economic success of the individual as supreme. In so doing, he truncates the importance of community and access to a healthy political and free life. For Spencer, freedom of the individual from the external constraints of government is imperative. In fact, so strong is this conviction that he is willing to go as far as

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natural selection to support his beliefs. As extreme as the theory of natural selection is, especially in its application to human beings, the use of it clearly illustrates his commitment to man's natural freedom. Despite the fact that some of Spencer's assertions are debatable, they add strength to liberal discourse and help fuel the contemporary liberal debate. One of Spencer's most influential successors is American economic philosopher, Milton Friedman.

In situating the contemporary liberal debate, Friedman is a central figure. The similarity that Friedman has to Spencer lies in his criticism of liberal thinkers and politicians who promoted the use of government in the economy for the purpose of enhancing positive freedom. Friedman, like Spencer, views liberalism as synonymous with capitalism. In so doing both submerge politics into the marketplace. However, in his critical examination of "progressive" liberalism, Friedman is much more explicit on the importance of maintaining a liberal open market for the protection of individual freedom. Friedman does not fully share, or express Spencer's Darwinism, but in his belief that economic laws are fixed and naturally create equilibrium a connection to this idea can be made. It is for this reason that this thesis supports Macpherson's claim that Friedman merely restated Spencer. The validity of this claim is relevant to the current liberal debate as it cements the existence of two roads within liberal theory. Friedman's stronger emphasis on the economic freedom of man is evinced in the title of his book, which is *Capitalism and Freedom*.

In *Capitalism and Freedom*, Friedman examines the negative effect of government policies on the freedom of the individual. He asserts that the erosion of individual freedom is attributed to the policies enacted by the American government during the Great Depression. The effect of the depression social welfare policies, he argues, have placed constraints on the free market, which in turn, constrain individual choice of how to live one's life. The depression and post- depression policies are the focus of the majority of his writings.

Analogous to Spencer, Friedman contends that the only way to ensure individual freedom is to maintain a limited government. Friedman argues that, "the preservation of

freedom is the protective reason for limiting and decentralizing government power.”<sup>31</sup> In a similar manner as Spencer, he asserts that state intervention causes more harm than good, regardless of the intentions of the legislators.

The similarity of Friedman to Spencer is evident throughout his writings. Consonant with Spencer, Friedman contends that the meaning of liberalism has changed. Friedman argues that the meaning has changed because “the enemies of the system of private enterprise have thought it wise to appropriate the label.”<sup>32</sup> The enemies of private enterprise, for Friedman, are the same enemies enumerated by Spencer; they are the proponents of socialism. Liberalism proper, Friedman argues, emphasizes:

freedom as the ultimate goal and the individual as the ultimate entity in society. It supported *lassiez-faire* at home as a means of reducing the role of the state in economic affairs and thereby enlarging the role of the individual; it supported free trade abroad as a means of linking the nations of the world together peacefully and democratically. In political matters, it supported the development of representative government and of parliamentary institutions, reduction in the arbitrary power of the state and the protection of the civil freedoms of individuals.<sup>33</sup>

The need for a free market is central to Friedman’s criticism of contemporary liberal theory and practice. This can be seen in his statement that, “in the late nineteenth century and especially after 1930 liberalism came to be associated with a very different emphasis, particularly in economic policy. It came to be associated with a readiness to rely on the state rather than voluntary arrangements to achieve objectives regarded as desirable.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, akin to Spencer, Friedman asserts that this change resulted in “a revival of the very policies of state intervention and paternalism against which classic liberals fought.”<sup>35</sup> What is most interesting about this comment is that it is almost an exact reiteration of that made by Spencer. Friedman, like Spencer, asserts that state intervention suppresses the freedom of the

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<sup>31</sup>Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press:1982) p.4.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p.5.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p.6

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p.6

individual by engendering a dependency of certain individuals on the state.

The threat to liberalism, Friedman argues, is correlated to the increase in state power in the economic affairs of the state. A true liberal, he asserts, is “fundamentally fearful of concentration of power.”<sup>36</sup> His objective is to preserve the maximum degree of freedom for each individual. Consequently, he argues that government should not be assigned any “functions that can be performed through the market both because this substitutes coercion for voluntary co-operation in the area in question and because, by giving it an increased role, it threatens freedom in other areas.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, it can be seen that, for Friedman, capitalist economic freedom is what protects liberal political freedom.

