

## ABSTRACT

An Examination of Philosophical Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, policies were quickly evolving and adapting to meet a variety of needs. One concern when developing these policies was ensuring that these policies were moral and just. This thesis examines what different moral philosophies, namely Libertarianism, Utilitarianism, and Liberalism, believe is just and how these theories were and could be applied when creating COVID-19 policies. Policies concerning non-healthcare essential workers, single mothers, and school aged children are specifically addressed and examined since many individuals in these groups were disproportionately affected by the constant change in policies. Examination of these theories reveals that Liberalism is the most applicable in modern day because of its emphasis on creating policy with the greater good in mind.

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AN EXAMINATION OF PHILOPOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

During the Spring of 2020, I was enrolled in Social World II at Baylor University when classes switched to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This course examined different ways of thinking and how different political thought has influenced modern day society. Due to the nature of the course, it was possible to apply the ideas regarding different political thought to other current problems, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic. By using these different ideas, I was able to directly witness how different thought processes can manifest when creating policy.

Throughout this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic is used to better understand how different philosophies such as Libertarianism, Utilitarianism, and Liberalism can be applied to modern day societies. There are many moral and political philosophies that work together to influence how the government operates and how policy is developed. By examining individual philosophies, it is possible to better understand how modern society has taken ideas from a variety of philosophies when creating modern policies. It is also possible to develop conclusions on which philosophies have been the most successful in the past and may be most relevant in the future. Therefore, the end goal of examining these philosophies is to determine which one is the most just and applicable. In the future, these ideas can be applied to more than just the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter one outlines the COVID-19 Pandemic and provides information regarding policies that were enacted throughout the United States from March of 2020

through March of 2022. Throughout this two-year period, there was a lockdown that affected many countries, mask mandates were enacted, and a vaccine and booster shots were developed and distributed. This chapter then goes on to introduce three groups who were particularly disadvantaged throughout the pandemic: non-healthcare essential workers, single mothers, and school aged children. Non-healthcare essential workers were chosen because many of the people that fall into this category have compounding factors that inhibit their ability to work remotely and force them to continue risking their own safety to provide for themselves and their families. Single mothers were chosen because they faced especially difficult situations trying to find childcare so that they could continue working. Finally, school aged children were chosen because of the significance of this population in the future. Many children lost the structure which school provides throughout their developmental years. This loss of structure can have countless effects on their futures and the future of the country.

Chapter two discusses Libertarianism. Libertarianism is emphasizing the idea of maximizing personal freedom. To maximize individual freedom, Libertarians advocate for as little government interference as possible. Libertarian COVID-19 policies supported policies lifting restrictions such as the mandatory quarantine and mask mandates and instead letting individuals decide what they were comfortable with. Although this idea may have been applicable at one point in time, it would be difficult to implement now as the federal government has become instrumental in providing jobs, creating laws, and enacting regulations that citizens now expect within the United States.

Utilitarianism emphasizes the importance of the greater good. Utilitarianism acknowledges that decisions will not be able to satisfy everyone. Therefore, when

planning or creating policy, utilitarians argue it is just to do what would promote the most good and create the most happiness. This system therefore lends itself to assigning values to potential outcomes and calculating which outcome would be the most favorable.

Therefore, when applying Utilitarian thought to COVID-19 policy, it is important to realize that one policy will not be sufficient for all groups. Therefore, policies should be created to maximize the happiness of as many groups as possible.

Like Libertarianism policy, Liberal policy also emphasizes the importance of personal freedom, and similarly to Utilitarian thought, Liberal policy emphasizes assisting the disadvantaged to increase overall stratification. These ideals therefore support policy that allows justified taxation to better support the marginalized in society. Liberals argue these policies are justified because everyone would agree to these policies if they did not know their position in society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Background on COVID-19

The COVID-19 Pandemic was caused by a virus that could easily spread throughout the air and was highly contagious. Government leaders had to act quickly, implementing new policies to protect their citizens. Throughout the pandemic, there were three main ways the government attempted to slow and stop the spread of COVID-19: nationwide quarantine, mask mandates, and development and distribution of a vaccine. Although these mandates affected everyone, certain groups were disproportionately affected. Some examples of groups that were particularly affected by these policies are essential workers, single mothers, and school aged children.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus took the world by storm in 2020, resulting in a world-wide shutdown, mask mandates, and the quick development of a new vaccine. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The virus spreads through small aerosol particles from an infected individual's nose and mouth to other individuals in close contact. Most people infected with the virus experience mild symptoms such as a runny nose, a cough, or loss of taste and smell. However, many cases still result in hospitalization and require the use of advanced treatments such as high flow oxygen or a ventilator. People most at risk for hospitalization are the elderly and those with chronic underlying medical conditions (World Health Organization, 2022). Since COVID-19 is a virus, antibiotics and other medications are ineffective in treating this disease. Therefore, COVID-19 patients are treated for their symptoms in hopes to minimize the effects of the



virus. This approach is effective for many patients experiencing mild symptoms, however, it is still unclear if there are any lasting effects, such as lung damage caused by the virus. Since the beginning of the pandemic, an abundance of research has been conducted to learn about the sequence of the virus, how the virus is transmitted, and how to treat patients infected with the virus. As the virus continues to spread and mutate, more research is being conducted to learn how to create more effective treatments and provide guidelines to the public.

As the virus started to spread, little information was known regarding the severity of the virus. Since 2019, information regarding the severity of the virus, how the virus spreads, and possible treatments has been researched and published. Throughout this time, policies also continued to change based on what information as present about the virus at the time. The following lists some of the most important milestones throughout the pandemic according to the Center for Disease Control. On December 12, 2019, the first symptoms of COVID-19 appeared in a hospital in Wuhan, China. By January 7, 2020, Chinese officials identified a coronavirus as the source of the symptoms. At this point, they were simply able to identify one virus and the shape of the virus. Coronavirus describes a large family of viruses that has crown-like projections coming from the surface. (*Coronaviruses* | NIH, n.d.) Other coronaviruses include MERS and SARS (*Coronaviruses* | NIH, n.d.). January 17, the CDC started screening passengers on flights from Wuhan, China for COVID-19 symptoms and on January 18, the United States officially confirmed its first coronavirus case. Throughout the rest of January, the coronavirus was declared a public health emergency, the World Health Organization was able to confirm human to human spread of the virus, the United States White House

created a coronavirus taskforce with Alex Azar as the head, and that task force announced travel restrictions that would take effect on February 2, 2020. At the beginning of February, the Food and Drug Administration approved an Emergency Use Authorization pack for diagnostic testing and the name for the novel coronavirus was announced as COVID-19. As February progressed, Italy announced a nationwide lockdown. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Within three days, the New York school systems shut down and within six days, the first human trial for a vaccine started. The first Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) bill was passed by the United States Senate on March 26th. On March 28, hospitals started the emergency use of hydroxychloroquine. Hydroxychloroquine became a very prominent topic throughout the pandemic as many citizens wanted to expand the use of this drug. However, with little research, many medical professionals did not feel comfortable authorizing large scale use of this drug.

