

A Praxeology of Coercion

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CHAPTER 1

The Libertarian's Claim

Libertarians claim they know something others don't.

Society is structured in an unfair way, and this is because people are coerced into unwanted social arrangements. Many people don't want to pay for the projects of others, but they have no choice. If they don't pay their taxes, they will have to go to jail. Many people don't want particular social policies enacted in their names, but they are coerced into complying. As involuntary members of the nation-state, they are legally obligated to support all projects undertaken by that state.

The idea of coerced social arrangements strikes libertarians as inherently flawed. So libertarians have developed various theories describing the sense in which coerced social arrangements are wrong. The totality of such theories may be understood as "the theory of libertarianism", as distinct from the theories, for example, of democracy or of socialism.

The theory of libertarianism, though compelling, falls short of a praxeology. Though it conveys the negative effects of social coercion discursively, and with strong conviction, the reasoning employed falls short of demonstrating strict and logical necessity. What passes for social cause and effect in libertarian social theory, does not meet the rigorous standards of logical consistency established by the social science of economics and the physical sciences.

As far as is known, there are no necessary consequences to social acts aside from those described by the established laws of economics. For example, no necessary consequence will befall one who coerces another, as far as contemporary social science can gather. There are no cause and effect laws in the social realm, aside from the established laws of economic social activity; what common language refers to as the law(s) of supply and demand.

The Wrong Use of Social Coercion Versus The Wrong-ness of Social Coercion

In the libertarian community, though there is agreement on the central issue of social coercion, there is disagreement about exactly what is wrong with social coercion. Some believe the problem is that overall coercion in society is at too “high a level”, and that a diminishment in the overall use of social coercion is what will eventually lead to greater opportunities for the emergence of various libertarian societies. But others believe the problem is not the overall level of coercion per se, but rather that coercion is misused in society. Instead of being used to uphold individual liberty and protect private property, coercion is used largely for the socialistic purposes of wealth transfer, equalization, and other state purposes. When coercion is properly and not improperly used, they believe, this will then be a libertarian society, regardless of whether people are still more or less coercive in their general approach to things.

Though these two approaches indicate a significant divide both philosophically and in practice, the fundamental fact remains: Libertarians are in agreement about the central importance of social coercion.

A Universal Element of Social Theory

A social theory, as opposed to one’s own social behavior, is an attempt to demonstrate some connection between various

types of social behavior and human well being. Generally a social theory attempts to demonstrate how something positive may be gained by implementing a particular social “system” (method of social interaction), and by virtue of this, also how negative things may be avoided by implementing this system.

For one who is not currently acting according to a particular social theory now, there is no reason other than arbitrary preference to attempt to change one’s behavior and come in to compliance with a particular social theory, if not doing so will not lead to negative results. That is, if the consequences that a social theory says will happen, will not happen, there is no reason for me to attempt to change my current social behavior and try to adhere to the new social system or social method being propounded.

Thus, a universal aspect of a social theory, is that it have an implicit or explicit theory of causality. The social theory attempts to demonstrate how behaving or not behaving in a certain way will lead to, will “cause”, something negative or bad to happen. In claiming that some action or inaction will lead to some consequence, the social theory implicitly or explicitly puts forth some kind, some type, of causal explanation. This causal explanation is the specific theory of causality employed by the social theory in question.

The Strength of Causal Assertions

Each social theory attempts to demonstrate the positive or negative consequences to particular methods of social behavior and social interaction. And it does so by means of its underlying causal theory. It follows that the strength of the causal assertions of any particular social theory, can only be as strong as the underlying causal theory on which such assertions are based.

The causal theory underlying the statement: “The election of a Republican president will ultimately be followed by the

election of a Democratic president”, is of a fundamentally different nature than the causal theory underlying the statement: “In moving a glass of water towards the east, one necessarily moves it away from the west”. The causality in the former statement is not necessary. A nation’s political system may change, or some unforeseen event may happen. However, the causality in the latter statement is necessary. Unforeseen events cannot change the necessary connection between the two events. Thus, a social theory employing a non-necessary causal theory, to this extent can only make non-necessary social assertions; assertions of social cause and effect that are non-necessary. And a social theory employing a causal theory of necessity, to this extent, can make social assertions of a necessary kind.

Social Coercion

Though the theory of libertarianism falls short of a praxeology; falls short of a demonstration of necessary cause and effect, it does succeed in focussing libertarian intellectual effort on the defining characteristic of contemporary society: coerced social relationships, or simply “social coercion”. The theory of libertarianism is to some degree the theory of social coercion. What libertarianism finds harmful and tries to explain, is primarily social coercion.

A provisional definition of social coercion according to libertarianism, is coercion directed by society or society’s representatives (i.e., government) toward an individual or individuals who have done nothing wrong in the plain sense. Social coercion is when some in society choose to pursue their ends by compelling (forcing, coercing, etc.) others to cooperate in or pay for the pursuit of those ends, not as punishment for any crime committed, but rather because the coercing of individuals in service of those ends is viewed as acceptable behavior.

If someone has done nothing wrong, has harmed no one, common sense justice conceives that one should not be subject to a penalty. But what is wrong with society according to libertarians, is that society, influenced by faulty social theories, has devised a complicated system of “criminalizing” essentially non-criminal behavior. Contemporary society is not interested in punishing *crime* per se. Rather it is interested in punishing disobedience to its laws, and crime is only part of what those laws address. In contemporary society, crime is only *one* of the things one may receive punishment for.

The Legitimacy of Social Coercion

All of contemporary society, whether one designates ours as a time of democracy, of socialism or of statism, is based on the legitimacy of social coercion. It is based on the idea that the coercive powers of the state are properly used not only to punish harmful social acts (however those may be defined), but also to create new things; to look to the future and decide what society needs, and then utilize the coercive powers of the state to bring these things into existence.

What unifies all contemporary societies in spirit and in structure, is the ideology, held by almost every citizen of the world, that social coercion is a legitimate function of government, and thus a legitimate form of social behavior generally.

A simple example of social coercion in practice is when society and/or its government decides to build a road. Generally, all people in a given society or given area will not be in support of the road. If given the choice, many may not voluntarily pay for the construction of the road or make their property available for the construction of the road. At the same time, these people may not be “criminals” in the plain sense. Many of them could be people of high moral standing in this society.

So the theory of social coercion, is simply the rationalization used, for employing coercive means to compel these individuals into contributing to the road's construction. The theory of social coercion is the justification for constructing a legal system to punish people such as this, for not contributing to what society or it's representatives view as the future needs of society, above and beyond preventing criminal behavior in the plain sense.

The question arises: How can society obtain all the important things it needs, roads being only one example? And to this, the theory of social coercion ultimately answers: By making it a crime not to contribute to society's obtaining of these things. By using the coercive powers of the state to force everyone to contribute.

That the use of government coercion to undertake such projects is legitimate—is not ethically or morally wrong—is the fundamental and implicit assumption of the theory of social coercion.

