1 *Introduction: Why Are You Here?*

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This chapter introduces the reader to the volume. It presents our conviction that there is a bias toward pro-market, pro-capitalist (which we call "neoliberal") solutions in how people solve problems nowadays, and how people learn to solve problems in universities. We explain what these default neoliberal biases are, and why they are often harmful. We also explain how the case chapters in this book comparatively lay out a series of alternatives to these neoliberal ways of solving problems.

If you are reading this, then you probably came to school to make the world a bit better and are interested in solving problems. As professors we've noticed that in fact the reason a lot of people get an education is so that they can get a job that will then let them help people and solve problems out in the world somewhere. While we think this desire to be practical and effective and helpful out there in the great world beyond is admirable, there are some serious issues with how practical education currently works in the university. As it is, many of the tools and ideas that people learn in their education start with the assumptions that people should be taken as individuals and are often greedy. Because of this greedy individualism, the best sort of society we can (and should) hope for is one that approximates a market in which people are individually free to buy and sell things, as well as themselves, as much as they are able. We feel, as do many of the people we work with, that this market-forward approach to life often hurts far more people than it helps. This book is meant to illustrate why this is and provide you with some alternatives ways to change the world.

We're going to take our shared interest in problem-solving as a starting point. You should be aware, though, that we aren't going to engage with every type of problem-solving. We won't talk about chemical titrations, or stress-testing a railroad bridge. Rather we will focus on what we call "social," or "human problems," or maybe, more

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precisely, problems that emerge from how people choose to govern themselves and arrange their lives. The interesting thing about these social problems is that they inherently require some form of coordination of human effort. Sometimes coordination happens in mundane interactions and in everyday life such as when we have to find parking, think about workplace management, or find jobs for people who are unemployed. Other times, social problems take on a grander scale as when a whole city faces a water shortage or when a needed innovation requires the pooling of knowledge and capital beyond the scope of any single individual. What all this suggests to us, is that to solve a social problem, we need ways to influence, motivate, or coordinate the efforts of many people.

Given all that, this book has two goals: First, we want to challenge the prevalent idea that whenever you face a social problem, the best way to solve it is always by assuming that people are exclusively selfish and can only be motivated through promises of some form of satisfaction of their self-interest in a market setting. This view of humans is one that is prevalent in many economics, psychology, law, and management classes. What we've found is that when people solve problems this way, they end up creating markets and consumers and reducing the role of government or solidarity in organizing people's lives. Over the course of this book, we will call the ideas that influence this approach to problem-solving "neoliberalism." We will also point out the ways that embracing these neoliberal ideas about humans and their lives blinds many people, companies, governments, and NGOs to other, less individual, and less selfish ways to think about life.

The term "neoliberalism" has seen wide usage, particularly among academics; and some even deem it too amorphous to be of any analytic use. We disagree, though we are not dogmatic on this point. To us, "neoliberal" seems to be a useful way to describe the sort of pro-individual, pro-market, anti-government beliefs that animate a lot of bad problem-solving that we see out in the world. The next chapter of this book will more precisely define the way we use the term "neoliberalism", as well as explain the historical background and reasoning which has led to the acceptance of neoliberalism in contemporary problem-solving. For now, though, it might be helpful for us to use an example of prison labor and clothing production to illustrate the sort of thing that keeps us up at night – the neoliberalism-in-the-wild that haunts us.

Carcel is (or perhaps was, by the time you read this) a Denmark-based fashion company that was started in 2016 by a pair of Copenhagen Business School graduates. Their business model is simple: they employ women's prison labor in Peru and Thailand to cheaply make fashionable clothing which they then sell at a significant mark-up in Europe and North America. According to their own website, they are doing good by paying prisoners to make clothes, and claiming to teach them skills in the context of a meaningful job so that upon release the women might be able to better themselves. Their website notes that the main cause of incarceration for women in these countries is "drug-trafficking committed by single mothers who need to provide for their families." Setting aside whether or not prisoners can even consent to labor, what's remarkable here is that these entrepreneurs notice women who are unjustly incarcerated and the best they can come up with to fix the situation is to exploit their cheap labor via a fashion start-up. There is no political advocacy. There is no advocacy for their families. There is no imagining how to keep women from going to prison in the first place. The state is never addressed, much less considered. Abolition is certainly off the table. These women who had no other options when trying to feed their families remain in prison, only now they get to sew clothes for rich Europeans while passing their time.

This approach to problem-solving that Carcel embodies is emblematic of the idea that social change should occur through industrious entrepreneurship and the individual discipline of the wage-earning employee. For Carcel's founders, prison and incarceration are simply natural facts. By becoming disciplined employees and earning a wage we can imagine that the incarcerated women are choosing to rationally better themselves. Plus, Carcel can then brand a product with this fable. All told, this typifies much of the worst of neoliberal approaches to problem-solving that this book intends to challenge.