The Center for Disease Control recommended wearing a mask outside of the home on April 3, 2020, and by April 10, the United States had reported the most COVID-19 related deaths. Despite the continued spread of the virus, Georgia, Alaska, and Oklahoma decided to partially reopen their states and there were other states that never enacted a lockdown order. At the end of April, then sitting President Donald Trump launched an initiative to develop a vaccine as quickly as possible. On May 9, the United States' unemployment rate rose to 14.7%, the highest it has been since the Great Depression, and on May 28, the United States reported over 100,000 COVID-19 deaths. The rate of food insecurity continued to increase as many people were unable to find jobs and public resources were overwhelmed. On December 11, 2020, after 9 months, the

Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was approved by the Food and Drug Administration. By December 18, the Food and Drug Administration approved use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, instilling hope in many Americans. As vaccines were starting to be administered, the first variant of the virus was discovered in late December. At the time, it was unclear if the vaccine would be effective against the variant strains of the COVID-19 virus. On February 21, 2021, the United States death toll surpassed half a million people. On March 8, the mask mandate was lifted for fully vaccinated individuals making it difficult for businesses to ensure that all unvaccinated individuals were wearing a mask. By March of 2021, the United States had administered over 100 million vaccines and social distancing guidelines for children changed from six feet to three feet, making it possible to have more children in a classroom again. On August 23, 2021, the Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine was FDA approved, and on November 5, President Joseph Biden announced that private companies have until January 3 for all their employees to be vaccinated (CDC, 2022). Throughout 2022, most states and cities have returned to pre-pandemic conditions at schools and workplaces and have eliminated the mask mandate. This is just a brief overview of the complex events that occurred since December 2019 and is provided to give insight to many of the governmental policies and philosophies that were enlisted throughout the pandemic.

As seen in the series of events that have occurred up until this point, the United States government, the World Health Organization, and the Center for Disease Control have announced a variety of recommendations and mandates attempting to limit the spread of COVID-19. Zhang and Warner published a study near the end of 2020 that examined shutdown, reopening, and mask mandate policies, and how those policies

affected the COVID-19 infection rate. As seen in this study, there were three main policies put in place in order to slow the spread of COVID-19; nationwide quarantine, reopening, and mask mandates (Zhang and Warner 1). This study was published before vaccines were readily available and therefore was unable to assess the effectiveness of vaccines. Nationwide quarantine was the initial response of most governments as COVID-19 started spreading. Throughout the quarantine, mask mandates required that all individuals that did leave their house for an essential purpose to wear a mask. As the nationwide quarantine started to be lifted, the mask mandates remained. The vaccine became widely available mid-2021, which resulted in many companies requiring the vaccine to continue to enter their business. These three policies have helped decrease the spread of COVID-19, therefore helping keep communities safer and making it more difficult for the virus to mutate and continue to spread.

As COVID-19 continued to spread, many countries declared nationwide shutdowns. The goal of these shutdowns was to decrease the spread of COVID-19 by limiting the amount of person-to-person contact. It was predicted that social distancing prevented around 61 million cases of COVID-19 from January 2020- March 2020, and that without intervention cases would have been 67 times greater (Zhang and Warner 2). Although nation-wide shutdowns did decrease the spread of COVID-19, it also highlighted other issues in the country such as the increasing unemployment rate and the increasing food insecurity. Once the nationwide quarantine slowly started getting lifted, there was an increase in infection rate. Many experts recommend a 50 day shut down followed by a 30 day relaxation period to prevent a spike in cases when reopening (Zhang and Warner 9). However, the lack of planning resulted in reopening guided by

political policy rather than a decrease in infection rate. Many politicians were worried about the economic well-being of their states as they saw the unemployment rate increasing and their citizens becoming restless. The nationwide quarantine was therefore only a temporary plan to help decrease the initial spike in cases and to provide researchers with more time to develop effective protocols and policies for when people returned to work and school.

The mask mandate played a significant role in the pandemic after the country started to reopen. As the number of active cases begins to decrease in many states, mask mandates are still prevalent in many public settings. This is because it was found that, “mask mandates have a larger effect in reducing COVID-19 infection growth rates than shutdowns after 21 days” (Zhang and Warner 9). This means that based on infection rates, mask mandates were the most effective way to decrease the spread of COVID-19 21 days after a lockdown mandate was implemented. This evidence shows that wearing masks and following local mandates does effectively help slow the spread of COVID-19. A disposable mask currently costs around \$0.58 to make and sells for \$1-\$7 dollars depending on the demand (Kayar 2). This low-cost intervention allows many employees to return to work while staying safe. Simple surgical masks proved to be the simplest and most accessible way to help slow the spread of COVID-19 while allowing individuals to return to their daily lives.

As the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna two dose vaccines were approved in December of 2020 and Johnson and Johnson one done vaccine was approved in February of 2021, many became hopeful that there would be decreased social distancing and mask mandates. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines were revolutionary

because of their use of mRNA instead of a dead or weaker version of the virus. This technology has been researched since the SARS outbreak and just needed to be adapted to fit the COVID-19 virus. The mRNA vaccine works by providing the body with the genetic material necessary to make the spike proteins that are present on the COVID-19 virus (CDC, 2021b). The body's own cells will then display those proteins which in result activates the body's immune system to create antibodies against the virus. This type of vaccine does not change or interact with the body's DNA in any way. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine, on the other hand, works in a more traditional way. The Johnson and Johnson vaccine contains a modified virus that cannot replicate in the body. When this modified virus is introduced into the body, the body creates an immune response so that the body has all of the cells necessary to fight another exposure to the virus (CDC, 2021c). Like other vaccines, both types of vaccines have been proven to prevent the virus from spreading and growing, therefore preventing how frequently the virus can mutate into a new strand. As more and more studies review the effects of the COVID-19 vaccine and continue to prove its safety, more people are willing to become vaccinated. The vaccine continues to provide the most hope allowing the nation to fully reopen.

Throughout the pandemic, there were certain populations who were unable to participate in the nation-wide shutdowns. This population was composed of essential workers such as healthcare workers, food industry employees, postal workers, and more. Essential healthcare workers are defined as all paid and unpaid workers that are at high risk for exposure to SARS-CoV-2 because of their work-related duties that must be performed at proximity to the public or other co-workers. This definition includes certified nurse assistants, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, hospital

technicians, nurses, physicians, therapists, and more (CDC, 2021a). Many of these workers were unable to see their families and were faced with the reality of treating an exponential number of critically ill patients. The increased number of patients required many healthcare professionals to work extended hours without the proper equipment. To ensure they did not infect their family members, many healthcare workers would quarantine at a different location and were unable to see their loved one for extended periods of time. Since the pandemic started, healthcare professionals have been forced to work with limited resources for extended hours, therefore being directly exposed to the COVID-19 virus.

Along with essential healthcare workers, there were a variety of other workers who had to continue to work through the pandemic to provide other necessary resources to their communities. Essential non-healthcare workers are workers who are needed to maintain critical infrastructure and continue critical services and functions (CDC, 2021a). This group is primarily frontline workers who are at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 because they are required to be close to the public or their coworkers. This category includes restaurant workers, janitors, police officers, and many others. Many of these jobs are low paying making it difficult for their employees to take time off. This directly affected the minority communities as minorities are more likely to work in the low paying, essential non-healthcare positions. Essential non-healthcare workers provided many important services throughout the pandemic and were also more likely to be exposed to COVID-19.