However, a problem arises in practice. For example, if one does not possess economic power, the liberty to buy and sell what one desires, then one cannot fully enjoy political power. An individual who cannot provide for his or her subsistence through the market restricts his or her economic and political freedom. As a result, it can be justified for the state to intervene to ensure that all individuals have economic power to pursue their political power. This is the same problem that Spencer had in his attempt to relocate liberalism.

In the twentieth century it was Keynes more than anyone else who took up Green’s point of view. Friedman contends that it is the use of Keynes’ economic theory that has changed the meaning of liberalism. For Friedman, “Keynes’ political bequest has done more harm than his economic bequest ... whatever the economic analysis, benevolent dictatorship is likely sooner or later to lead to a totalitarian society.”<sup>38</sup> Friedman made this assertion because, in order for Keynes’ proposals to work, a large government bureaucracy needed to be created. Bureaucracy, Friedman contends, increases the power and scope of government and will, if left unchecked, inevitably usurp individual freedom. Friedman was therefore disappointed with the election of Franklin Roosevelt because, in his view, “ever since the *New Deal* a primary excuse for the expansion of government activity at the federal level has

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>38</sup> Milton Friedman, *John Maynard Keynes* in *Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Economic Quarterly* (vol 82: Spring: 1997), p. 22.

been the supposed necessity for government spending to eliminate unemployment.”<sup>39</sup>

Another criticism made by Friedman, in regards to the legislation of welfare policies, is the influence of academics. Friedman comments that:

[T]he members of Roosevelt’s brain trust were drawn mainly from the universities...they reflected the change that had occurred earlier ...from belief in individual responsibility, *lassiez faire* and a decentralized government to belief in social responsibility and a powerful centralized government. It was the function of government, they believed, to protect individuals from the vicissitudes of fortune and control the operation of the economy in the “general interest” even if that involved government ownership and operation of the means of production.<sup>40</sup>

The use of these academics, Friedman argues, turns the government into a form of aristocracy. These are the same sentiments expressed by Spencer. According to Friedman the academics influenced government to change its policy to become more interventionist. For Friedman, like Spencer, the change in the role of government to that of a social planner results in a resurrection of “Toryism” and the demise of liberalism.

The new form of “Toryism”, according to Friedman, reduces freedom of choice and dignity because control resides in the government rather than the individual. Similar to Spencer, Friedman states that the government “will proceed to do the wrong things because the people elected them to do the wrong things.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, Friedman, like Spencer, places greater value on individual freedom than on democracy. For both Friedman and Spencer, justice is the protection of negative rights.

To promote his view of justice Friedman suggests the merits of entrenching a balanced budget amendment into the American Constitution. Such an amendment, he argues, is “very much in the spirit of the Bill of Rights. Their purpose [the framers of the constitution] was to limit the government in order to free the people. Similarly, the purpose

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<sup>39</sup> Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, p.75. The *New Deal* was the name given by Roosevelt for his depression policies.

<sup>40</sup> Friedman, *Free to Choose*, p.83.

<sup>41</sup> Milton Friedman, *Politics and Tyranny*, (San Francisco: Pacific Institute for Public Policy; 1984), p.33.

of the balanced budget amendment is to limit the government and to free the people.”<sup>42</sup> For Friedman, liberalism is a theoretical and practical theory that values individual freedom as its fundamental principle. The well - being of the community, then, can only be realized through the protection of individual freedom, which for him is synonymous with free market capitalism.

In Friedman’s view, individual economic freedom is threatened by state regulation in the form of social welfare programs. He writes, “social programs do not achieve their objectives; the evils they were intended to repair stand out. In the private sector, failure means less money to spend. In government, failure means more money to spend.”<sup>43</sup> In his view welfare programs never achieve their goals and thus should never be implemented. Again, this is similar to Spencer’s observations.

For Friedman, government spending does not solve the problems it intends to solve. What is more, it often generates more problems. This is what prompted him to state that, “the road to Hell is often paved with good intentions.”<sup>44</sup> According to Friedman, a continued increase in government spending, due to the printing of more money by the FRS, leads to an increase in inflation because more money is being put into the economy. This, he argues, creates inflation and therefore increases prices. In capitalist theory, an increase in prices leads to an increase in unemployment because individuals will have less to spend and invest.

The feedback effect of government created inflation in Friedman's view causes the need for government to print more money. For Friedman, this is the inevitable result because inflation creates greater unemployment, which in turn will result in the need for more welfare and unemployment spending by the government. This is similar to the example given by Spencer regarding the negative effects of government housing. For this reason Friedman concurs with Spencer that government spending results in tyranny and the net loss of individual freedom.