The Intuitive Basis for the Libertarian Notion of Legitimate Government

The most fundamental categories of crime can be understood as those social acts that virtually everyone seeks to avoid being the recipient of. These acts are generally considered to be those of assault, murder, robbery, fraud, and closely associated social acts such as breach of contract, etc.

Historically, the libertarian notion of legitimate government is that a government is just, when it limits itself to providing services of a certain type: preventing social acts which almost everyone wants to avoid being the recipient of. Almost everyone tries to avoid being the recipient of the harmful social acts of assault, murder, robbery and fraud. So historically, the libertarian notion of proper or legitimate

government, is government that adheres as closely as possible to providing these services only, and as few others as possible. When government begins to expand beyond the prevention of universal crime, and begins to provide other kinds of services in addition to crime prevention, libertarians hold that government begins to diverge from its legitimate purpose.

When we say that this notion of government is “intuitive”, this simply means that the theory of libertarianism believes in the correctness of its vision of government, largely through philosophical insight, separate from any strict scientific treatment of the matter. There were libertarians before the laws of economics were fully developed, and there are libertarians now in the age in which democratic socialism claims to be the superior social system. There will continue to be libertarians, regardless of whether the project of natural law is successful in establishing laws of man’s nature. And there will continue to be libertarians regardless of the correctness or incorrectness of the ideas of the great libertarian writers of the twentieth century. This is because libertarianism is to some degree based on direct philosophical insight into man’s nature as it relates to man’s government. This direct philosophical insight, as distinct from strict social science, is the intuitive basis of the libertarian notion of legitimate government.

The point in mentioning the above, is not to establish a definitive account of what libertarianism means to everyone. It is simply to indicate that the starting point for libertarian social theory, is a philosophical insight that something is wrong with government that begins to provide services beyond crime prevention. Libertarianism believes that in some sense, government that moves far beyond the service of crime prevention, and begins to provide many other services as well, is ethically or morally wrong. But larger contemporary society is unanimous in believing that this type of government is ethically or morally good or neutral.

The Program of Natural Law

Over the last few centuries, a kind of theoretical revolution has been occurring unbeknownst to the legal and social scientific community. The program of natural law which was to arrive at the laws of man's nature in the same way that physics arrives at the laws of physical nature, has turned out to be a far different science than natural law social philosophers of old had expected.

Natural law philosophers had expected that the laws of man's nature would be expressible in every day language, and specifically, with reference to the common conception of cause and effect. They believed the exact laws of man's nature, once divined, could be expressed using largely unexamined, common conceptions. In this context, "common conceptions" are what we may call realistic conceptions of events, wherein one event follows another event, the second event conceived as happening later in time.

The project of natural law can be understood as the attempt to formulate laws of man's nature utilizing a realist or materialist conception of cause and effect. It was David Hume who posed the simple question: Why does one event necessarily have to be followed by another event? And from this simple question, the program of natural law was never able to recover. To this day, natural law still remains a largely unrealized ideal. To date, no strict laws of man's ethical nature have been formulated, akin to physical laws or to the established laws of economics.

Some social philosophers believe that natural law has been successful. As proof they point to the body of natural law philosophy and the wide agreement amongst natural law theorists about some general principles of natural law. Natural law scholars generally agree that: 1) Man is a being or entity of a specific nature. 2) That part of what constitutes an entity's nature, are the laws governing its interactions with other entities. 3) So that therefore, there must be laws governing

man's interactions with other men. 4) Those laws once discovered and formulated, then serve as a guide for man's proper behavior if he wants to live according to his nature. 5) And behavior not in accordance with these laws of man's nature, constitutes in some way, behavior detrimental to the well being of man as man. These ideas constitute the general program of natural law social science.

However, the problem begins when one wants to go beyond the general program, and actually arrive at real, objective laws of man's nature, as indicated by the stated aims of natural law theory. Here, natural law theory encounters intractable problems of accurate description and logical consistency. Here, natural law is unable to arrive at its stated aims and produce actual laws of man's ethical nature. When natural law proposes that *if man does not live according to his nature, his well being must diminish*, then natural law proposes a rule for conduct that is so general, that it does not provide meaningful ethical guidance. When natural law attempts to formulate an objective, universal rule for conduct of the type; *man must at all times try to stay alive*, then natural law provides an ethical rule which everyone realizes cannot be a universal rule of conduct at all places and at all times. Natural law theory has simply not been successful in overcoming this predicament.

Thus, no matter how strong the convictions of natural law and natural law related social philosophers to the contrary, natural law remains an unrealized science of man's nature, and does not arrive at the laws of man's nature. The program of natural law remains an ideal that so far no one has been able to achieve.

Praxeology Not Considered Natural Law

While the theory of natural law attempts but does not succeed in arriving at actual laws of man's nature, a different social science, one not considered to be part of natural law, continues to develop, and this social science *does* arrive at real

laws of man's nature. This science is praxeology, the theoretical science of human action. Praxeology is the general science of the laws of human nature. Praxeology is the science of social necessity; the social science that attempts to express all important social phenomena in law-like terms.

But while praxeology does succeed in demonstrating necessary cause and effect in the social world, and while it is the stated aim of natural law to do precisely this, there is a simple reason why praxeology is not considered to be natural law. Praxeology to date, has only succeeded in establishing necessary laws in the economic social realm, whereas what natural law hopes to do is establish the laws of man's nature in the ethical realm. And because it is the ethical realm of man's behavior that is the most important for natural law, and because praxeology has not succeeded in arriving at any ethical laws of man's nature, then from the point of view of natural law, praxeology is not natural law. True, praxeology has succeeded in establishing social laws, but those laws all revolve around *market* phenomena. All of the laws of praxeology to date, ultimately address economic goods and those goods' prices in terms of money. Economic goods and money prices are objectively existing things of finite and measurable quantity. Thus, praxeology has been successful in establishing social laws only with respect to objectively existing things of finite and measurable quantity. But the ethical side of man is not such a thing. Ethics does not deal with these types of entities. When one person lies to another, the lie does not exist objectively as an economic good does, and the lie is not measurable and finite as an economic good is. It follows that praxeology is a science that treats the objective and measurable goods of social exchange (market phenomena), and natural law treats that ethical side of man's nature which is not expressible as an objective and measurable thing. And this is why praxeology is not considered to be natural law.

If-Then and Should-Do Social Science

Besides the fact that praxeology treats objective economic goods, there is one more reason why praxeology is not considered natural law. Praxeology is what is called a “formal” science. Praxeologists like to say that their science is “formal” just like mathematics. Mathematics may say that “if” two is subtracted from four, “then” two must remain. But whether four are present, and whether two have been subtracted from them, mathematics is not designed to say. That is, mathematics describes the logic of the subtraction of units, but does not claim that any particular number of units “does” or “should” exist or whether any subtraction has or should have occurred. Similarly with praxeology in the areas in which it is able to make necessary statements. When praxeology states a law of social necessity, it says that *if* person A does thing “X”, *then* “Y” result must happen. But praxeology does not say whether or not A “should” or “should not” do thing X. Praxeology is only concerned with describing the *logic* of the action X, and does not try to say whether or not X should be done.