Working, single mothers have faced numerous unique challenges throughout history. Recently, single mothers have been forced to sacrifice time with their children to

make a livable wage for their family and be taken seriously by their companies. A study conducted in 1985 showed that 70% of single mothers were always worried about money. The study concluded that the rhetoric used in the United States would bring others to believe that there is a great deal of concern for single mothers and their families, but in reality the lack of affordable and trustworthy childcare makes it difficult for single mothers to accomplish as many achievements as their male counterparts in the workplace (Quinn & Allen, 1989). This study acknowledges the shift in American rhetoric to support single mothers but concludes that the support they receive is still not enough to allow them to advance their careers. Affordable childcare is a necessity for single mothers to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Available childcare has been a challenge single-mothers have faced for decades that has made it difficult for single mothers to advance their careers and therefore provide for their families.

As the COVID-19 pandemic worsened and schools and daycares were forced to shut down, working, single-mothers were faced with the challenge of finding reliable childcare. From the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic to May 4, 2021, 2.3 million women left the labor force. In August of 2020, the Census Bureau found that 19.6% of unemployed adults were not working because of lack of childcare arrangements. Women aged 25-44 were almost three times as likely to say they couldn't work due to the lack of childcare options (Zou, 2021). This study shows how single mothers have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as they are forced to leave their jobs to provide their children with safe care as many childcare facilities have closed due to health concerns. Single mothers who are fortunate enough to be able to maintain their jobs and work remotely from home are still at a greater disadvantage than two parent



households. Households with children have seen an increase of 27 hours a week in domestic chores like childcare (Zou, 2021). Families with a two-parent household can distribute this work between spouses to accommodate work schedules whereas single mothers are constantly required to arrange their work schedules around the needs of their children. The lack of safe childcare and the added difficulties placed on families throughout the pandemic makes it difficult for single mothers to balance being a mother and employee which has contributed to the increased unemployment rate in single mothers.

Not only were single mothers at a disadvantage compared to two parent households, but studies also show, they were worse off than single fathers. The loss was even worse for single mothers of young children, who lost 16% of jobs they held in February, compared with a 6% drop for single fathers (Henderson, 2020). This could be due to a variety of factors such as availability of childcare, place of employment, and societal expectations. For whatever the reason, this obvious discrepancy in expectations for single mothers compared to single fathers continues to show how difficult it is for single mothers to balance caring for their children while also advancing their career.

Before the pandemic, many fast-food workers expressed concerns about unsafe working conditions. According to a study conducted at the University of California Los Angeles fast food workers faced three types of problems. First, fast food workers were at higher risk for forced labor, workplace violence, harassment, and wage theft. Second, many fast-food restaurants use a franchise model that incentivizes labor violations. Third, low wages of fast food workers makes it difficult for them to meet their needs and are consequently also enrolled in a government safety program (Huang et al. 4) Not only

were fast food workers not making a livable wage, but many were also not being compensated for the unsafe conditions they were being forced to work in. These pre-existing conditions in fast food restaurants made it difficult for their employees to advance their career as they were constantly working paycheck to paycheck. The unsafe conditions of fast-food restaurants before the pandemic made employees feel unsafe and made it difficult for many employees to move to higher paying positions or careers.

During the nationwide quarantine, fast-food workers continued to work as their place of business was considered a non-healthcare essential business. This means that their places of employment could still require them to physically come to work, despite other challenges they may be facing in their life such as having to take care of children or parents. Current fast-food conditions do not support employees who may be at high risk for contracting COVID-19 or for employees who may be taking care of high-risk family members. Economist, Zhao, stated that a slight increase in pay will not make at-risk employees feel like it is safe to return to work (Nguyen 3). Although many restaurants increased their employees' pay during the pandemic, at risk employees or employees that needed to take care of their family still could not justify returning to work. This put these employees at an obvious disadvantage to the rest of the workforce as they needed to start looking for remote jobs as job availability continued to decrease due to employers decreasing their number of employees to save money. Statements from former fast-food employees provide insight into their decision to quit their jobs during the pandemic. A former Chipotle employee stated that many customers do not follow safety precautions and that the employees' responsibilities have dramatically increased while their pay did not. A former Taco Bell employee provides another explanation for resigning from his

fast food job by explaining that the management team reduced the number of hours he was working without explanation (Nguyen 4). These stories are just a few of the reasons many fast-food employees decided to resign during the pandemic. Many employees felt like their management team did not value the contributions they made to the company and therefore felt their skills would be better suited in other positions. Fast food employees did not adequately compensate their employees for the conditions they were required to work in, and as a result many fast-food employees decided to quit their jobs and were left without a reliable source of income throughout the pandemic.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, public schools were already facing problems such as oversized classrooms and lack of resources. Research from 2019 showed that 17% of Texas citizens believed that low teacher pay was the largest problem facing the Texas school system and another 17% believed that lack of school funding was the largest problem facing public schools (University of Texas Austin, 2019). These problems create environments that make it difficult for children to learn. As of 2019, the average teacher in the United States made \$59,000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). These compounding problems therefore have created a teacher shortage, not only in Texas, but throughout the nation. Teacher shortages directly lead to overcrowded classrooms and lack of funding can make it difficult for students to have access to all necessary materials and resources they may need throughout their education. Funding and teacher salary has been a persistent problem in the United States public school system, and these problems continue to impact the quality of education children receive.

In March of 2020, schools moved to online learning to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This transition, however, made it difficult for teachers to ensure students were staying on track and required that parents and caregivers become more involved in their child's education. The Office of Civil Rights prepared a report concerning the impacts of COVID-19 on education. The report covers a variety of problems including impacts of the overall school system structure, disparities faced by students of color, disparities faced by students with disabilities, and more. Students faced problems during the pandemic include lack of resources to necessary learning materials, unsafe living conditions, and increased food insecurity. These problems all affect a child's ability to learn and therefore can have serious complications in the future. As school aged children start to return to the classroom, students with fewer at home resources will be at a disadvantage compared to their peers. These disadvantages can directly affect their future learning, leading to more problems in the future. The problems faced by school aged children throughout the pandemic may have lasting effects on the teachers and students as they try to return to normal instruction.

## CHAPER THREE

### Libertarianism

When considering the role the government should have in making laws and regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic, libertarians suggest the government should interfere as little as possible to ensure that the government is not infringing on the liberty or freedom of any individual. In fact, “Libertarians favor unfettered markets and oppose government regulation, not in the name of economic efficiency but in the name of human freedom” (Sandel, 2008). Therefore, libertarianism favors little government interference, not only in COVID-19 policies, but in all aspects of government. Economically, this means the government cannot impose taxes or participate in redistribution of wealth. Socially, this would imply that the government cannot make laws imposing or restricting any belief system, meaning there would be no regulations on things such as marriage, abortions, or firearms. Milton Friedman published *Capitalism and Freedom*, in which he argued that political freedom could not exist without private property and economic freedom (Boaz, 1997). Libertarianism seeks to maximize individual freedom by limiting the role of the government. Therefore, the ideal libertarianism government, in terms of today, would be fiscally conservative as to decrease government spending and socially liberal to not impede on anyone’s beliefs.

