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Future Orthopia: A Conceptual Design for a Liberal and Robust Market Order in the 21st Century

Enrico Moch¹*

¹ GrandEdu Research School, Germany.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4722-0961>; Email: Enrico.Moch@GrandEduResearchSchool.de

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This paper introduces the concept of a future orthopia, a realistic vision for an economic order that preserves the radical promise of the Austrian School while acknowledging the messy realities of today's platform-driven, highly networked markets. At its core lies the belief that spontaneous order and decentralised knowledge, as Hayek and Mises once envisioned, still hold untapped potential for economic freedom and entrepreneurial discovery. Yet the realities of platform capitalism show how quickly data monopolies and gatekeeper structures can undermine this freedom. Using a qualitative and conceptual approach, this paper brings together classical Austrian theory, complexity economics, and modern governance research. The radical reforms under Javier Milei serve as a real-world test case, a dramatic experiment in how far deregulation, fiscal austerity, and institutional rollback can push an economy toward Austrian ideals and at what social cost. The findings suggest that spontaneous order alone is not enough when network effects, algorithmic control, and market power concentrate freedom in the hands of a few. A Future orthopia, therefore, calls for an adaptive, rule-based framework that preserves openness, safeguards diversity, and limits new forms of hidden centralisation. This is not about a return to static planning but about protecting the spaces where entrepreneurial action can flourish without being fenced off by invisible gatekeepers. The paper offers a blueprint for those who believe that freedom and fairness must be defended together and that markets, if left unchecked, can be both liberating and deeply fragile. In the end, the freedom of the market remains what it has always been: the freedom of people to think, to act, and to shape their future.

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INTRODUCTION

For over a century, the Austrian School has upheld the idea that a truly free market order depends on spontaneous, decentralised coordination (Hayek, 1945). It starts with a simple but radical insight: knowledge is fragmented, yet markets, when left to evolve freely, can weave this scattered information into an order that responds to complex needs far more flexibly than any central plan ever could (Menger, 1871; Kirzner, 1973). Yet in an age of global risks, powerful digital gatekeepers, and far-reaching interdependencies, this belief in self-organising freedom is being tested in new ways. The idea of a "future orthopia" introduces a new normative framework that sets the classical principles of the Austrian School, individual freedom, entrepreneurship, and spontaneous knowledge alongside dynamic institutional resilience (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990). Such a "right order for the future" is neither purely utopian nor merely theoretical; instead, it is conceived as an adaptive framework that balances competition, complexity, and the common good within a digital platform economy (Srnicsek, 2017; Zysman & Kenney, 2016). At the heart of this lies the question of how the balance between spontaneous order (Hayek, 1945) and necessary institutional framing (North, 1990) can succeed in an economy increasingly shaped by platforms, network effects, and data-driven market dynamics. As Krall (2021) points out, market freedom always remains under threat when state intervention expands unchecked, power concentrations go unregulated, or spontaneous processes of self-regulation are obstructed. This paper, therefore, explores how the principles of the Austrian School, institutional adaptability, and digital governance can merge into a sustainable future orthopia in order that safeguards

freedom, accommodates complexity, and at the same time secures collective room for manoeuvre through institutional checks.

Research Question:

How can a *future orthopia*, as a conceptual framework for market governance, combine the principles of the Austrian School with institutional resilience and digital market regulation to secure freedom and competitiveness in the 21st century?

Hypotheses:

- **H1:** Markets will only remain open and competitive in the long run if spontaneous order is protected against power concentration and information asymmetries through robust institutional frameworks (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990).
- **H2:** Platform economies challenge the spontaneity of market processes but can remain manageable through smart governance in line with the idea of a future orthopia (Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Srnicsek, 2017).
- **H3:** Entrepreneurial discovery and iterative adaptation (Kirzner, 1973) serve as the crucial link between the classical market process and the adaptive capacities of complex systems (Holland, 1992).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**Spontaneous Order and the Market Process**

The Austrian School sees markets not as static systems but as restless, ever-evolving processes of discovery. Its central claim is both simple and radical: only a free market can tap into the scattered, partial knowledge of individuals more effectively

than any plan imposed from above (Hayek, 1945). Menger (1871) and Mises (1949) showed that economic order does not come from government design but from voluntary exchange, interaction, and the uncertainty that fuels genuine innovation. Kirzner (1973) puts the entrepreneur at the core of this story. The entrepreneur is not just rational; he is a discoverer who spots what others miss and keeps the market in motion. Lachmann (1956) pushes this further: capital and expectations are always subjective, so markets are never finished but stay open, contradictory, and alive. Spontaneous order is radical precisely because it rejects the fantasy of shaping markets from above. What emerges is not chaos but a living order so complex that no central authority can ever fully control it (Hayek, 1945). This is the key question for a future orthopia: how can we protect this creative uncertainty without suffocating it with rigid institutions, and how do we prevent it from mutating into new monopolies and hidden concentrations of power?