The second and more positive aim of this book is to inspire you, the reader, to look beyond neoliberal solutions to the problems that face us. Maybe you are already critical of neoliberal solutions; maybe you wish for something different but doubt that better ways of solving our problems are available. We know, too, that many of our academic colleagues have worked on "neoliberal problems" in their own research for many years now and are often a bit burned out. They are at something of a loss as to what it would take to fix the problems

they study; problems which neoliberalism seems to repetitively create. In any case, we hope to inspire our readers by presenting a series of actual cases where problems have been solved by methods going beyond the neoliberal conception of human interaction. By introducing a series of alternative approaches to social problems, approaches that put people before markets, we hope to display the many other ways we can make human life better. To this end, we will present a series of normal human problems such as "Where should our water come from?", "What should a job look like?", or "How should we treat people who do drugs?" For each question, we will present two different approaches to solving the problem: a neoliberal approach and an alternative one that puts people before markets.

What will emerge across our cases is the simple point that the neoliberal approach to problem-solving is *never* the only way to rearrange the human condition, and, more often than not, it seems to make things worse. By reading the individual cases of this book, we hope readers might see similarities to the social problems that they themselves are trying to solve which could lead them to invent novel solutions. Or maybe the great variety of these cases can simply inspire the reader to look beyond the typical conception of the problems facing our society, such that novel ways to practically organize people become newly imaginable.

Throughout the book, we aim for the two contrasting cases to be as empirically similar as possible, but of course some differences will be present as we are dealing with real-life examples. That said, our goal isn't to prove that one solution fits all problems. Rather, we only wish to argue, based on empirical evidence, that before we decide how to approach a social problem, we should critically evaluate options beyond those that treat people solely as egotistical consumers who demand to be kept away from the government. And that point gets proven simply by the success of the alternative approach in its own right. The contrasted neoliberal solution is there to imply that not only did the alternative approach work; it also surpassed what could be expected from a neoliberal solution in the first place. Instead, what really deserves consideration is whether the neoliberal problem-solvers involved in the failed attempt ever seriously evaluated, let alone searched for, a nonmarket-based solution to their problems. If they didn't, then we feel they were unjustifiably narrow in their approach to problem-solving. Such a blinkered approach to governing people

clearly impedes our ability to solve the problems we face, but just as importantly it also distorts and demeans our self-conception of who we are as human beings.

Let us return to the case of the incarcerated women who were trying to feed their families. If we choose not to view every human tragedy as a potential for installing a marketlike service, then other solutions seem much more appealing than exploiting prison labor. One could attempt to improve their conditions by lobbying or putting political pressure on the respective governments to increase child support and free the women in question. One could set up a charity to support Peruvian and Thai families on the assumption that if the rich European clothes shoppers hear about the plight of these women, then they might provide assistance without expecting the quid pro quo of a piece of clothing in return. One could even imagine an asylum regime in Europe or the United States in which legal-immigration status would be granted to mothers and their families facing incarceration in their own country for trying to feed themselves. The real travesty of the proliferation of the neoliberal way of thinking is not only that better solutions to our problems might be overlooked, but that we have come to believe that it is both acceptable and even commendable to buy clothes made by prison labor, and that we have come to assume that no one can be convinced to assist other people in need unless they get something in return.

The above alternatives of relying on charity or government intervention are just some of the alternative approaches one might consider, and not even very creative ones at that. With an open mind and a bit of ingenuity you, our readers, can probably come up with even better nonmarket-based ideas – ideas that directly help the people we're worried about. The important point is that, once the neoliberal blinders are off, there is no end to creative avenues from which we can approach problem-solving. No single assumption about how to coordinate human action and motivation unites the alternative solutions we investigate. What we find inspiring in the variety of alternative approaches in the following chapters is precisely the empirical insight that there are many other ways of organizing, of getting people to coordinate and collaborate, than simply by promising individual rewards for compliance. We can be altruistic, show solidarity, and be motivated by obligation, respect, duty, or even love. And sometimes we don't even act as individuals at all. Some of our best behavior is much

better understood and influenced through the shared identities we get from belonging to families, cultures, or religions, from going to schools, working at specific places, or even cheering for certain football teams. This book aims to show that there is no reason to assume that we all suddenly become atomized, selfish individuals whenever there is a need to solve some problem or come up with government policy. And not only does that insight make one a better problem solver; it also serves to dignify who we are as humans.

Though we think this book may be helpful to all social problem-solvers, we know that our main audience will be university students, as well as universities themselves and the professors that teach there. As we noted above, many young people who enter universities around the globe are drawn by the promise that a university degree will enable them to become better social problem-solvers. In turn, their time at university or in college might let them become activists, managers, politicians, entrepreneurs, social workers, executives, teachers, government workers, lawyers, doctors, and many, many more vital social roles and jobs. Common to these sorts of aspirations is that the people who do them need to know how to motivate and coordinate people around them, such that they can solve a concrete practical problem. The explicit promise of contemporary universities is that they will teach students how to think about and solve such social problems. This is most explicit in the promises of business universities and professional degree programs when they claim to teach students how to best manage people. In such explicitly practical education, it's not terribly difficult to identify the influence of neoliberal thinking. Yet, we suggest that similar sorts of limitations are also present in more academic courses of studies, such as when political science, anthropology, or sociology claim to teach about how government, cultures, and societies function. It is, for example, within such more traditionally academic departments that we often find the institutes or research groups focused on solving social problems related to immigration, unemployment, racial injustice, or city development. However, even in these more traditionally academic contexts, we feel there are problems with the practical education that students receive.