Like many political and moral theories, libertarianism has greatly evolved throughout history. The start of modern-day libertarianism began around 25 years after the World Wars and the Progressive Era. Immediately following World War II, many

Americans supported the growing government and were excited at the prospect of increased government involvement to help assist the many individuals who had been greatly affected by the war and were struggling to make a living. However, two decades later, the support for increased government decreased and the popular opinion shifted against this ideology (Boaz, 1997). The increased government spending could clearly be seen after World War I when the United States plunged into the Great Depression. To combat the lack of financial opportunities during this time, President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal to provide citizens with programs to provide for necessities. The New Deal lasted until the start of World War II.

The modern-day Libertarianism movement started to gain popularity in 1962 when Milton Friedman, an economist from the University of Chicago, published *Capitalism and Freedom*. In this work, “he argued that political freedom could not exist without private property and economic freedom” (Boaz, 1997). This means that to truly independent of any political constraints, an individual must be able to own their own property and decide what they want to do with that property. If an individual does not own their own property, they will be confined to others and the government, therefore never having political freedom. This idea along with Friedman’s newspaper articles and television appearances, made him one of the most popular Libertarians of the time. This popularity allowed Friedman to spread Libertarian ideas and appeal to the public’s growing interest in reducing the power of the government. The 1960’s were a time when the popular opinion started to shift from increased government involvement to decreased government involvement therefore providing an environment where Libertarian theory could easily spread.

Robert Nozick was an American philosopher who was born in 1938. Nozick's work, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* helped spread Libertarian ideas. Nozick's most popular idea was his description of the minimal state. According to Nozick's ideas a minimal state is "limited to the narrow functions of protection against force, theft, [and] fraud, enforcement of contracts, and so on, is justified; that any more extensive state will violate persons' rights not to be forced to do certain things, and is unjustified" (Boaz, 1997). The idea of the minimal state was revolutionary at the time as the government was already involved in regulating many aspects of daily life. The minimal state would therefore be difficult to implement as private businesses would need to be developed in order to replace most of the government programs that many citizens already relied on.

The minimal state was formed upon the idea that the government should only have as much power as every individual in a society would agree upon. Therefore, a minimal state is defined as "A state that is limited to the protections of rights of person, property, and contract" (Mack, 2018). These are the duties of the government because it is believed that these conditions, the protection of rights of person, property, and contract, would be naturally agreed upon by all citizens. Protection for these rights will naturally form because "Anarchy cannot prevail because each person will recognize that some will try to violate the rights of others. Enforcement and punishment will be necessary, and specialists in these tasks will emerge" (Buchanan, 1975). Individuals given the responsibility to protect individual freedom would naturally become specialized, and distinct positions in these protections would emerge. The other responsibilities that the government currently holds such as regulating food, education, and transportation would now be privately owned. Government deregulation would eliminate taxes, and therefore

allow for individuals to then be able to decide where they want to spend their earnings. This idea creates a very individualistic culture where the rights of the individual are valued over the community. The minimal state aims to protect an individual's rights by providing them with the choice of where to spend their earnings and preventing the government from interfering with their beliefs and desires.

To enforce the minimal state, there needs to be funding to enforce individual freedom and punish those who infringe on another's freedom. Some Libertarians suggest that taxation would naturally be agreed upon to protect these rights. Nozick, however, "does not impose taxation - even to fund its protective activities" (Mack, 2018). Nozick acknowledges that true libertarianism would not allow the government to infringe on an individual's liberty and freedom by taking part of their earnings. Therefore, Nozick proposes that these protective duties should also be privatized and those wanting protection must pay a fee to the company. Nozick proposes that funding the minimal state still does not justify infringing on an individual's rights and therefore should be voluntarily paid for by everyone.

As previously mentioned, many libertarians also believe that these protective duties are justification for taxation. Justification for taxation follows the following reasoning: "If the dominant association taxes individuals—seizes some of their financial assets without their consent—but provides compensating benefits for each of those individuals in the form of protective services, the association's conduct will be perfectly permissible" (Mack, 2018). Therefore, taxation would only be justifiable if there were benefits for everyone. This system of taxing all individuals creates a more consistent system of protection. In Nozick's system, enforcement agencies would only be able to



respond to problems for an individual who is paying, whereas with taxation, enforcement agencies would be able to respond to all calls and concerns.

All libertarian policies and beliefs stem from the idea that as autonomous individuals, everyone can care for themselves without the intervention of the government. Sandel summarizes Nozick's points from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* by stating, "He begins with the claim that individuals have rights 'so strong and far-reaching' that 'they raise what, if anything the state may do'" (Sandel, 2008 p.62). These ideas therefore once again emphasize individual liberty and freedom. Therefore, ideally, this would mean that everyone is motivated to work because they know that they will be entitled to keep all the earnings of their own work. This also means that if an individual wants to make more money, they would be able to do so by working more. Therefore, unlike other moral philosophies that promote redistributive justice where individuals are encouraged or required to surrender some of their freedom, Libertarianism ensures that an individual's freedom is of the utmost importance. In Libertarianism ideology, freedom, particularly economic and personal freedom, is guaranteed.

There have been many objections to libertarian ideology. In fact, Michael Sandel, a political philosopher, and Harvard Law professor, makes five objections to Libertarianism. These objections are that taxation is not as bad as forced labor, the poor need the money more, others contribute to an individual's success, citizens of the state have a voice in taxation laws in a democracy, and success is part luck (Sandel 66-69). As seen previously, Libertarians may disagree on whether taxation should be allowed for the protection of basic rights. Sandel is implying that both no taxation or minimal taxation are not enough, and that taxation is acceptable when it is agreed upon through a

democratic system where the citizens are able to vote on their laws. These objections therefore work together to explain that although a lack of government regulation may maximize personal freedom, it is not something that society would agree to because it is not truly just and there are too many compounding factors when determining one's success.

One of the most common objections to Libertarianism is Sandel's third objection that others contribute to an individual's success. The most common example of this is that many people pay to go see LeBron James as he is one of the best basketball players in history. Libertarians argue that he should receive all the earnings from his games as he is the reason that people are coming to watch the games. However, this is not realistic as LeBron James would not be able to play basketball without his coaches, teammates, and the staff who is there to assist him. Therefore, although LeBron James may be the reason people are going to the basketball games, the other individuals have a part in his success and therefore should be compensated. Not only did others play a role in LeBron James' success, other factors that can only be accounted for by luck, such as his height, athletic ability, and the era he was born in, also play a significant factor in his success. This idea can also be applied to other aspects of life. For example, a businessman with a promising idea needs the help and resources of others to help achieve his idea. Although he was the one with the idea, the people that assisted him should also be fairly compensated for their work and time. There are many objections of libertarian policy as outlined by Michael Sandel. Most of these objections deal with the fact that libertarian policy focuses too much on the individual and not enough on the society.