Complexity, Institutions, and Resilience

Complexity theory offers a sharp lens for grasping the tensions in today's markets. Holland (1992) sees markets as complex adaptive systems that thrive on constant feedback, variation, and selection to stay resilient. This perspective expands the Austrian School's focus on spontaneity by showing that robust, adaptive institutions are vital to manage path dependencies, check concentrations of power, and keep knowledge flows transparent (North, 1990). Ostrom's work (1990) on governing the commons pushes this further: communities that share resources need clear rules and self-enforced boundaries to avoid collapse, a lesson that resonates strongly with the dynamics of digital platforms (Srnicek, 2017).

A *future orthopia* builds on these insights: Spontaneous order alone is not enough. Freedom and complexity do not need rigid planning, but they do need flexible, evolving institutional structures

that protect openness and prevent hidden monopolies from taking hold.

Platform Economy and Normative Tensions

The platform economy has become the modern battlefield for the promise of spontaneous order. What began as an open marketplace now risks turning into a new kind of hidden centralisation fueled by network effects, data monopolies, and economies of scale (Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Srnicek, 2017). State planning may be fading, but in its place stand private platform operators who decide through algorithms, data access, and digital ecosystems who gets to be seen, who stays invisible. This is central control by another name, but this time without democratic accountability. Zysman and Kenney (2016) show that while platforms can unleash rapid innovation, they also undermine market logic when no strong counterweights exist. For a future orthopia, this means the old principles of the Austrian School, freedom, competition, and dispersed knowledge, hit a systemic limit. Markets fail when their spontaneous order is not supported by clear rules that curb new concentrations of power and secure fair access.

This is where the question of fairness comes into sharp focus. Rawls (1999) reminds us that any working order must be not only efficient but fair, a "realistic utopia" that protects equal opportunity without smothering freedom. The platform economy proves that spontaneous processes alone do not guarantee fair outcomes. Without institutional resilience, the promise of self-organising order rings hollow. A future orthopia does not cling to a romantic vision of a borderless free market. It stands for a deliberate balance: protecting spaces for entrepreneurial discovery (Kirzner, 1973) and complex, adaptive processes (Holland, 1992), while also making sure no one is locked out by digital gates or hidden data fences.

METHODOLOGY

This work does not treat a future orthopia as abstract theory alone but as a practical experiment in rethinking how market order can stay open in an age of hidden power and digital platforms. Methodologically, it takes a qualitative-conceptual approach to map the tension between spontaneous market forces, institutional safeguards, and the new gatekeepers of the platform economy. It begins with a close look at the Austrian School's foundations from Menger to Hayek, combined with Kirzner's view of the entrepreneur as an active discoverer and Lachmann's radical take on uncertainty. These ideas are expanded with insights from complexity theory (Holland) and institutional economics (North, Ostrom), showing markets as adaptive systems: open enough to enable discovery, resilient enough to resist hidden monopolies. These illustrative cases were selected for their paradigmatic character and relevance to the tensions between spontaneity and institutional design.

Instead of chasing linear cause-and-effect explanations, this perspective looks for patterns: where does spontaneous order fail? When do platforms act as private regulators? How can institutional resilience create new space for fair competition? To make this real, the paper uses illustrative cases: Milei's radical market shift in Argentina, simple game-theoretical scenarios of entrepreneurial action, or platform markets where asymmetrical data flows quietly redraw access and power. These sketches do not replace broad empirical studies but make visible what happens when market logic and digital governance collide. Rawls' idea of a "realistic utopia" acts here as a final filter: can a system protect freedom and fairness at once, or does one always come at the cost of the other? The approach remains deliberately open-ended. It does not claim to deliver the final proof but aims to build a conceptual map that pushes Austrian principles into the realities of platform capitalism.

Building on previous work (Moch, 2024b; 2025a, 2025c, 2025d), this paper further develops the conceptual architecture of a future orthopia. These self-citations are not cosmetic; they mark how this framework has grown step by step. Instead of reinventing each idea, the work ties earlier models to new perspectives like complexity and digital governance. The result is not a closed model but an open framework for debate, and the self-references are an honest part of that ongoing process.

ANALYSIS

The analysis makes one thing clear: markets lose their creative edge wherever spontaneous order is blocked, whether by unchecked power or rigid institutional bottlenecks. The Austrian School reminds us that markets thrive on open access to knowledge and entrepreneurs who see possibilities others miss (Kirzner, 1973). The case of Argentina shows what happens when radical liberalisation charges ahead without stable rules. Similar patterns can be observed in other contexts, such as post-liberalisation Russia or India's platform markets, though these remain beyond the scope of this paper. North (1990) demonstrates that clear rules lower transaction costs; Ostrom (1990) adds that communities can only manage common resources sustainably when they negotiate shared guardrails.

In the digital sphere, the same question keeps coming up: Who controls the interfaces, data streams, and visibility? Platforms that started as open spaces become private gatekeepers, shaping who can play and who stays invisible. Holland's complexity theory (1992) reminds us that adaptive systems survive only if they protect diversity and openness. Rawls (1999) puts this to the test: any "realistic utopia" must keep doors open an order that excludes is not a fair order.