Thus, praxeology is “if-then” science. And praxeologists agree that praxeology can only make statements—can only arrive at laws—of the “if-then” type. But natural law aims to do more than this. Natural law theorists want to know not only what the results of particular behaviors will be, but they want to demonstrate what things person A “should do” or “should not” do. Natural law theory, as envisioned by natural law theorists, is at root a “should-do” science. Natural law theorists like to say that natural law arrives at man’s proper ends. Natural law seeks to discover what things man *should* aim at; the ends or values he *should* choose. And because praxeology is “if-then” science and natural law is “should-do” science, then it follows from this also that praxeology is not, and cannot be, natural law.

Praxeology and Man's Nature

Praxeology to date has not succeeded in establishing laws of man's ethical nature, and is a formal social science that cannot arrive at man's proper ends. Though these things are true, nonetheless praxeology has succeeded in elaborating its own formal conception of man's nature: The concept of human action. For praxeology this means simply that every behavior of man can be understood as the purposive aiming at some end or goal. Regardless of whether a particular person is *thinking* while sitting absolutely still, or *moving* from one location to another, a person is "acting"; is trying to attain some end or goal. And this fundamental fact of human existence, this fundamental fact of human nature, is what praxeology refers to as "action".

Praxeology is to a large extent, the science of the *logic* of human action. For example, if it is true that man *acts* by purposely aiming at some goal or end, then as a logical matter, there must exist a situation or circumstance from which person A (the actor) is *leaving* in addition to the situation or circumstance person A is aiming at. That is, the way we conceive that A aims at some goal, entails conceiving that A is "leaving" some other thing. When A tries to solve a problem by thinking, he necessarily tries to "move away from" the non-solution of the problem. When A tries to move to place Y, he necessarily tries to move away from place X. And so in this way, praxeology arrives at and elaborates the concept of *human action* as the most fundamental core of man's nature.

The Standard Formulation of Human Action

The standard formulation of human action as conceived by Ludwig von Mises is that in acting, *man seeks to substitute for a state of affairs he deems less satisfactory, a state of affairs he deems more satisfactory*. Present in this formal conception of man's nature are at least two of the fundamental elements of

action: 1. The purposive aiming at some end or goal. (the more satisfactory state of affairs) 2. And the emergence from or leaving behind of some other situation or circumstance. (the less satisfactory state of affairs)

In addition to the fundamental duality of the “moving to” one state of affairs and “moving away” from the other state of affairs, is the conception that one state of affairs is “more satisfactory” while the other is “less satisfactory”. By this, praxeology does not mean that when person A looks back on some action he took in the past, that he will always view the thing he was aiming at, “Y”, as more satisfactory than the thing he left behind, “X”. Rather what praxeology conceives, is that at the *point of* or *locus of* action (at that very instant where action occurs), that the state A aims at, “Y”, is viewed as more satisfactory than the state he leaves, “X”. That is, at the very instant A tries to solve a problem by thinking, he views the solving of this problem as a more satisfactory state than the non-solving of it. And at the very instant A moves from point X to point Y, he views point Y as a more satisfactory place to be than point X. Later, A may look back and judge this past action differently. But if A does so, this will be another “action” (of trying to judge his prior behavior), and what praxeology will be concerned with is the essential character of this, *now present*, action.

A Revised Formulation of Human Action

The standard formulation of the concept of human action is that in action, man seeks to substitute for a state of affairs he deems less satisfactory, a state of affairs he deems more satisfactory. A revised formulation consists primarily of a refinement of this formal conception of man’s essential nature. When man acts to substitute a more for a less satisfactory state of affairs, it is not accurate to conceive that he attempts to substitute for *all* that exists now, an entirely new totality of more satisfactory things. That is, in seeking to move from point X to point Y, person A does not also seek to substitute for

the old surroundings of point X, totally new surroundings for point Y. If person A goes from one house to the next in the same town Z, he does not try to substitute a new town to surround the house he goes to. Rather it is more accurate to conceive that A, while “leaving the town Z unchanged”, seeks only to change the house he is in. In acting, person A seeks to change only part of his overall state of affairs, while leaving the rest of his overall state of affairs unchanged.

Thus, a revised conception of human action conceives action as the striving on the part of person A, to attain some thing or some state, that is differentiated from other surrounding things—that is differentiated from the entire state.

The Conception of More Versus Less Satisfactory

When conceiving human action classically, we say that the state of affairs aimed at is judged more satisfactory than the state of affairs being left behind. This way of phrasing things has at least two disadvantages. First, this phrasing may imply to some, that whether a particular state of affairs is *objectively* better than another is something that praxeology is trying to conceive. However, praxeology does not intend to say anything at all about the objective quality of any particular state of affairs. Second, this standard phrasing may imply to some, that *at least* person A *himself* makes some judgement about whether a particular state of affairs is objectively better than another state of affairs when or before he decides to act, and that praxeology seeks to conceive this judgement and action. But this is not entirely accurate, and again, praxeology does not intend to conceive this.

What we want to conceive, in saying that A attempts to substitute a more for a less satisfactory state, is that in trying to attain *any* state, then *some* state must be left behind for A. As person A is always and at all times trying to attain some state of affairs as conceived by praxeology, then A is also always and at all times leaving some state behind. There exists a

fundamental duality: The state of affairs or thing A is attempting to attain (aim at, arrive at, etc...), and the state of affairs or thing A is attempting to leave (arrive from, aim away from, etc...).

Next, the fact that A *tries to* leave one state and *tries to* attain another, has an inherent meaning to the individual actor A. The meaning to actor A, inherent in moving to Y and away from X, derives not primarily from a *judgement* on the part of A, but rather derives from A's *nature* as man. Person A *wants to, tries to, strives to, attempts to, etc.*, reach some state or attain some goal *by nature and at all times*. What can be said is "satisfactory" or "not satisfactory" about the striving for Y and leaving behind X, is derived exclusively by conceiving things from the point of view of the being "A" who's nature it is to strive for Y and leave behind X. As A's nature is to strive for Y and leave behind X, then when we conceive the state Y as "more satisfactory", this is conceived only as applying to being A, at the time when being A is striving for Y and trying to leave behind or avoid X. What we seek, is the conception that since A is a being who's nature is to strive for Y and leave X, that at the time A strives for Y and strives to leave X, that if this does not happen for some reason, then this will constitute something "contrary to nature" for A, since his nature is to try to arrive at Y and emerge from X.