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<sup>42</sup>Milton Friedman, Tyranny and the Status Quo, (New York: Harcourt Brace; 1984), p.58.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p.40

<sup>44</sup>Milton Friedman, Inflation and Unemployment, (London: The Institute of Economic Affairs; 1977), p.9.

The economic premise behind government spending, Friedman states, is founded on false assumptions. In his view government spending creates more harm than good and for this reason should be curtailed. Using a similar argument as Spencer, he contends that the realization of the good is “an individual and not a social matter”.<sup>45</sup>

The use of state regulation to remedy social problems, Friedman argues, leads to higher taxes and erosion of individual freedom. He shares the same perception as Spencer that individual liberty is tied to negative freedom. On this agreement in liberal principles Macpherson’s statement about Friedman is correct. The community, in the opinion of Spencer and Friedman, should never be granted moral authority over the individual because to do so engenders a loss of individual freedom. Furthermore, the end, or good of the social whole, for Friedman and Spencer, should never be used as a tool for government to promote the freedom of the individual. Such practices, they contend, result in tyranny and slavery. Thus, they espouse the necessity of a limited government for the preservation of individual freedom.

Friedman acknowledges the need for some government regulations to monitor the free market. However, on the whole, in his analysis of liberalism, he offers a recapitulation of Spencer’s argument albeit without making reference to social Darwinism. Thus, Macpherson’s comment has been substantiated. Friedman made more explicit Spencer’s liberal contentions through his strict focus on free market capitalism as the legitimate form of liberalism. In so doing, he has been the central figure in situating the parameters of the contemporary liberal debate.

Spencer and Friedman present economic freedom as legitimate liberalism. For them, the use of positive liberty is anti-liberal, and as such, must be stopped. Both perceive that an emphasis on the social health of the community as an end of liberalism is inherently destructive to man’s negative freedom. The arguments presented by Friedman and Spencer initiated a great deal of discourse in liberal thought and practice. Their arguments have been

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<sup>45</sup>Friedman, *Free to Choose*, p.97

both contested and accepted by many liberal thinkers and practitioners and so liberal thought is divided.

The most important contribution to liberal thought by Spencer and Friedman is the fact that they have resuscitated “classic” liberal principles to give them a new and more vital life. The continued support of “classic” liberal principles has spawned a large amount of literature from “classic” and “progressive” liberals alike as to what is the best form of government to promote the liberal end of freedom. The increase in literature on this subject has also served to broaden the debate. At the forefront of the contemporary liberal debate, Macpherson challenges Friedman on his understanding of individual freedom.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RE-ASSESSING THE PHILOSOPHICAL TENSIONS IN LIBERAL THOUGHT: TRANSCENDING OR ACCEPTING THE TENSIONS?**

Since its inception liberal theory has undergone several structural and theoretical changes. The inclusion of positive liberty into liberal theory, as noted in chapter three, has had a profound effect on the interpretation and practice of liberalism. One of the greatest influences has been liberalism's alliance with democracy. Democratic theory has played a key role in furthering the contemporary liberal debate. The alliance with democracy has actually changed the conception of liberalism among liberal thinkers such that liberalism is no longer seen to be separate from democracy. In short, liberalism is now commonly conceived as liberal democracy.

Because liberalism has developed into liberal democracy it follows that the liberal debate has also become a debate about democracy. "Classic" liberals, such as Friedman and Spencer, now argue that an interventionist state weakens both liberalism and democracy because it limits freedom of choice. As discussed in the previous chapters, "classic" liberals submit that liberal democracy requires freedom of choice. "Classic" liberals believe that it is the market that best guarantees individuals the necessary degree of freedom. On the other hand, "progressive" liberal thinkers, such as J.S. Mill and T.H. Green, argue that this conception of liberal democracy is flawed because it undermines the importance of the good of community.

The philosophical tension within liberal thought has recently culminated into what appears to be an endless repetition of debate. The debate or tension is recycled over the interpretation of liberal rights and the good of the individual and community. Essentially, the entire focus of the tension resides in determining the appropriate means to achieve the liberal end of individual freedom. Some liberal thinkers, such as Milton Friedman and Herbert Spencer, contend that individual freedom, as an individual right, is the highest good. This chapter argues that the inherent philosophical tension in liberal thought is most likely

irresolvable and therefore requires a more thorough examination of the theoretical underpinnings of liberal thought to consider the possibility for the development of an alternative approach to liberal thought that supports both the sanctity of individual freedom and the value of community.