Our diagnosis is that one substantial reason for these widespread limitations in imagining a world beyond neoliberalism is the fact that even in a critical context, neoliberalism can suck all the air out of a room and make it difficult to imagine other worlds. Many more

traditional academic programs and institutions take great, deserved pride in critiquing neoliberalism and exposing its problems. Many of the contributors to this book teach in precisely such places. However, such a wholesale criticism of neoliberalism has left many academics and researchers exhausted. This sort of burnout can leave one feeling paralyzed in the sense that one doesn't know how to actually translate one's skepticism and critical work on neoliberalism into practical action. Often in the best case, the academic approach to diagnosing and describing a situation can practically preclude imagining an alternative world – doubly so if the world under description is exhausting, repetitive, and painful to describe, as neoliberal politics often are. What we suggest is lacking on the contemporary scene, is an education in how one practically develops and implements a nonneoliberal solution to a problem. A solution that, if you are living in a Western democracy, probably needs to be nested and justified within a society that largely operates on neoliberal principles. Put another way, you think you're getting educated in solving social problems, but, by using the tools you are taught to employ, you end up either paralyzed or causing more harm than good. In this way, we see this book both building on a rich tradition of critical scholarship on how the world currently works as well as providing the next step in making good on all this criticism – that is, imagining a better world.

Naturally, universities aren't the sole cultivators of this market-first approach to contemporary society's conception of social problem-solving. However, we still want to focus our attention on how problem-solving is taught at universities for two reasons. First, we do not think that the neoliberal conception of human motivation is *natural*, nor should it be seen as such. That is, the idea that the *best* way of coordinating people's efforts should *always* be to speak solely to their self-interest is so outlandish that no one would accept it on their own. People must be taught to see the world this way and feel that this kind of assumption is natural. We want to intervene where this teaching happens.

The second reason for writing this book with universities in mind is that, often in today's society, it is practically a requirement that one has a university degree if one wishes to tackle social problems on a large scale. This means that, on average, the detrimental effects of market-first problem-solving skills are much greater among those with university degrees. The negative effects of their myopic conception of social

problem-solving hurts not only themselves but the entire society around them. Hence, universities, their professors, and their students have a much greater responsibility to ensure that their education does in fact make people better at solving social problems, rather than the opposite. We take our cases to provide empirical proof that if you solely teach students to conceive of humans as economic creatures, pursuers of self-interest, and insatiable maximizers of stable personal preferences, then you have failed in the task of educating skilled solvers of social problems. You've made bad citizens and bad humans. Likewise, if you solely teach students the evils of markets, but do not assist them in how to conceive of and practically organize the world differently, you may have saved them from committing the mistakes of neoliberals, but at the expense of paralyzing them. It may at times be the most effective solution to coordinate people by speaking solely to their self-interest, but it is assuredly not always the case, and the contrast cases you are about to read show examples of how one can actually and successfully approach problem-solving differently. Hence, universities should take care to ensure that students are taught to critically evaluate, in each specific instance, whether this is one of those cases where market forces provide the best approach to social coordination, or whether they are indeed faced with a problem that is better solved by coordinating people through other means than self-interest.

While this book challenges the adequacy of contemporary university education, especially at business and other professional schools, we also hope to assist in remedying the problem. For while we think education may be part of the problem, we also think that it is a cornerstone of the solution. We hope that this book can be used not only as a challenge to existing curricula, but also as an inspiration for alternative forms of teaching. One can then either use this book as a whole as a starting point for teaching alternative forms of problem-solving or, alternatively, focus on content areas or even a single case and delve into the suggested literature on that issue. Alternatively, if you are a student or staff intent on challenging the current teaching at your university, then this book can be read as an argument to which the defenders of the status quo must respond. You can use our argument and the chapters presented here to make your case for change in your education.

The relative success of all the alternative solutions we present here demonstrates that better ways to solve our social problems both exist,

and can be found by those equipped with an open mind and a broad array of practical problem-solving skills. In light of the cases presented here, in order to justify the status quo market-first neoliberal curriculum, someone must explain away the apparent success of the alternative approaches we present. This could either be done on theoretical grounds or by questioning the soundness of the empirical argumentation itself. If the defense of status quo is theoretical, our bet is that the arguments in defense of neoliberalism will be some version of the traditional fallacious arguments discussed and dissected in detail in the next chapter of this book. If, on the other hand, the defense of neoliberalism is empirical, then the task of the critic of this book is to come to terms with why, in each contrast case that we present, the alternative solution worked as well as it did.

It seems to us, taking in the sweep of all the chapters in this book, that there is indeed empirical proof that we should solve our social problems by treating the people wrapped up in them as whole humans. We can solve social problems in many ways, many more human ways, and this ought to be reflected in the curriculum of a university education which promises to teach problem-solving. Just as importantly it ought to be reflected in the impulses and assumptions of the organizers, politicians, and leaders of our societies.

We hope the coming chapters will show the possibilities for a better world that we all could build.