In other words, what is "satisfactory" or "not satisfactory" from the point of view of actor A, is limited to, and goes no further than, the conception that when A tries to leave X for Y, and this does not or cannot happen for some reason, that this will constitute something "against nature" for A, since it is A's nature to leave X for Y. The terms dissatisfaction, unhappiness, uneasiness, etc., are formal statements or conceptions of the idea: When the nature of some thing is to change from X to Y, and change X to Y does not happen for that thing, then this constitutes "non-nature" for this thing.

Human Striving as Human Action

So there are at least two modifications or clarifications in the revised conception of human action. First, the individual actor is conceived as striving to change a differentiated part of his overall state of affairs. Second, as the individual actor is a being whose nature it is to “strive for” some differentiated thing or state, and thus “strive away” from some other differentiated thing or state, the terms “satisfaction” or “dissatisfaction” are optional but not necessary terms, that attempt to capture this fundamental fact of human nature. We conceive that if for some reason, actor A is prevented from changing from X to Y, that this constitutes in some sense, something “contrary to nature” for A. We do not have to say that A is “dissatisfied” with having to stay at X. However, if it is understood that by the terms “satisfaction” and “dissatisfaction” we mean only the fruition or prevention of “X to Y” for A, and not a *judgement* by A on past or future events, then the utilization of these terms seems acceptable.

Because of these conceptual changes, and because of other considerations, the present author prefers to use the term “human striving” rather than the historical term “human action”. In our language and culture, it is common and ingrained to conceive of “thought” and “action” as two separate things. However, praxeology does not intend to separate thought and action. To praxeology, thought and action are the same. The term “striving” is meant to capture the essential meaning of human action; that every “attempting to”, every “trying to”, whether in thought or in movement, is a “striving”. One may habitually tend to conceive that one “deliberates” before taking some “action”, and thereby misunderstand the concept of human action. But the term “striving” is meant to conceive and demonstrate by reference to self-evident introspection, that a human act such as “deliberation” is the “attempt to” (the “striving to”) reach some conclusion, and that therefore, one cannot avoid striving, nor can one separate striving from *any* aspect of what one does.

Universal Aspects of Human Striving

The primary fact of human existence is human striving. Everyone is engaged in attempting to attain some thing or state. This “attempting to attain”, this “trying to”, this “wanting” something, is a striving for some differentiated thing or state.

Individual actor A strives to leave particular X and to arrive at particular Y, while leaving his overall “state of affairs” unchanged. This overall state of affairs is what actor A believes to “be the case” or believes “to be the situation” from which X and/or Y have been differentiated. That is, the overall state of affairs that remains unchanged for A, when A strives for something particular, is comprised of the totality of what “exists” or “is believed to exist” for A, as A understands things.

As A strives for some particular thing, it is against the backdrop of an unlimited set of things A leaves for the moment unchanged, and each of these things individually is some thing A believes to exist and/or to exist in a certain way. As A strives, he believes he is living in a certain city, he believes he owns a certain television, that his health today will be the same as yesterday, that the tree in his yard will still be there when he returns, that his friend will treat him the same as usual, and on and on. The set of things constituting A’s overall “state of affairs”, which he leaves unchanged while striving for the particular, is comprised of the totality of *all* beliefs A has about things. It includes not only the belief that the tree in his yard will still be there when he returns, but that this tree will be the same diameter as before, that it will be the same color, that branches will not be missing, that a large bear will not be at the very top of the tree, and on and on, ad infinitum.

All of these things constitute what is believed “attained” by A. That is, all of these things are what actor A believes to be the case, believes to be “true”, or believes to be the situation, as he turns his attention away from them, in order to strive for something particular. In short, in contrast to that which A now

strives for, everything else becomes that which is “already attained”, “believed attained”, or simply “attained” for A.

It is important to realize that by *attainment* is not meant simple possession. Rather by *attainment* is meant the belief A has about things, both true and untrue, both correct and mistaken, both real and unreal. What is “attained” for A is comprised not only of what A believes he owns in the sense of possessing it, but also what A believes to be the case with respect to everything else, whether he owns it or not. Thus the praxeological conception of “attainment” is meant as the most universal and all inclusive conception of anything and everything that A could possibly believe, including his belief about what he owns or possesses.

Further, what is *attained* for A or *believed attained* also includes the positive expression of a negative belief. For example if A believes he is not the owner of a particular house (whether true or not true, correct or not correct), in our formal system we will conceive that it is “attained for A” that he does not own the house. A’s overall state of affairs, that which A believes is the case (that which he believes is attained), includes his *positive belief* about things that are not the case for him. In other words, for A, it is the case that: “I do not own that house”.

Striving and Attainment

Thus we may conceive all behavior of social actor A in terms of “striving” and “attainment”. All behavior of A we propose, may be conceived in terms of what A is striving to attain, and in terms of what A has (or believes he has) attained.

Coercion As a Universal Aspect of Human Striving

In a formal praxeology of human striving, we can conceive all human behavior in terms of what individual actor A is

striving to attain, and what he believes he has already attained. In *social* interaction, actor A strives in relation to actor B.

The classic exemplification of the social phenomenon coercion, is when A points a gun at B and says: “Give me your money or I’ll shoot”. When A does this, he makes (or tries to make) something B thought was “attained” (his safety, well being, etc.) into something B now strives to attain. Then, A offers that thing back to B, in exchange for what A wants from B.

In the classic example of force or coercion, the universal and recurring aspect of the series of events that are “coercion”, is that the person who coerces (A), makes or tries to make, some thing or state that other person B believed was “attained” for himself, into something person B will now believe is not attained, and will therefore (hopefully) strive to attain it. Then A plans to offer this same thing back to B as an item in an exchange.

It is important to realize that at this stage in our conceptualization of things, the concepts of “force”, “coercion” and “compulsion” are considered equivalent. We conceive these as social means A uses to change the behavior of person B, and effect a certain kind of exchange with B. By contrast, we conceive acts such as “assault”, “violence” or “murder” differently. We conceive these things as a type of aggression that A may initiate, but not necessarily to effect the kind of exchange we have in mind.

When A twists B’s arm and says: “Give me that toy”, what is happening is that A is making (or trying to make) B strive for (attempt to attain, get, etc.) “having his arm let go” or “having a pain-free arm”. A is trying to make B strive for this, because A wants something from B (the toy). And so A wants to offer this thing B is now striving for (arm let go, pain free arm, etc.) in exchange for the toy.

What makes this exchange a coercive exchange, is that before A initiated this particular exchange, B believed that his “arm let go” or “a pain free arm” was already “attained”. He was not striving to attain these particular things before A initiated the coercive exchange, because he believed they were already attained. Then it was A himself, who made this thing, this aspect of B’s arm, something no longer “attained” for B, but rather now something B would have to strive to attain.