Regardless of their particular liberal stance, all liberal thinkers regard the end, or good, of liberalism as the freedom of the individual. The interpretation of freedom in liberal thought is the primary source of the ongoing philosophical tension within liberal thought. The “classic” liberal interpretation of freedom is the ability of individuals to act without state interference or external constraints. “Progressive” liberal thinkers, on the other hand, regard freedom as the ability to act, that is, the ability to overcome economic and other constraints. Thus far it may appear that there is little difference between the two conceptions of individual freedom. However, where the philosophical tension arises in liberal thought is the “progressive” liberal allowance for state intervention in the economy as a means of promoting the freedom of the individual juxtaposed with the narrower conception of “classic” liberalism.

Ronald Beiner is among the commentators on liberalism who seek a different discourse, one that avoids the quest for the appropriate means for guaranteeing freedom. It should be stressed that Beiner is one of several liberal critics who seek an alternative focus for liberalism. His commentary on liberalism is, however, quite poignant and for this reason his writings serve as an apt illustration of some of liberalism’s shortcomings in resolving its inherent tensions.

According to Beiner “[T]o pose a political controversy in the language of good is to open up, rather than close off, issues in which we can all debate and which we can weigh up in various ways; to resort to the invocation of rights is to preclude all debate, for the rights appealed to are meant to be non-negotiable.”<sup>1</sup> Beiner further argues that:

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald Beiner, *What's the Matter With Liberalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press:1992), p.89.

[T]he widely assumed if not absolutely prevailing view within contemporary liberal society is that there is no need to adjudicate between competing substantive notions of the good. Indeed it would be prejudicial to our rights and liberties as individuals to do so. Everyone is free to determine what are his or her preferred objects of consumption, and the function of the political system is to guarantee fundamental rights in the context of consumer choice. Such a system does not discriminate between competing notions of what is good; it is neutral.<sup>2</sup>

Beiner criticizes contemporary liberalism for its celebration of individual consumer choice above that of the well-being of the social whole. Beiner's criticism of liberal democracy is that "it neither encourages nor requires citizens to be ... active or ... knowledgeable in their command of political affairs."<sup>3</sup>

One of the central tenets of liberalism is individual choice. It is for this reason that liberalism individualizes the idea of the good life, and thus, in a sense, denies the possibility of creating the "good" community. Basically, within liberal thought there is a belief that any common standards or goals are potentially tyrannizing over individual freedom because they limit the range of personal choice. Liberals such as Friedman and Spencer hold such a view. Some liberal thinkers like Mill, Green and C.B. Macpherson, have attempted to include a place for community within liberal theory through the notion of positive liberty. Such a notion gives some power to the state to promote the exercise of individual freedom. However, the essential problem remains to be resolved.

The "good" promoted by "classic" liberalism is consumer choice of goods. The consumer choice of goods ranges from material goods to ethical goods. The commonalities of these goods are that they are all available to be consumed. The choice of goods available to individuals is determined by market availability. "Classical" liberalism allows the greatest degree of latitude for consumer choice by refusing to adopt a common ethos, or ethical standard for individual judgment. According to Beiner, "under liberal dispensation, the ethos is - lack of ethos; individuals in this society are habituated in being insufficiently habituated.

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<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p.9

This is the liberal paradox.”<sup>4</sup>

The liberal truncation of community not only limits individual access to freedom, but also produces an illusion of freedom and choice. For Beiner, “the official ideology of liberalism is of course diversity - the rich multiplicity of different conceptions of the good. But when one surveys the liberal reality, what one sees is more and more sameness - of tastes.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Beiner observes that, “such is liberalism, with its shopping mall culture-where one has hundreds of shops to choose from, all of which sell the same junk.”<sup>6</sup> He makes a similar criticism of the liberal practice of diversity that Macpherson makes in his critique of Friedman outlined in chapter three. In reality, it can be argued that there is little diversity within liberal society in regards to acquisition of goods. In the political as well as the economic realm individual choice or political expression is limited by what is offered.

Similar to Beiner, Macpherson argues that liberal-democracy has become nothing more than consumerism of ideas and goods. In his opinion, liberal democracy has undermined its democratic principles. He believes that democracy is the power of the lowest and largest class over the highest class. According to Macpherson, the ability for the lowest classes to have more political power than the highest class represents the inherent moral nature of democracy. He regards democracy as enabling man to do, exert and enjoy his capacities, much in the same fashion as does Mill. However Macpherson differs from both Mill and Beiner by asserting that liberal-democracy is incapable of meeting the moral essence of democracy and man and submits that liberal-democracy must be transcended by nonmarket democracy. In his opinion, a nonmarket state, as he describes it, can provide man with his full developmental powers, which can be transferred into full democratic political participation.