A future orthopia must therefore do both: protect spontaneous discovery and keep hidden power in check. It needs guardrails strong enough to prevent

quiet monopolies but flexible enough to let entrepreneurs move. The matrix approach (Moch, 2025d) shows that platform markets are not just technical pipes; they are hybrid networks where rules, incentives, and invisible chokepoints decide whether freedom stays real or becomes an empty word.

DISCUSSION

The idea of a future orthopia goes back to the core promise of the Austrian School: markets reach their full potential when they stay free from rigid planning, centralised steering, and bureaucratic overreach (Hayek, 1945; Mises, 1949). Javier Milei's radical experiment in Argentina shows just how far this can be pushed in practice: massive deregulation, a shrunken state, dollarisation, textbook Austrian principles (Moch, 2025e). The short-term results are striking: inflation drops, market dynamism returns, old structures break open. But the cracks are visible too. Argentina's experience shows what happens when rules lag: trust crumbles, inequality grows, basic services collapse. North (1990) would say: without stable institutions, freedom stays fragile. Ostrom (1990) would add: communities need rules to manage risk and share benefits fairly.

This same tension runs through the platform economy. Here, freedom is not threatened by the state but by private gatekeepers. Algorithms and data control decide who gets access and who disappears from the market. Srnicek (2017) and Moch's matrix approach (2025d) both show that platforms, if left unchecked, create invisible chokepoints where spontaneous order flips into hidden control. Holland's complexity theory (1992) reminds us: systems only stay adaptive if they allow variety and openness. Rawls (1999) takes this even further: a "realistic utopia" cannot be fair if it silently locks out whole groups.

So what does that mean for a future orthopia? It is not about blind faith in deregulation. Milei's lesson makes that clear. It is about combining freedom and resilience: spontaneous markets need institutional guardrails that are strong enough to limit power but flexible enough to let discovery happen. The matrix approach underlines how crucial it is to design fair access points and keep digital monopolies from fencing off entire fields of opportunity.

The repeated references to the author's earlier work are methodologically justified. They trace how this framework has grown step by step from radical theory to real-world tests. They also make clear where this idea pushes beyond what came before. For future research, the open question remains: can the principles that once made markets so powerful still protect freedom when platforms and new power centres threaten to close it down? That is the challenge and the promise of a future orthopia.

CONCLUSION

The debate around a future orthopia shows that the Austrian School's vision of a spontaneous market order is far from outdated; it remains relevant wherever new experiments test its limits. Javier Milei's radical reforms in Argentina demonstrate that freedom, deregulation, and fiscal restraint can indeed unleash significant economic momentum in the short term. Yet the same example makes plain what happens when institutional resilience is missing: social divides deepen, power concentrates, and inequality grows. Hayek's (1945) trust in the power of dispersed knowledge remains valid, but North and Ostrom remind us that stable, adaptable rules are what allow that freedom to endure.

The platform economy tells a similar story. Network effects, gatekeeping algorithms, and hidden data monopolies show how easily openness collapses when spontaneous order is left unsupported (Srnicek, 2017; Moch, 2025d). The matrix approach makes clear that access, incentives, and institutional

frameworks must work together to keep markets both dynamic and fair. Rawls (1999) sharpens this point: a system that ignores justice is no realistic utopia at all.

A future orthopia is therefore not a rigid plan but an open framework for balancing freedom and stability. It preserves the spark of discovery yet sets boundaries where hidden power might take hold. Milei's case is a reminder that radical freedom can reinvigorate markets but only if it stays grounded in social responsibility and long-term trust. This work closes with a simple insight: the path to a resilient market order does not lie in blind deregulation but in a conscious mix of spontaneity, institutional strength, and normative fairness. The ideas of the Austrian School retain their force when they are carried into the complexities of the digital age boldly, but not naively. Only then does the freedom that Menger, Mises, Hayek and others defended become more than a promise. In this sense, the freedom of the market remains, as ever, the freedom of people to think and act for themselves, a fragile promise that must be protected anew in every era.

LIMITATIONS

This work is deliberately theory-led: it reinterprets the Austrian School's vision for the realities of platform economies and digital power, but it does not claim to offer exhaustive empirical evidence. The cases from Milei's radical reforms to digital gatekeepers serve to illustrate patterns, not to deliver universal proofs. Some connections remain built on conceptual analysis and qualitative logic. A second limitation concerns transferability. Argentina's case shows that Austrian principles can be translated into political action, yet it also highlights the social costs and frictions when deregulation moves faster than institutions can adapt. Whether a future orthopia can work in other contexts remains open and demands more comparative, real-world research. The same holds for platform markets: network effects, data

asymmetries and algorithms evolve faster than any single framework can fully capture. The matrix approach (Moch, 2025d) provides an initial map but must be tested and adjusted for different sectors.

Finally, the normative dimension of this work is intentionally not closed. Freedom, resilience, and fairness will never stay settled; they have to be renegotiated wherever new risks emerge. A future orthopia should therefore be seen less as a finished plan and more as an ongoing invitation to rethink how open markets can keep their promise when new power threatens to shut them down. Future research might explore how institutional guardrails function in platform-dominated sectors such as mobility, retail, or AI-based labour markets.

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