What is wrong with a coercive exchange by A, from the point of view of B, is the following: Both A and B strive to attain things. In the coercive exchange, A seeks that which he wants from B by means of a coercive exchange, as defined above. But what is wrong with this exchange from the point of view of B, is that while A is getting that which he wants from B (the money or the toy), B is only getting that which he already had. That is, in the coercive exchange, B has something he thought was already attained for himself, made into something now no longer attained. Then this thing is offered back to B. So B only gets what he just had a moment ago. He doesn’t get anything “new”. But as seen from the point of view of B, A *is* getting something new. Because A is not being coerced. A is striving for some thing (such as the money or the toy), and these are not things A already had. Rather, these are “new” things for A, not things that were changed from “attained” to “striven for” for A.

So as B sees things, A is striving for and receiving the things he wants, but B is only getting that which he already had. And this is what is wrong with coercion from the point of view of B.

A Preliminary Insight into Libertarianism’s Complaint with Social Coercion

Thus when libertarian social theory complains about how force is unjustly applied in contemporary society, it has in

mind the seeming injustice of these types of coercive exchanges.

In civil society, the part of society comprised of voluntary, non-coercive exchanges, people by and large offer to one another, that which the other person is striving for. In the classic market exchange for example, each person receives the “next” thing they are striving for, generally some good or service or some increment of money. But in coercive, non-civil society, that part of society comprised of non-voluntary transactions, one party to the transaction gets the next thing he is striving for, while the other person only gets that which he had already attained.

The coercive exchange consists in arranging for something someone already has, to become something they are now striving to attain, and then offering that same thing back to them.

In coercive exchange then, the one who coerces, seeks to attain that which he *currently strives for*, by offering in exchange, that which the other person *already has or had attained*. One person is getting that which he wants next, the next thing on his “list” so to speak. But the other person is only getting something he already had. He isn’t getting the next thing on *his* list.

This is the essence of libertarianism’s intuitive insight that social justice centers around the phenomenon of force (coercion), and the way it is used or practiced in contemporary society.

The Libertarian Conception of Government vis-à-vis Coercive Exchange

The libertarian conception of proper government revolves around this essential phenomenon of coercive exchange.

Libertarians generally believe that when government is concerned primarily with *preventing* coercive exchanges, then government is in this sense legitimate. However, when government is the *initiator* of coercive exchanges, then government itself becomes the source of social acts that almost everyone wants to be protected from, and thus becomes illegitimate.

Libertarianism takes this fundamental idea, and uses it in an attempt to delimit the proper function and scope of government. By and large, libertarianism arrives at the conclusion that when government is arranged so as to prevent or punish the fundamental criminal acts of murder, assault, fraud, and related social acts, that such a government retains some degree of legitimacy. But when the coercive powers of government are employed for the purposes of securing certain things or certain states of affairs for some people, beyond protection from crime, then government begins to lose whatever legitimacy it may have had. For example, when coercive exchanges are employed so that some may have a road they want, then government is acting to secure some thing that *someone* is striving to attain (the road), by giving in exchange to *someone else*, that which they already had (staying out of jail, freedom from police harm, etc.) The people who don't want the road, pay for its construction, not to obtain the road, but in order to stay out of jail. This is the essence of a coercive exchange from the point of view of libertarian social theory.

The theory of libertarianism is to a large extent, a theory based on this fundamental insight about coercive exchanges, and a theory of how to structure the institution of government (or protection and dispute resolution services) in light of this insight.

CHAPTER 2

Societal Acknowledgement of Economic Social Laws

Social theory and social science are controversial. Unlike mathematics, the exemplification of objective science, social science is still relatively subjective. Almost all assertions of social science are disputed or controversial to some degree.

But though this is undoubtedly the case, a small but growing number of assertions made by social science have achieved “law-like” status, even though the sense in which these assertions can be considered social *laws* may be disputed in academic circles. That is, though the exact nature of these social laws may not be understood, the fact that these laws have been formulated by social science, and the fact that certain of these laws are now heeded by society and society’s representatives, confers implicitly “law-like” status on them, regardless of the still unresolved academic issues surrounding the meaning of these laws.

Economics tells us that an increase in the supply of money, must necessarily cause a decrease in money’s value (inflation). Economics tells us that increasing the minimum wage rate above the market wage rate, must necessarily cause unemployment. And these are two economic (or social) laws, that regardless of their exact status in academia, have for all practical purposes, achieved in the minds of contemporary society, the status of real social laws.

Many social problems could be solved, or at least ameliorated (one might believe), were the government to print the extra money needed, so that those who have urgent needs, would have enough money to pay for them. And one might also believe that many social problems could be solved or ameliorated by increasing the minimum wage to a high enough level, so that wage earners could then afford to purchase all urgently needed goods and services.

What prevents these seemingly good deeds from being done is not the unwillingness of government to do good, and not the failure of government to recognize that people need more money. What prevents these deeds from being done is the knowledge of the necessary consequences of doing them, which those in government are eager to avoid. What prevents these deeds from being done is the knowledge of the social laws that social science has discovered.

The social law states that if one wants to avoid causing inflation, one should not increase the money supply. And the social law states that if one wants to avoid causing unemployment, one should not increase the minimum wage rate above the market wage rate. The fact that money is not printed in large enough quantities to solve the urgent problems of most in society, and the fact that the minimum wage rate is not increased enough to achieve the same end, is implicit proof that society and/or its leaders generally do acknowledge these laws. People acknowledge the massive inflation and unemployment that would result, were the (seemingly) good deeds of increasing the money supply and minimum wage rates to be implemented.

The Effect of Economic Teachings on Social Policy

Libertarians tend to believe that leftists and others in society ignore the teachings of social science and continue to enact harmful policies contrary to man's true nature. This notion is only partially true. In the social-legal realm, it is true

that modern society continues to enact many laws restricting human liberty and private property in an attempt to achieve the ends of certain groups in society. However, in areas that economics has succeeded in establishing social laws, governments are not rushing to enact policies to contradict those laws. The rush to print more money, the rush to raise the minimum wage, the rush to increase tariffs, have all abated due to the negative consequences social science has demonstrated and society believes would result.

In academia, it isn't only libertarian social philosophers who acknowledge the general correctness of the established economic laws. Many scholars working in the prestigious government universities, who are largely sympathetic to leftist/socialist causes, themselves acknowledge that with regard to economic policies, many times there are "law-like" consequences associated with these policies. And as these scholars are concerned about the reputation and electability of left-leaning politicians, they counsel caution to these politicians when it comes to enacting the harmful policies of old.

Thus, many of the old economic fallacies which some would be eager to enact into law are suppressed, because the ideas of economics have changed the intellectual landscape from what it was only a hundred years ago. Whenever a politician begins to complain that "we are losing our factory jobs", implying that laws should be enacted to prevent it, what slows the rush to enact such laws of old, is society's degree of economic knowledge. Society and/or society's representatives, now understand more about natural economic processes, and what the necessary consequences (generally considered harmful consequences) of preventing those processes are.

And thus, in the areas in which economics has been able to conceive social laws, its teachings are having an effect on social policy and social attitudes, and are preventing the enactment of many harmful policies. In addition, the teachings of economics are preventing the harmful policies that *are*

enacted, from being enacted as widely and/or as strongly as they otherwise would be.