According to Macpherson, the overarching problem with liberal-democracy is that it is structured on the capitalist market, which serves to absorb all of the productive power of

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>5</sup>Beiner, *What's the Matter with Liberalism?*, p.23.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.23

the labourer. Furthermore, he argues that in market society the value that the labour added to the product is also lost from the worker and transferred to the owner. If the worker did not have to sell his labour, as he suggests would be the situation in a nonmarket society, the worker would have an opportunity to benefit from his labour in terms of intellectual enjoyment and enhancement. He describes the benefit to the labourer in a nonmarket society as “the satisfaction value plus the value which its application added to the materials on which it was applied.”<sup>7</sup>

Macpherson argues that man in a nonmarket society is able to maximize his capacities. He also argues that man is also a member of a community that works towards encouraging and maintaining the maximization of the capacities of all members of that community. Moreover, he believes that man, in a nonmarket society, will no longer be the self-interested atomistic individual that he is forced to be in market society. To support this he writes that “society is also a positive agent in the development of capacities ... every individual’s capacities are socially derived and ... their development must also be social.”<sup>8</sup>

Macpherson contends that the manner in which society acts as a positive agent in a nonmarket society is in the legislation of laws that ensure that everyone has access to the means of life and access to the means of labour. His conception of nonmarket society has many theoretical similarities with the “progressive” liberal postulates of Mill and Green, but he carries their ideas a step further to suggest the abolition of market society. His critique of liberal-democracy hinges entirely on its capitalist market structure rather than just liberal thought itself.

For Macpherson, the actualization of the moral nature of man and democracy is the formation of a nonmarket society. In a nonmarket society, Macpherson asserts that man’s current inert capacities can be entirely maximized. He argues that in a nonmarket political

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<sup>7</sup>C. B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays In Retrieval* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1973) p. 67.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid* p. 57.

society man will not “be treated as a means to others’ ends, but as an end in himself.”<sup>9</sup> The other significant fact of nonmarket society, which he claims, as compared to market society, is the reassertion of a viable political community.

In Macpherson’s opinion, man can only live a full human life when he is able to maximize his developmental capacities. This requires that he not have to transfer his developmental capacities for a wage. In short, in his view, man can only live a full human life in a nonmarket society. He describes nonmarket society as one in which “the exercise of human capacities by each member of a society does not prevent other members exercising theirs.”<sup>10</sup> Hence he shares Mill’s conception of man as well as his notion of community for the development of man’s capacities. Macpherson differs from Mill in his dismissal of the capitalist market. Mill, as noted in chapter two, remains committed to the workings of the capitalist market with some state regulations. In Macpherson’s opinion, state regulation in the capitalist market may compensate for some of capitalism’s inadequacies, but in no way solves them all. It is for this reason that he recommends nonmarket society.

The purpose of Macpherson’s analysis of market society is to demonstrate that it is incapable of fulfilling the moral requirement of democracy and individual freedom. He repeatedly stresses that capitalist market relations detract from, rather than contribute to, the enhancement of man’s developmental power. In so doing it is his belief that men will rally together to transcend market society. To support his contention that the market is incapable of allowing man to live a full human life he asserts:

[A]s soon as you make the essence of man to be the acquisition of more things for himself, as soon as you make the essential human quality the striving for possessions rather than creative activity you are caught up in an insoluble contradiction. Human beings are sufficiently unequal in strength and skill that if you put them into an unlimited contest for possessions, some will not only get more than others but will get control of the means of labour to which the others must have access. The others then cannot be fully human even in the restricted sense of being able to get possessions, let

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 56

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 62

alone the original sense of being able to use their faculties in purposive creative activity.<sup>11</sup>

In essence, Macpherson argues that the market restricts the majority of men from having the opportunity to develop and exercise their intellectual capacities. In so doing, he contends, liberal market society *de facto* relegates the majority of men to that of a slave. As can be seen he fully accepts and absorbs Mill's conception of man as the underlying principle of nonmarket society.