As the COVID-19 pandemic worsened and mask and vaccine mandates started becoming commonplace, the American Libertarian party made many statements of their stance. In response to President Biden's September 9th speech outlining a six point plan to address COVID-19, the Libertarian party made the following statement: "Outdoing his previous vaccine mandates for Federal government employees, Biden also announced that healthcare workers who work with patients on any type of Federally-funded healthcare plan (Medicare/Medicaid), any teachers who are a part of any Head Start program, as well as ALL government contractors, regardless of their industry, must be vaccinated or undergo weekly testing (at a cost yet to be determined) as a condition of their employment. This is entirely unacceptable, and we shall not comply" (Bilyeu, 2021). The Libertarian party rejects this plan for multiple reasons. First, libertarian policy believes that the government cannot force an individual to receive a vaccine or undergo COVID-19 testing as it requires time and can go against an individual's wishes for their body, therefore infringing on their freedom. Second, libertarians believe that the government should not be funding vaccines and COVID-19 testing as individuals cannot decide if they want their money to fund these projects. The American Libertarian Party ended their statement by saying, "The Libertarian Party has been pro-choice on everything since its founding, and we will continue to fight for your freedom every time the state threatens it. We are not government property" (Bilyeu, 2021). This final statement summarizes the American Libertarian party's belief that personal autonomy is of the utmost importance, and therefore, every individual should have the choice to get the vaccine or COVID-19 tested but should not be required to.

The American Libertarian party provided insight on how libertarians would address the complex problems associated with COVID-19. Although the Libertarian Party is not an exact manifestation of libertarian ideology, it provides a good starting point to examine policy. When it comes to single mothers, the Libertarian Party does not express a need to assist these mothers. Section 1.6, Parental Rights, in the Libertarian Party's Statement of beliefs states, "Parents, or other guardians, have the right to raise their children according to their own standards and beliefs, provided that the rights of children to be free from abuse and neglect are also protected" (Libertarian National Committee, 2018). This statement makes it clear that libertarians believe that a parent should be allowed to raise their child in whatever way they see fit if the child is safe. The statement however fails to acknowledge what would happen if a parent were unable to provide for their children. In the case of COVID-19 many single mothers lost the ability to find childcare for their children when they went to work. According to libertarian policy, this would not have been a problem as childcare facilities would not be required to shut down and would have only closed if that's what the patrons of the facility wanted. Therefore, if those paying for the service wanted the facility to stay open, they would be able to, and the mother would be able to continue to work. This outlook fails to address what would happen if the mother contracted COVID-19 and was unable to work.

When considering how the libertarian party would have addressed front line workers, it is important to understand the libertarian viewpoint on employment. According to the Libertarian Party, "Libertarians want all members of society to have abundant opportunities to achieve economic success" (Libertarian National Committee, 2018). This means if a front-line worker feels uncomfortable, they should have another

opportunity that will fit their wants and desires. For example, if a place of work did not require their customers to wear masks and this caused an employee to feel unsafe, they should be able to find another job that provides this safety.

Finally, when considering school aged children, the policy remains constant. The Libertarian Party states, “Libertarians advocate free-market education where parents, teachers, and students, not the government, should make their own choices on education” (Libertarian National Committee, 2018). Similarly, to places of work, parents, children, teachers, and staff should decide what is best for a child’s learning environment. If everyone agrees that it is important for a child’s health to shut down the school and learn virtually then that is what should happen. However, if someone believes that hands-on learning is more important than social distancing, they should have the option to provide that for their child.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Utilitarianism

During a time like the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of the governments, employers, and other large facilities is to minimize the negative side effects. Many policies were enacted that aimed to ensure minimal exposure to COVID-19. This is because it was almost universally agreed upon that the poorer quality of work from students and employees is more favorable than an entire school or workplace contracting the virus and either becoming seriously ill or completely unproductive. There was also an emphasis on staying at home to protect at-risk populations such as those who are immunocompromised, elderly, or have preexisting health conditions. This emphasis on caring for others aligns with Utilitarian thought very well. Utilitarians believe in maximizing the good and minimizing the bad. Good and bad can be defined and measured in a variety of ways. Some associate good with happiness and bad with sadness and anger. Bentham described the good and the bad as pleasure and pain and noted four areas where one can experience pleasure and pain: physical, political, moral, and religious (Bentham, 1789). Throughout this chapter, the good and the bad will simply refer to happiness and sadness. There are also many ways to approach this idea of maximizing the good and minimizing the bad. One common one is to view everyone as equal and then do what makes the most amount of people the happiest or what causes the least amount of sadness. For example, one person's anger with staying at home during the pandemic is offset by the happiness an immunocompromised person feels when their

community is showing that they are actively trying to help them. There can also be different levels of good and bad. Looking at the previous example, the individual's anger with staying at home would be offset and overcome by the life that is saved from the immunocompromised individual not needing to leave their home. Under a utilitarianism view of the pandemic, ways to maximize happiness and minimize pain would require for there to be a way to measure the good and bad associated with lockdown policies, mask mandates, and vaccine trials.

Utilitarian thought can be identified throughout history however it was not fully described until the nineteenth century. During this time, society was focused on ensuring the wellbeing and comfort of the upper class, so classical utilitarians including Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill worked to create a philosophy that could reform policy and maximize the happiness of all citizens. It is believed that, "If anything could be identified as the fundamental motivation behind the development of Classical Utilitarianism it would be the desire to see useless, corrupt laws and social practices changed" (Driver, 2014). The emerging application of utilitarian ideas to policy required classical utilitarians to first articulate these ideas. The first philosopher to do this was Jeremy Bentham. John Stuart Mill explained his interpretation of utilitarianism shortly thereafter, effectively establishing Bentham and Mill as the classical fathers of utilitarianism. With the work of Bentham and Mill, utilitarianism first developed as a philosophical political theory that could be used as a tool when assessing the fairness of certain laws and policies in the 18th century.

Bentham's philosophical theories differed from those of his predecessors and other existing philosophical theories, namely psychological egoism, because he believed

that overall happiness should be maximized, despite how it affects an individual. This definition implies that good actions are defined based on their effects. This is to say, “It isn't so much that there is a particular kind of action that is intrinsically wrong; actions that are wrong are wrong simply in virtue of their effects, thus, instrumentally wrong” (Driver, 2014). Unlike previous philosophers who stated there were certain situations that were always wrong or always right, Bentham believed in evaluating a situation and then making a decision that would promote pleasure and minimize pain. This belief therefore focused less on the morality of people and more on the morality of specific actions. The nature of Bentham’s philosophy therefore requires a way for an individual to decide how to maximize the happiness and pleasure of not just the individual making the decision, but overall.

The idea of maximizing pleasure implies there is a way to measure the pleasure or pain of each action. This characteristic is unique to utilitarianism and can be difficult to numerically define. According to Bentham, pleasure and pain are to be measured by its intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, nearness or remoteness, fecundity (producing the same effect later), purity (producing the opposite effect later), and its extent (Bentham, 1789). To use these considerations when making a moral decision, values need to be assigned to each category. The sum of pleasure and the sum of pain can then be added up, and if the value of pleasure is greater than the value of pain, the action can be considered moral. However, adding up values in every situation is difficult and unrealistic, so Bentham believed individuals should be able to mentally note these parameters and consider them when making a moral decision.