The Challenge the Left Poses to Libertarian Social Science

The challenge that western leftism poses to libertarian social science is not primarily a challenge concerning economic law. In the face of overwhelming acceptance of economic knowledge in contemporary society, leftism does not have the confidence to embark on any grand Hegelian/Marxist type theory in the attempt to abolish the price system and voluntary market exchange. But leftists know that nothing approaching economic laws have been established in the social realm outside of economics proper. They know that there are no strict laws of social, non-economic behavior. In the area of non-economic social behavior and social policy, things are as they were in the economic realm of man's social behavior hundreds of years ago. No social laws have been discovered and established, so therefore, no negative consequence is believed to necessarily follow from any particular social behavior or policy. It follows from this, that when negative consequences (unwanted social effects) appear, they can always be blamed on the policy or behavior of someone else. Strict science will have nothing to say on this matter.

Leftism makes the following point to libertarian social science. Let's say we grant the essential correctness of most of the fundamental economic laws. Those laws instruct on the necessary consequences of specifically economic social acts. Many times, the economic consequences of enacting policies associated with socialism or welfare-state democracy, may be described as "negative" consequences. Some policies will have the effect of making some goods more expensive. Other policies will result in shortages. And still other policies will result in unemployment.

But though one may agree with all this for the sake of argument, what happens in the case where society, or some in society, view the negative economic consequence as worth suffering, in order to achieve some end viewed as more important? Man is not just an economic being. Man's social side extends far beyond mere economic considerations. Specifically, man is concerned with things such as "justice" and "fairness" in social interaction, not to mention the many other concerns man has, such as concern for his environment. It could well be that one values these things enough that the possible negative economic consequences of achieving them may be worth suffering. If this is the case, then what, scientifically speaking, is wrong with this? What does strict social science—strict in the sense this term is meant in economics—have to say about a relative value judgement between some important social end, and a negative economic consequence? From the point of view of science, why can't we choose the social end over the economic end?

This is the challenge that contemporary leftism and welfare-state democracy poses to libertarian social science.

Strong Convictions Versus Social Laws

From a libertarian point of view, the three most important world ethical systems are: the ethical system of world socialism, the ethical system(s) of the world religions, and the libertarian private property ethical system. Although a particular individual may possibly subscribe to all three of these ethical codes to some degree, each ethical system *excludes* the others with respect to its *primary value*. Socialism views government re-distribution of assets as the fundamental ethical principle, and towards this value, is willing to sacrifice religious belief and human liberty to a lesser or greater extent. Religion views belief in the deity as the fundamental value, more important than earthly liberty or material status. And libertarianism values human liberty as

primary, and whether or not one is a believer, or whether or not there is material equality, is of secondary importance.

The ethicists of socialism, of religion, and of private property are all three very strongly convicted. They all hold their beliefs with passionate certitude. The socialists say that *if* their ethical code is not followed, *then* the rich will grow richer and the poor will grow poorer until revolution must result. The religious say that *if* man acts unethically as defined in the texts, *then* man will suffer in the afterlife. Private property ethicists say that *if* man does not respect human liberty and property, *then* society will disintegrate and man will eventually become extinct. All groups are unshakable in their belief that the social-ethical theories they subscribe to have sufficiently demonstrated, in a logical and incontrovertible way, social-ethical *cause and effect*.

As taught in the texts of all three ethical systems, man has a certain nature, and in learning about this nature, we arrive at something like the “laws” of man’s nature. In learning about man’s nature, we learn what is good or bad for man, and thus what to do if we want good things to happen for man, and what not to do if we want to prevent bad things from happening to man. The adherents of all three ethical systems believe that their particular ethical system is the one that has been able to do this correctly. They are certain that their philosophers have sufficiently demonstrated what man’s true nature is, and what the effect of not adhering to their ethical systems will be. They are certain that their philosophers have demonstrated within their texts, social-ethical cause and effect, and have thus arrived at something like the laws of man’s nature.

But in the age of modern science, the learned scholars of each particular ethical school are not easily swayed. They have seen what “laws” look like, and they don’t look like long, voluminous texts. When modern science arrives at laws, both physical and social (as in economics), the actual laws themselves, the objectively presented statements of cause and effect, are generally very short. The deliberation and debate, the scholarly research and the presenting of various theories, in the

period *before* a law is established, may exist as lengthy texts. But the actual laws themselves, once arrived at, are concise. The mature statement of a scientific law is generally expressible in relatively few words or symbols.

The mature statement of a scientific law, is a statement in written or symbolic form, about equivalence between entities, such as $(\dots\dots) = (\dots\dots)$, and generally conceives a necessary relationship between the entities, that fallible and non-omnipotent man, may not have realized, or may easily forget.

When the learned scholars of each of the three major ethical schools, compare this general form of a scientific law, to the ethical assertions of cause and effect being proposed by the other two schools, they suspect that these proposed cause and effect connections, may not be real scientific laws, but rather a kind of substitute for scientific law. It doesn't take long before each school is able to locate in the theories of the others, the points at which what is claimed to be cause and effect, is actually something like intuition or strong conviction.

This is essentially why the philosophers of socialism (the dominant social system of our day) are confident that when they propose policies and teach behaviors at odds with the teachings of the other world ethical systems, that as far as science has anything to say in the matter, there is no (scientific) reason why socialist policies should not be enacted, and no (scientific) reason why socialist ethics and socialist behavior should not be practiced. There is no *scientific* demonstration of any inferiority of the socialist ethic as compared with the religious or private property ethic.

The Effect of the Non-Establishment of Social-Scientific Laws on Social Policy

Because science has been unable to establish laws of social, non-economic behavior, this means that in the political arena

where social policy is debated and formed, no party to any debate over non-economic social policy is able to advance a scientific reason why their policy should be enacted and/or the other person's policy not enacted. Those both for and against any proposed act can only offer their strongly felt opinions regarding what they view as the harmful consequences of any intended act. But none can refer to any scientific law—as they could were the policy being proposed an economic policy—in regard to a proposed social, non-economic policy.

Thus, those who want to pursue some social end by enacting a particular social policy, are not restricted in their behavior by any acknowledged social law. As far as what has been established by scientific demonstration, and as far as what is known by public opinion informed by social science, social behavior outside of economic activity is “consequence-free”. There are no necessary negative consequences to social policies akin to the decreasing value of money or rising unemployment, as demonstrated by specifically economic social law.

The result of this is that while economic social acts have increasingly come under the sway of generally accepted laws, and while this has greatly restricted society's sphere of consequence-free behavior, no corresponding progress has been achieved with regard to social, non-economic behavior or acts. And thus, while the “rate of acceleration” of economic acts entailing harmful consequences has slowed considerably, the rate of acceleration of non-economic social acts entailing harmful consequences has proceeded apace. And thus man-made laws—the means by which each tries to attain what he wants through government social policy rather than through voluntary cooperation—continue to proliferate rapidly in contemporary society. This is a direct consequence of the fact that non-economic social behavior has eluded description in scientific, law-like terms.