Man's moral power, Macpherson argues, consists of "at least of his capacities and his strength and skill. But these cannot actually be exerted without something to exert them on."<sup>12</sup> In his view market society prevents the majority of men from access to the enjoyment and use of their intellectual faculties and skills because they do not have access to productive resources in which they can exert and develop their skills. He argues that this is the case because most men in liberal market society must sell their labour power to another, which he considers to be an involuntary contract.

Macpherson regards the inclusion of democracy into liberal thought as the initial means of transcending market society. Democracy had this effect, he contends, because the moment that the democratic franchise was extended to all classes "it began to abridge market freedom. The more extensive political freedom, the less extensive economic freedom."<sup>13</sup> In his view political freedom is the genuine end of liberalism. Moreover, he argues that only political freedom can allow man to live a full human life.

For Macpherson political freedom requires a high level of citizen participation that liberal market society discourages. It is his opinion that political participation is essential for man to live a full human life because it facilitates a strong political community as well as enables man to develop and enjoy his intellectual capacities, both of which give dignity to man. Thus, he believes that economic freedom is irrelevant, or at the very least subordinate to

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<sup>11</sup>Macpherson, *The Real World of Democracy*. (Montreal, CBC Enterprises: 1965), p 54

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p 41

<sup>13</sup>Macpherson, *Essays In Democratic Retrieval*, p 99

man's political freedom.

Beiner agrees somewhat with Macpherson that liberalism truncates man's inherent moral capacities. He also agrees that liberal thought and its connection to capitalism is a source of many of its problems and philosophical tensions. Beiner goes further than Macpherson in his criticism of liberalism to include diversity. In Beiner's opinion, liberalism is inconsistent on its principle of diversity. He considers that this inconsistency is caused by its lack of clear moral guideposts that help support individual diversity. Without such guideposts he argues that liberal pluralism (diversity) is false. What is needed to engender authentic diversity, according to Beiner, are "moral and intellectual resources to distinguish between phony pluralism from real pluralism - resources that are missing in contemporary liberal philosophy."<sup>14</sup>

For Beiner, the problem with liberal pluralism is that it really does not exist in practice. This creates a problem for individuals living in liberal society. He notes that there are a number of options open to individuals that give the illusion of choice, but the actual choices available to individuals are quite limited. For instance, one can choose to buy many different cars, but ideas and policies are limited. In Beiner's view the choice of policies or ideas becomes even more truncated due to the dearth of moral guidelines that allow individuals a real choice in behaviour or policy. In making this statement he notes the need to look back and examine moral theory outside of the liberal context. His criticism of liberal society is similar to Macpherson's disenchantment with "Equilibrium Democracy" Macpherson describes "Equilibrium Democracy" as follows:

1. That democracy is simply a mechanism for choosing and authorizing governments, not a kind of society or a set of moral ends. 2. That the mechanism consists as a competition between two or more self-chosen sets of politicians or elites arranged in political parties which the votes will entitle them to rule until the next election. 3. The voters role is not to decide the issues and then to chose the representatives who will carry out those decisions: it is rather to chose the men who will do the

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<sup>14</sup>Beiner, *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit*, p.7.

deciding.<sup>15</sup>

The most striking feature of this model is that citizen participation is discouraged and limited to the periodic vote. Macpherson asserts that democracy in this model, “is simply a market mechanism. The voters are the consumers, the politicians the entrepreneurs.”<sup>16</sup>

Macpherson argues that this model jettisons citizen participation for political efficiency. In this model, as he presents it, democratic decision-making power is transferred from the individual to an, albeit elected, elite decision-making body. Consequently, Equilibrium Democracy, in his opinion, rejects promoting man’s developmental and intellectual capacities for the purpose of maintaining simple and efficient democratic choice. He argues that this model collapses the role of political man into that of economic man. In his view Equilibrium Democracy makes man into “essentially a consumer and appropriator: it assumes also that the things different people want from government—the demands for political goods—are so diverse the only way to of getting government decisions to meet them ... is the entrepreneurial system.”<sup>17</sup>

However, Beiner disagrees with Macpherson’s postulate that a nonmarket society is a useful way to eliminate the problem of diversity or pluralism in liberal society. Contrary to Macpherson’s critique of liberal-democracy being primarily a result of its intimate relationship to capitalism, Beiner argues that replacing one economic system with that of another does not resolve liberalism’s inherent tensions and problems. He asserts that “the choice of one economic system rather than another is logically subordinate to the choice among alternative visions of a moral order.”<sup>18</sup> In his view something more is required to escape the liberal problem other than the regulation of the economy.