John Stuart Mill, another classical utilitarian, believed that there were different levels of pleasures. This is different from Bentham as Bentham believed that there were no pleasures that were innately better than others. Particularly, Mill distinguishes between higher and lower pleasures. Mill states,

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. (Mill, 1998)

Mill then goes on to explain that those who have experienced higher pleasures such as existing as a human over an animal or being educated over being uneducated would all agree that they prefer the higher pleasures. Higher pleasures are therefore classified as those that increase intelligence or skill. Therefore, both Bentham and Mill agree that actions should be taken to maximize happiness and pleasure and minimize sorrow and pain. Mill however suggests considering the quality of the pleasure, a feature Bentham does not consider, when deciding what moral decision to make.

Utilitarianism's consideration of all individuals promotes policies that advocate for those who may otherwise be ignored. It does this by ensuring that everyone is viewed with the same value, regardless of race, gender, or social class. This therefore allows individuals and groups whose voices may otherwise be ignored to have a say in government and the development of policies. Therefore, "Utilitarianism claims to offer a science of morality, based on measuring, aggregating, and calculating happiness. It weighs preferences without judging them. Everyone's preferences count equally" (Sandel, 2008 41). Ideally, this equality before the law allows for greater happiness and pleasures because it ensures equal representation. Equal representation would reduce

corruption as groups that are overrepresented in politics would be barred from creating legislation that disproportionately affects minority groups since legislation would be empirically calculated. This would therefore prevent large, wealthy corporations and groups from passing policies that would only benefit them, allowing them to become more powerful and prosperous. Utilitarianism, therefore, promotes equality as no one opinion has more weight than others, making it possible to develop policy that benefits groups and individuals who are usually ignored.

As previously mentioned, utilitarianism is unique in the fact that it is possible to assign value to everything to quantify different decisions. However, "By caring only about the sum of satisfactions, it can run roughshod over individual people " (Sandel, 2008 p.37). For example, this could mean that the death of an individual would be favored if the other individual's pleasure was stronger (i.e. there were many people who would feel pleasure with that person dead). Therefore, utilitarianism can result in the decrease in value of human life as it becomes an expendable asset. When taken to the extreme, utilitarianism can result in the devaluing of human life.

When applying utilitarianism theory to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to consider policies for specific situations. To truly maximize happiness and minimize pain it is important to realize that different communities may benefit from different policies and that there is not one, universal solution. The article *Utilitarianism and the Pandemic* addresses utilitarian considerations when implementing the lockdown. Since the lockdown is directly related to the problems single mothers faced throughout the pandemic and how school aged children may be affected, it is important to quickly address. According to this article, utilitarian considerations include saving the greatest

number of lives, length of life, quality of life, outcomes of treatment and lack of treatment, social benefit, and responsibility (Savulescu et al., 2020 623-625). Most policies throughout the pandemic focused on the first point, saving the greatest number of lives but did not consider the rest of these points. Two points especially important to Libertarian arguments are length of life and quality of life. Length of life is important to Utilitarians because those with greater projected life spans will be more affected by these policies. Quality of life applies not only to those who contracted COVID-19 and will suffer the effects of the illness, but also those whose lives were indirectly impacted by COVID-19 through policy. The quality of life of those who were not directly affected by COVID-19 became a topic of discussion as rates of depression and anxiety significantly increased during the pandemic and lockdown. Therefore, when making decisions, utilitarians consider the quality of life of at-risk populations, those who were hospitalized due to COVID-19 complications, and those who were minimally affected by the virus itself and more affected by the policies put in place to protect others. When applying Utilitarian ideas, each situation needs to be researched and addressed separately. For example, when hospitals were creating triage plans when there was a shortage of resources, utilitarians would treat the patients with the best prognosis. This is because treating individuals with the best prognosis would ensure that those who survived would retain a high quality of life and would be able to live through the rest of the pandemic. However, other policies such as deciding which workers were essential, how long quarantine should last, and how the education system should adapt were more complex decisions.

As the pandemic worsened and most companies and institutions switched to remote work, essential workers frequently were left to work in unsafe conditions. The fact that many workers felt unsafe attending their places of work creates an environment that is not conducive to productivity and promotes uncertainty. According to the Labor International Union, “As the Committee on the Application of Standards put it “[r]isking one’s life, safety or health at work jeopardizes the very ability to work” (International Labour Organization, 2021 p.3). This is to say that although there were some professions where employees were unable to go remote, many of those employees felt there were not enough precautions in place to keep them and their families safe. Non-healthcare employees were hit especially hard as they were not provided with the same levels of PPE (personal protective equipment), and if they did contract the virus, there were fewer resources available to assist them in their recovery process. Ideally, Utilitarians would consider the number of non-healthcare essential workers and create policies that promote their safety and well-being just as much as someone who is able to work remotely from home. This could look like ensuring that all essential facilities, including grocery stores and fast-food restaurants, received adequate amounts of PPE. This could also look like ensuring free, regular testing to ensure the work environment is as safe as can be. Finally, if non-healthcare essential workers were valued as much as other employees, their employer would ensure each employee had the insurance to cover any medical costs and the time off to take if they were required to quarantine. Utilitarian policy would value the safety and well-being of non-healthcare essential workers just as much as those who were able to work safely and remotely from home. This consideration of non-healthcare

essential workers would create policies to ensure they are provided with as safe of a work environment as possible.

Throughout the pandemic, policies favored families who had the resources and abilities to both work from home and watch their children throughout the day. For many families this was possible because there were two parents available to balance these duties. As one parent worked the other could watch the children and vice versa. However, single mothers were tasked with the full-time responsibility of watching their children and squeezing in work whenever they had the time. That is of course, if the mother was able to work directly from home as many single mothers work in fields where they were required to go in person. The article, “*‘I don’t have much of a choice’: Low-income single mothers’ COVID-19 school and care decisions*” describes how COVID-19 disproportionately affected single mothers by stating, “Nearly two-thirds of single mothers live below 200% of the poverty line. Single mothers are overrepresented in the disrupted service sector (e.g., hospitality, travel, retail), and among those lucky enough to keep jobs, they are overrepresented as essential workers with few childcare resources” (Radey et al., 2021 p. 1313). In accounting for these families, utilitarian policy would weight the cost of keeping a daycare open versus closing all daycares. It is likely that utilitarian policy would promote the operation of a daycare for single mothers, provided there are ways to ensure the safety of the workers and the children. A safe work environment could be created through policies mentioned above. The challenge of staying home with a child and working from home was extremely difficult for many single mothers. To maximize happiness and specifically minimize pain, it is important to retain safe childcare options.