The Stand-Alone Nature of Social Law

Social law provides an objective demonstration of the necessary effects of specific types of social action or social behavior. When we say “objective demonstration” we mean in this context that since the social law eventually can be reduced to an equivalency statement, that once and to the extent the law is grasped as such, then to this extent the subjective interpretation of the law’s meaning is diminished. Once one grasps the meaning of an objectively presented statement of equivalence, then one does not have to refer back to any text or philosophy in order to prove, understand or “back-up” this statement. The equivalency statement, once correctly arrived at and objectively presented, can stand on its own, since it is a statement about how two entities which can appear differently, or appear in different form, are actually the same in some sense.

The reason that the social laws stating the necessary effects of increasing the supply of money or of increasing the minimum wage above the market rate can stand on their own as objective social laws, is that in *some sense*, an increase in the supply of money *is the same thing as*, a decrease in its value. Likewise, a legal minimum wage that increases above the market wage rate is in *some sense, the same thing as*, unemployment.

How this is so, is perhaps a contentious and controversial issue that academicians will argue about. Nevertheless, what gives these types of social laws their “stand-alone” capability, is that they are efficient statements of equivalence between entities, of the same essential type as the equivalency statements of mathematics or formal logic. Once these laws are grasped, then they serve as a type of “efficient” knowledge, whereby those acknowledging them can conceive a relationship between two entities, a relationship not known previous to the discovery and conceptual formulation of the laws.

It is for this reason that the ethical assertions of socialism, of the world religions, and of the private property ethic do not appear to be scientific laws. The assertions made by these ethical systems do not reduce to statements of equivalence, and therefore cannot stand on their own. The link asserted to exist between the two entities which are (the particular unethical act) and (the particular negative consequence) exists only as an argument in the texts of the ethical system in question. The link is not objectively demonstrable or presentable as an efficient equivalency statement. Rather, to believe in the *link*, one has to believe in the *text*. The cause and effect link exists only as part of the overall belief system of the philosophy itself, but cannot exist as a stand-alone law, expressing an aspect of equivalence between two entities.

The Effect on Society of Social Law

The establishment of a social law has at least four effects that significantly change society and the direction society takes with regard to social behavior and social policy.

First, once a social law is established, then those who know of the law and act or propose to act under its guidance, do so with the prestige of science as an ally. In the sphere of contentious political conflict for example, those who's actions are in accordance with established scientific laws are in an advantageous position. Since the social law expresses a necessary cause and effect relationship, those who know the law are in a position to confidently assert what the consequences of a particular act will be. While those without the knowledge the law imparts, are not in such a position.

Second, once a social law is established and begins to be widely acknowledged, then those who would undertake particular harmful social behaviors, are less able to disavow responsibility for the consequences of their behavior. Before a necessary law of social behavior is established, one is able to behave in a socially harmful way, and blame the negative

consequences on someone else. But once a social law is established and becomes widely acknowledged, then intellectual and public opinion begins to believe in the necessary relationship between the behavior and the consequence, and are thus able to locate the *cause* of the harmful consequence. As a result of this, the person contemplating a harmful social behavior, must now take into account whether he wants to be held responsible for this behavior, as he will no longer be able to blame someone else for the necessary consequences. When this person decides he does not want to be held responsible for the consequences of his behavior, then he abstains from it in order to prevent the consequences. He does so, in order to *prevent harm to himself*, were he to be held responsible for the negative consequences of his social behavior.

Third, aside from the purely political struggles in which social laws play a part, there are others in society not engaged in political struggles per se, but who nonetheless need to act socially. There are many people who sincerely want to avoid or prevent harm to themselves, but who, not knowing the certain cause of the harm, are unable to prevent it. They are not in a position to prevent certain types of social harm *to themselves*, because they do not know which of their social behaviors must lead to negative consequences to themselves. So the establishment of a social law, provides those who sincerely want to avoid harm to themselves, a means to do so. Once a social law is established, people may prevent specific types of harm or negative consequences from occurring to themselves, if and when they want to, by abstaining from their necessary causes as established by the social law.

Forth, when because of the establishment of a social law, person A abstains from some behavior in order to prevent harm to himself, this can be experienced by person B, as a lessening of the occurrence of these behaviors generally. In cases where B believes that some behavior of A would have been harmful to himself, B, then when A abstains from this as a means to prevent harm to himself (A), then B experiences this as the

absence of an act or behavior that would have been harmful to himself.

All these are real and significant ways that established social laws improve society, by allowing people to understand the necessary consequences of specific behaviors. Once people understand the necessary cause and effect relationship between some intended behavior, and the necessary harm to themselves, they are empowered to prevent the harm to themselves by abstaining from the intended behavior, when they judge the harm as more than they want to experience.

CHAPTER 3

The Epistemology of Social Law

What grants “law-like” character to social law, is a phenomenon whereby single, unitary changes or events, when conceived according to a conservation-like law or principle, can be seen from two points of view, which are not identical. An original change, is accompanied (not followed) by a counter-change, which is the same change, but seen from a different point of view.

Tangible examples of this phenomenon are: A glass of water moved towards the east, is always a glass of water moved away from the west. And, an automobile made more aerodynamic is always an automobile made harder to bring to a stop.

What imparts the law-like quality, the “necessity” to these change scenarios, is that one change can be seen in two ways, which are not identical in some sense. The fact that the change is one change, that the event is one event, is what ensures that the other way of seeing this change (the accompaniment or necessary effect) will always be present in the same way. The fact that the change can be seen in two ways, is what provides the “two-ness” to the change scenario, and what allows the apparent reality of “two events” to be connected to one another by means of a law. The fact that the change can be seen in two ways, is what provides the basis for our common sense notions of causality, of cause and effect, and is what tempts us to speak

of this change as two events in succession, and in terms of the necessity “between” two events.

What makes the law in question of practical use, is the fact that one may intend to effect some particular change, but not necessarily intend for the necessary consequence to occur. One can intend to move a glass of water to the east, and not really care whether or not it is moved (not “intend” to move it) away from the west. Similarly, one may have reasons for making an automobile more aerodynamic, and may never consider whether one can do so without making the car harder to bring to a stop. The car’s being harder to stop is not thought about, and is in this sense, not intended.

This fact of the non-intended accompaniment to the originally intended change, constitutes the sense in which the two (the change and its accompaniment) are not identical. That person A does or can experience this unitary change as *two* events in temporal succession, constitutes the non-identity of these two events, *for person A*. The separation of the original change from its necessary accompaniment **is** the form of non-identity between the two. The separation **constitutes** the non-identity.