Despite Beiner’s dismissal of economic restructuring as a possible liberal solution, both Beiner and Macpherson contend that democracy must be raised to a higher standard. This consonance in thought is evinced in Beiner’s assertion that “my intention as a liberal

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<sup>15</sup> C. B. Macpherson, *The Life and Times of Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Beiner, *Philosophy in a Time of Lost Spirit*, p. 8.

critic would be to criticize liberalism in the name of democracy, but at the same time to elevate democracy to a rather demanding standard.”<sup>19</sup>

Beiner criticizes liberalism’s commitment to consumer choice and the language of rights. He argues that the issue of abortion offers an apposite illustration of how the liberal language of rights is an inappropriate mechanism for resolving important political decisions. In his view the commitment to individual choice as a model for decision-making serves to foster political conflicts. He asserts that:

[O]n issues such as abortion there are opposed points of view grounded in fundamentally different moral and religious commitments that will either be abated by an agreement to disagree ... or proceed with unremitting hostility and anger. But why should this be posited as the appropriate model for political disagreement? Or rather, doesn’t the fact that this suggests itself as an appropriate model of political disagreement in general raise doubts about the political soundness in liberal society?<sup>20</sup>

Beiner argues that far from being a necessary and useful method for conflict resolution the liberal language of rights tends to enhance political disagreement:

[E]ven in a case such as a policy toward abortion-where there is admittedly the need for a *modus vivendi* - it is very unclear what neutrality might signify. What would count as a neutral policy in a conflict where one side sees abortion as such as evil and the other sees it as an inalienable prerogative of women? In such a case, one could only approach a resolution by changing the moral fabric of the terms in which the issue is debated, not by pretending to a spurious neutrality.<sup>21</sup>

Beiner asserts the need to objectively step outside of the liberal framework of individual rights and introduce an alternative vocabulary.

Beiner criticizes liberalism for submerging what was formerly discussed as good into the language of rights. He suggests that political disagreement on issues such as abortion

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* p 9

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* p 65.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* p 67

would have a better opportunity to be resolved if they were approached from the perspective of the good rather than liberal right. He argues that “rights as ordinarily understood cannot be central to political philosophy because they do not constitute an independent moral claim.”<sup>22</sup> In his view rights “ have no independent force of their own.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, he suggests that the notion of good is beyond the individual and has an independent force on its own which can affect the individual in his or her moral decision-making. He further argues that it is more useful to use good as a reference than right because “the positing of a right does not offer a set of considerations that can be weighed up against a set of alternative considerations. Rather the positing of right seems to put a halt to the weighing of such considerations.”<sup>24</sup>

Expanding on the problem of liberal rights, Allan Bloom criticizes liberal thinkers for replacing what was once divine authority, what he considers the embodiment of the good, with individual rights. In Bloom’s view the replacement of divine authority endowed individuals “with rights, free and equal, no longer treading the enchanted ground where rights and duties were prescribed by divinities, now recognizing no authority higher than their own wills.”<sup>25</sup> He argues that relying on no other authority than one’s own will in determining moral decisions facilitates widespread moral turpitude. It does so, in his opinion, because, like Beiner, he believes that the liberal language of right stymies one’s ability to properly consider notions pertaining to the good.

Beiner suggests that one way to resolve the liberal problem posed by individual rights is to examine pre-liberal moral thought, or more specifically the thoughts expounded by the Greek philosophers. He notes that this suggestion will be received as illiberal, but he believes that such an inclusion is necessary. Beiner asks whether there are any contemporary theorists who are “willing to be bold enough, *illiberal* enough, to admit that taken as a whole, the moral civilization that defines contemporary liberal society is not terribly impressive?”<sup>26</sup> He

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<sup>22</sup>Beiner, *What’s the Matter With Liberalism?*, p.82.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p.82

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p.86

<sup>25</sup>Allan Bloom, *Giants and Dwarfs*, (New York: Touchstone Books; 1990), p.209.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p.7

also suggests that in order to “penetrate to what liberalism means, we must not just look to the mechanical politics of the liberal state, but to the spiritual politics of the liberal soul.”<sup>27</sup> In the context of this discussion, the soul is the embodiment of morality. It is what enables man to properly judge actions and take decisions in a manner that is in accordance with the good. Thus, it is what enables individuals to build and sustain a community of consensus and diversity.