Young school aged children not only lost their sense of security and routine, but also lost direct access to their teachers. Many children had to rely on their parents to prepare their school supplies and assist them when their teacher was unable to do so over a video platform. School aged children are one of the largest groups in the United States and therefore were one of the largest groups affected by the pandemic. According to the United States Census, children under the age of 18 made up 22% of the nation's population (Ogunwole et al., 2021). Research has shown, "closing schools comes with potential costs including inferior academic instruction, delayed socioemotional development, parental stress, and increased work– family challenges. Models projected that school closures from March– December 2020, ...— will result in a 7- to 11-month learning loss" (Radey et al., 2021, 1313). Therefore, according to utilitarian policy, it is important to weigh the pros and cons of closing schools to reduce exposure and spread of COVID-19 and the pros and cons of the academic and developmental delays students will face from not attending face to face instruction. Due to the strain at home teaching put on families and the delays caused in children, utilitarians would want children back in school as quickly as possible. There would be stricter restrictions to ensure that safety is still being maintained such as smaller class sizes and reduction in the number of certain activities such as singing and running. If a child or a member of their family was part of an at-risk population, there should be an online instruction option. This type of instruction would be more effective when there are less children as the teacher has fewer students to try and control in an online classroom. When considering school policy, it is important to consider not only the safety of the children and their families, but also how the children may be affected academically and developmentally. It is also important to

remember that many teachers have experience with in-person instruction but very few have experience with remote instruction, making in-person instruction the ideal teaching style.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Liberalism

Like Libertarianism, Liberalism stresses the importance of individual freedom and autonomy. Liberalism, however, differs from libertarianism as liberals believe that individuals would agree to give up more of their freedom to enter a more comprehensive social contract. Liberalism is a recent version of liberal philosophy, one of the oldest moral and political philosophies roughly defined as “a philosophy that starts from a premise that political authority and law must be justified. If citizens are obliged to exercise self-restraint, and especially if they are obliged to defer to someone else’s authority, there must be a reason why. Restrictions on liberty must be justified” (Courtland et al., 2022). Many Liberal thinkers have differed on what constitutes a reason for restrictions on liberty. Therefore, Liberalism can be seen as a spectrum, with those who value individual freedom on one side and those who value the benefits derived from a robust social contract on the other side. Since Liberalism has many variations, this chapter will focus on John Rawls’ Liberalism.

Throughout the history of Liberalism, private property has remained a major point of discussion. In the more modern views of liberalism, private property is equated to individual liberty, meaning one’s right to private property ensures their individual freedom. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* explained this belief by stating, “From the eighteenth century to the present day, classical liberals have insisted that an economic system based on private property is uniquely consistent with individual liberty,



allowing each to live her life—including employing her labor and her capital—as she sees fit” (Courtland et al., 2022). In this sense private property is broadly defined beyond the physical possessions of an individual. Private property can be an individual's thoughts, labor, or physical possessions. Therefore, an individual has the right to protect these entities. If an individual is asked to restrict their liberty, there needs to be a reason. For example, the government could not confiscate an individual's private property without probable cause. However, if there is a good and valid reason, then the government would be able to confiscate property to an extent. For example, the government is taking an individual's property through taxation, however, the taxes are being used to improve the public education system. Improvements to the public education system will in return benefit the individual who was taxed therefore making this restriction of liberty just. Liberal ideas originally applied primarily to political philosophies, but more recently we see the application of liberalism to social justice theories. We first see the application of Liberal ideals to social justice in the work of John Rawls. Specifically, Rawls's work *A Theory of Justice* made this transition possible (Courtland et al., 2022) This work along with his other writing laid out the basic principles of liberalism and a social justice theory.

John Rawls was a modern thinker who worked to describe a way to make difficult social and political decisions while balancing the happiness of the greater good and valuing individual freedom. One of Rawls' most influential works is *A Theory of Justice* where he describes his modern liberal view. Here is one way to summarize Rawls' theories: “For Rawls, the default is not liberty but rather an equal distribution of (basically) income and wealth; only inequalities that best enhance the long-term

prospects of the least advantaged are just” (Courtland et al., 2022). Like Libertarianism, Rawls values personal freedom. However, unlike Libertarianism, Rawls believes that protecting personal freedom requires safety nets that protect the most disadvantaged in society. These safety nets are imperative as people are born into different social classes, are provided with different opportunities, and have different skill sets than others. These differences allow those with the most power to infringe on the freedom of those with the least amount of power. Therefore, these safety nets would ensure an individual’s freedom despite their position in society. John Rawls' modern view of liberalism not only values individual freedom but also addresses the challenges one may encounter in protecting their freedoms.

Rawls introduced the veil of ignorance to assist in making decisions. The veil of ignorance ensures that those who are normally marginalized and lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder are still provided for and respected. Sandel described the veil of ignorance by explaining, “Imagine that we choose under a ‘veil of ignorance’ that temporarily prevents us from knowing anything about who we are. We don’t know our gender, our race or ethnicity, our political opinions, or religious convictions. Nor do we know our advantages and disadvantages .... If no one knew any of these things, we would choose in effect, from an original position of equality” (Sandel, 2008 p.141). The idea is that under the veil of ignorance, everyone would agree to the position that would protect the marginalized because if they were in that position, that is what everyone would want. The reason policies do not realistically protect the individual liberty of those who are the worst off in society is because those who are well off have more leverage and power in making policies and do not want to give up any of their power. The Veil of

Ignorance prevents those who have a higher status and more money from making policies that would only benefit them as it forces them to consider what policies they would want if they were born into a different social position.

Under the veil of ignorance, Rawls believes people would only agree to inequalities if they benefited the most disadvantaged in society. These inequalities would come about as individuals would want to be protected if they were in these difficult situations. This idea became known as the Difference Principle:

- i. Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with a similar scheme for all.
- ii. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society (Rawls, 1985 p.6).

In this, Rawls acknowledges that everyone has the right to equal rights, and if there are going to be inequalities, they must be available to everyone and they must benefit the least advantaged in society. The Difference Principle is also one of the primary ways Rawls transitioned Liberalism from a political philosophy to a social justice philosophy as well. Rawls did this by acknowledging both the importance of individual freedoms as well as the importance of the wellbeing of the community. This policy is also the basis of Rawls' argument for wealth redistribution. Unlike Libertarians who believe taxation is an infringement of individual liberty, Rawls argues taxation is necessary to preserve the liberty of all. Those who are well off in society would agree to taxation because under the veil of ignorance they would support redistribution so that they would have the same basic opportunity to social and political power.

Rawls acknowledged the benefits of other moral philosophies such as utilitarianism but wanted a way to make these policies more applicable and wanted to

emphasize individual freedom. Therefore, “Principles of justice are derived not by assessing the utility of actions (or tendencies of actions) but by the rational choice in a fair setting. Those principles are geared toward the basic structure of society, not toward every act or every level where justice is a concern” (Lebacqz, 1986 p.40). Rawls’s theory of Liberalism aims to create a just society by focusing on more long-term policies over individual action. This way of creating a just society is more realistic than previous theories.

In addition to its rationality and broad applicability, Rawls’s theory stresses the importance of individuality. Therefore, unlike Utilitarianism, “Rawls’ principles clearly protect those who are least advantaged. No “trade-offs” are allowed between their liberty or well-being and the well-being of others” (Lebacqz, 1986 p.40). This is a different idea of individual liberty as it implies that the government has a role in protecting individual liberty. This is because Rawls acknowledges that individuals will have different strengths and resources. Therefore, individuals with fewer strengths and resources need to be protected to ensure that their individual freedoms are not infringed upon by those with more strengths and resources. Redistribution is justified because personal freedom is at the core of Liberal policy. Like utilitarianism, no one person is more important than another. However, unlike utilitarianism, to ensure no one person is more important than another, safety nets need to be provided for the disadvantaged so that they are guaranteed the same freedoms as their peers. Rawls’ Liberalism is designed to be more applicable to society and emphasizes the importance of individual liberty.