In his explanation of the relationship between the individual and the community Beiner finds common ground with Hannah Arendt. Arendt criticizes liberal thought for its emphasis on the private life of the individual. According to Arendt, the human condition is one where “*men not man* live on the earth and inhabit the world.”<sup>28</sup>

For Arendt, it is through being with *men* that one derives political power. Power is a natural condition of man, in her view, because the human condition is one of plurality. She argues that plurality is “the condition - not only the *conduit sine qua non*, but the *conduit per quam* - of all political life.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, she contends that not only is plurality man’s and woman’s natural or human condition, it is the very essence and the means to engaging in a political life. In her view, for man to live a free political life he must have access to a political realm that consists of others who talk, deliberate and act. In her opinion the need for community is so necessary to being human that without it man has no real power and is prevented from being a political being.

Beiner regards plurality and community in the same way as Arendt. He describes political community as “the reciprocities of consciousness which are achieved and sustained by equals who discourse together publicly for the purpose of social decision and action.”<sup>30</sup> He asserts that community, or the public realm, is one in which “citizens in a democratic society inhabit a shared world of political concerns that affect all in common.”<sup>31</sup> As noted

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 7. *Italic emphasis is mine.*

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup>Beiner, *What's The Matter With Liberalism*, p.33.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

above, he does not believe that contemporary liberal society currently provides such a space. He argues that liberalism in reality is more homogeneous than pluralist.

In Beiner's view "when one surveys the liberal reality, what one sees is more and more sameness - of tastes, of cliched perceptions of the world, of the glum ennui with which one reconciles oneself to the monolithic routines of our world."<sup>32</sup> He argues that liberal pluralism is superficial. What passes for pluralism is nothing other than a myriad of consumer choices of the same product in different forms. He argues that liberalism provides individuals with nothing other than sameness in the guise of choice.

Beiner's criticism of liberal democratic practice is markedly similar to Arendt, his liberal critic and predecessor. According to Arendt, ancient Greek political practice offers an excellent starting point for the critic of liberalism as both a theory and practice. She notes that for Greeks a political realm was requisite to the sustainability of both individual distinction and community.

One of the major problems with liberal thought, for Arendt, is the absence of a viable political realm in which to act and speak politically. In her opinion, the political realm "rises directly out of acting together, the 'sharing of words and deeds'."<sup>33</sup> She asserts that the political realm is always possible because it is something that is created the moment that "men are together in the manner of speech and action."<sup>34</sup> However, she also argues that although the space is always possible it "does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them - like the slave ... do not live in it."<sup>35</sup>

The point emphasized by Arendt is the striking absence of a political space. In her view the political realm "depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see, hear and testify to their existence."<sup>36</sup> The relevance that this examination has to the critique of liberalism is the fact that liberalism, in its current form,

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p 23

<sup>33</sup>Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.198.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p 199

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p 199

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p 95

places constraints on the ability of individuals to appear and act with others. In so doing it truncates one's ability to understand one's reality and self because this reality and understanding is predicated on being with others. For the most part liberalism has been concerned with the promotion of the individual as a solitary actor, who limits and interprets his interactions with others from the perspective of rational self-interest.

The truncation of community engendered by liberalism is evinced in the quality of items produced in liberal society. Karl Jaspers argues that:

being mere materials obtainable at a moment's notice in exchange for money, they lack the aroma that is produced by personal effort. Articles of consumption are supplied in a mass and are used up, their refuse being thrown away: they are readily interchangeable, one specimen being good as another. In manufactured articles turned out in large quantities, no attempt is made to achieve a precious quality, to produce something whose individuality makes it transcend fashion, something that will be carefully cherished. An article which thus satisfies ordinary needs arouses no particular sense of affection, and is only felt to be important if it should chance to be unobtainable.<sup>37</sup>

The same description can be made of men in liberal society. With public opinion pressuring individuals to conform to the political trend, individual distinction is undermined, or deemed unacceptable because it goes against the prescribed political norm. In liberal society, nothing is a constant. Thus, wealth, employment, and opinions held by men can change. In opinions, rarely is there real quality placed in forming an opinion because no one opinion is held to be any better than that held by another.

In the language of liberalism each material item and each person hold specific utility. Once that utility is used that material is quickly discarded for another. It is difficult to see the formation of a strong community and friendship among citizens when all are reduced to utility. In this sense, each item and individual is consumable and therefore everything in liberal society is eventually reduced to self-interest.

For Arendt, the political realm is the realm of work. With the emergence of liberalism, and the merging of the private and public space the difference between work and

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<sup>37</sup>Karl Jaspers, *Man in The Modern Age*. (New York: Double Day Books: 1951), p.46.