Many of the disadvantages of Liberalism come from the idea of wealth redistribution. Unlike Libertarians, Liberals support wealth redistribution to secure

everyone's personal freedom. However, this taxation can be viewed as an infringement of personal liberty as the people with the most money lose their property to provide for others. One argument includes, "Justice in its full sense seems to require some accounting for the amount of good as well as for its allocation" (Lebacqz, 1986 p.36). This means that wealth redistribution is not a fair principle as it is just for those creating the most good in society to be compensated for their work. If one person in society is working harder than another, the less hard working person should not have the same opportunities because it would be unjust to the person that is working harder.

A Liberal view of the pandemic would acknowledge that individuals have the right to safety whether that be through quarantining to protect their health or going to work to earn a wage to pay for the necessities for their families. Upon analysis of different countries and their political philosophies, it was determined that the most effective policies in handling the COVID-19 pandemic were those of the democratic, non-neoliberal countries such as New Zealand and Germany because they treat healthcare as a public good rather than a private good. Neo-liberal countries like the United States and the United Kingdom treat healthcare as a private good and therefore are unable to provide to all citizens in the country (Chalk, 2021 p.97). Under the veil of ignorance, liberals argue that everyone would agree to public healthcare as it would provide the most benefit to the most vulnerable as many underserved populations are unable to afford private healthcare.

Non-healthcare essential workers have the right to protect themselves from things they believe to be serious dangers. Under the veil of ignorance, all workers would want to be protected from harm in the workplace at the expense of the company making less

money. Therefore, “Workers who have removed themselves from a work situation which they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health should be protected from undue consequences in accordance with national conditions and practice” (International Labour Organization, 2021 p.5). This protection especially applies to workers who are considered high risk. However, this protection does not protect individuals who are otherwise healthy but would feel safer staying at home because COVID-19 did not present imminent danger to their life.

Single mothers have the right to protect themselves and their children. To accomplish this, they need a safe place for their children to stay while they work to make an income for their family. This constraint would be agreed upon under the veil of ignorance. Currently, “Findings suggest that mothers made decisions largely on the basis of constraints—safety or financial need” (Radey et al., 2021, p. 1312). This means that single mothers are forced to stay home with their children and either quit their job or work in the evening after their children have gone to bed to ensure their safety or go to work and jeopardize their child’s safety by sending them to a daycare so that they can make a livable wage for the family. This situation not only affects the mothers but also affects the children growing up in these situations. According to Rawls’ difference principle, the children that are born into these situations are innately further behind in life than their peers who are born into a two-parent household. Therefore, there should be policies that allow the children born to single mothers to receive the same care and attention that will increase their chances at a life comparable to their socio-economically advantaged peers.

As policies concerning public education changed, many students lost resources that they had been accustomed to such as free school lunch, special education teachers, and extra resources to assist in their learning. In a report entitled *Managing Public Education Resources During the Coronavirus Crisis*, the importance of finding a way to provide these resources was emphasized. For instance “District leaders should consider how to redeploy skilled non-classroom staff by mapping their availability and matching their skill sets to help meet student and family needs in a distance-learning environment, especially for those students who struggle most even in a classroom setting” (Willis et al., 2020). Specific suggestions induced assigning specific school personnel to specific tasks to create an organized system that would still be able to accommodate the needs of these children. This is in line with Liberal policy as these policies are still protecting the disadvantaged. It however may not be providing enough support as it was previously, making it not enough of an intervention. One way to make this policy more in line with Liberal policy would be to create a system that allowed for those children who relied on in person education a way to still attend school to have access to the necessary resources. Protecting the most disadvantaged in society requires public schools to ensure the needs of students with special considerations are met, whether that be food insecurity, special education requirements, or lack of access to the necessary technology.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

Libertarianism promotes and advocates for individual freedom, both economically and socially. This philosophy maximizes individual autonomy by ensuring the government cannot infringe on an individual's rights. This, therefore, promotes an individualistic society where the individual is valued over the overall well-being of society. Libertarianism is therefore difficult to apply as it is impossible to function without the support of others in modern society. It is also difficult to ensure that everyone will be granted the same freedom as access to resources is in part luck. On the other hand, Utilitarianism values the overall wellbeing of the community. Through promoting the well-being of the whole, utilitarianism advocates for those in society who many normally be ignored as everyone is valued the same. To ensure that the overall good is being considered, utilitarianism also promotes scientific analysis. However, through ensuring that the overall good is being pursued, individuals and their freedoms are reduced to a value in an equation. Therefore, Utilitarian policy discounts the importance of individual freedom. Liberalism works to both preserve individual freedom while also valuing well-being of all individuals in a society. They do this through only seizing individual's property if there is a just reason and the people whose property was seized are compensated. Since Liberalism is not as extreme as the other philosophies and can already be seen in some current political policies, it is also the most applicable. Although



Liberalism promotes a less intrusive version of wealth redistribution, many argue that any wealth redistribution is an infringement of people's rights.

All three philosophies provide ways to think when needing to make policy. Libertarianism promotes individual freedom, Utilitarianism promotes the overall happiness of the society, and Liberalism encourages the implantation of social safety nets to provide for societies least advantage. When considering which philosophy would be most applicable in modern society, it is important to acknowledge that one philosophy cannot adequately address all the complex problems and views present within modern society. Therefore, it is important to have a philosophy that is more moderate in its beliefs so that will satisfy a greater portion of the population. It is also important to implement a philosophy that would be applicable and useful. This would mean the philosophy could be applied to large scale policy to shape individual decisions. This way individuals would not need to consider a philosophy every time they went to decide. Finally, a good philosophy needs to acknowledge others as we do not live in isolated systems and cannot accomplish anything without relying on others. Therefore, a good philosophy can apply to a wide range of people, can easily be applied when making decisions, and acknowledges the role of others in society.

Based on the criteria listed above, Liberalism is the philosophy that is the most realistic to apply when making policy. Using the COVID-19 case study, it was possible to see how Liberalism valued both individual freedom and the wellbeing of society. This is because Liberals believe that's individuals have the right to stay at home and protect themselves from the virus or go to work to continue to make a wage. Liberals also acknowledge that the pandemic would affect different socio-economic classes differently

and provides safety nets for those most affected. Through acknowledging that different groups need help throughout the pandemic, Liberals are promoting those individual's liberty and the well-being of society. Liberalism is also applicable as Liberals seek to change policy in order to create a just society. These policy changes are more applicable than having to consult an algorithm as in Utilitarianism. Finally, Liberalism acknowledges that we live in a society, not an isolated system and we need to acknowledge and protect those around us. Liberalism suggests that policies protecting the most marginalized of society would be accepted because our position in society is partly due to luck. For these reasons, Liberalism is the most applicable philosophy when making policy.

Throughout this thesis, COVID-19 was used as a case study to further examine how different philosophies would affect vulnerable groups. This is because for a philosophy to be moral and just, as these philosophies claim they are, they must protect the rights of all individuals, not just those with the most money and power. COVID-19 also highlighted many of the inequalities present within modern society that need to be addressed. Some of these problems were addressed throughout this paper including the problems facing non-healthcare essential workers, single mothers, and school aged children.

In the future, these ideas can be used to assess what problems needs to be considered as well as how policy can be developed to create a more just society. Although another worldwide pandemic is unlikely in the coming years, the problems facing marginalized groups do not disappear and still need to be acknowledged and attended to.

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