The Universality of Quantum Epistemology

An important advance in understanding how to consistently conceive social phenomena was foreshadowed by the epistemological revolution which took place in atomic physics in the first half of the twentieth century. The primary lesson learned from this revolution in thought, is that in order to conceive phenomena in a logical, contradiction-free way, the concepts we construct and utilize, must be fitted accurately to the phenomena. The scientist cannot simply assume that mature, classical concepts—no matter how logically consistent in their own closed system—are appropriate for conceiving all future phenomena in a logically consistent way.

The quantum revolution was a revolution in thought, and a warning about the limits of formal conception and description of phenomena in general. The lessons taught by this revolution in human thought exceed physics and mathematics, and instruct us on how the *precise* manner in which *all* phenomena are conceived, is of decisive importance. One cannot simply apply concepts that were successful for one set of phenomena, to another set of phenomena, and expect a similar logically consistent account to emerge. If a formal system is to be logically consistent, its concepts must accurately conceive the phenomena. Concepts that accurately conceived a specific set of phenomena may not accurately conceive a new set. Thus a formal system attempting to depict essentially new or different events, by recourse to older concepts, may risk being shown inconsistent, and in this sense, not a useful or workable system or theory. This was the meaning of the discussion and debate between Einstein and Bohr.

In social theory, as opposed to physical theory, something akin to the difference between classical physics and quantum physics exists. Because the science of economics has to a large extent succeeded in formulating social laws of cause and effect, whereas no such laws have been successfully formulated with respect to the ethical side of man's social nature. The science of economics has succeeded in constructing a formal system of necessary cause and effect with respect to economic goods and their money prices (one may loosely analogize) in the same way that classical physics had arrived at a formal mathematical system for conceiving the necessity in the movements of large objects. However, social science is confronted with an essentially new set of phenomena, when it tries to consistently conceive the *subjective entities* which are ethical phenomena. Here, social science is in a predicament similar to the physicists, when they tried to apply classical Newtonian physics concepts to the new atomic phenomena. It was eventually realized that this was impossible, and a new set of concepts had to be devised, which were fitted to the essentially new phenomena. This is the epistemological lesson and legacy

that quantum epistemology left for all those who seek to describe phenomena by means of formal systems.

Hume's Law

All social science goes through Hume. This is because it was Hume who demonstrated the logical inconsistency in simple cause and effect, when cause and effect is conceived as two events in temporal succession. What is commonly considered a realistic account of things, includes the idea that events follow one another, one event being later in time than the other. And it was Hume who demonstrated that when two events are conceived in this manner, it may be the case that event A has always been followed by event B in the past, but there is no reason why event B must necessarily follow event A every time in the future.

Cause and effect is important to social science for the simple reason that, if there is no social necessity, if one event does not necessarily have to be followed by another event, this means we can continue trying social acts that did not work in the past, and there is a chance that—perhaps with small modifications—they will work in the future. There is no logical reason not to try the failed social acts of the past, again and again, until we find the right way to make them work. This follows, if social necessity cannot be demonstrated.

For anyone to whom cause and effect is important, Hume's simple law of non-necessity between time sequential events seems a frustrating affront to our strongly held convictions that somehow, cause and effect does exist in the world, even though when we try to demonstrate it logically, we usually fall short. But leaving aside for a moment the difficulty in overcoming Hume's law and demonstrating cause and effect in social reality, let us understand from where Hume's law derives its simple and enormous power.

A social scientist, as human observer of some part of reality, cannot observe the entirety of all of reality at once. A human observer can only isolate, from the entire global reality, a sequence of observations to be described and analyzed.¹ In the intervening time between any two events, it is impossible to logically maintain, that the left out part, the part of reality not being analyzed, has absolutely no effect on the part that is being analyzed. This fact constitutes the “uncertainty” or “non-necessity” between any two successive events, when those events are conceived as real physical events, part of larger reality.

When material reality is observed, inherent in this is that the scientist-observer isolates a sequence of events to analyze or describe, which sequence of events is never, and can never be entirely isolated from the effects of the rest of material reality. Any event A-1 existing during the time interval between event A and event B, is thus influenced to some degree by the part of reality that is left out of the observations or descriptions. The left out part is *on principle* and *necessarily* excluded from the description. It is not accounted for in the conceptual scheme, since the scientist-observer **has to** isolate the part of reality he wants to study, and **has to** leave other parts of reality outside of his study. And this is why it is not possible to logically maintain that event A must necessarily be followed by event B. It is impossible, on scientific principle, to account for all the effects operating on event A-1 in the time interval between event A and event B.

Hume’s law is a powerful and succinct statement of this simple fact.

The Implication of Hume’s Law

The implication of Hume’s law is that necessity in social science cannot be conceived within a system of material concepts. When a statement about or conceptualization of two entities is constructed, which captures the materiality of those

entities; captures the sense in which those entities exist in temporal/sequential reality, then strict necessity must be lost in the conception of cause and effect between these two entities. A social theoretician who knowingly or unknowingly utilizes such concepts, will be subject to this type of epistemological law. Social cause and effect will in principle not be demonstrable, when the material conceptual scheme is used to describe social phenomena.

When the social scientist uses material descriptions or conceptions, this does not mean that nowhere in his theory might one find necessity. But it does mean that if there is a chain of reasoning employed, anywhere such conceptions are present, is where the logical chain of necessary cause and effect, or logical chain of necessary following, must break down. Three examples of such material type conceptions are:

1. The differentiation between internal processes of thought, versus an external world of real events.
2. The idea that another person's "reason" is "located" in his head.
3. The idea that in *human action* in the Austrian School sense, that one deliberates, *and then* chooses to act.

All of these are examples of conceptions which can inadvertently introduce material, and thus non-necessary links, in one's social scientific scheme. If one's internal thoughts are conceived as existing in spatio-temporal relation to a world of outer reality, conceived of as a reality outside one's own body, then this is a material conception of the relationship between the two entities. If one conceives that another person's reason is located in that person's head, then this constitutes a spatio-temporal conception of the relationship between that person's reason, and other material things. And if one conceives that deliberation is something that *happens before* action, then one is conceiving action as a material-temporal event, which is preceded by thinking or deliberation.

All of these are examples of entities/events conceived such that they will be subject to Hume's law. This does not mean that no important social insights can be communicated by such concepts. It only means that necessity between events will be absent whenever and wherever such concepts are present. A social theory depending on such concepts, but claiming or aspiring to demonstrate social necessity, is likely mislabeled, as no necessity will *in principle* be demonstrable, if the demonstration consists of a chain of reasoning dependent on the relationship between materially conceived events.

Mixing Material and Formal Concepts

The effect of Hume's law on theoretical social science, is to necessitate two separate conceptual schemes, if one wants to maintain clear meaning and logical consistency. One can describe things clearly and meaningfully using the concepts of materiality and temporality, in which case strict necessity cannot be conceived in any particular sequence of such conceived events. Or, one can utilize a formal conception system that does not accurately depict real material life in its fullness, but which through its formality, can demonstrate necessity.

An obvious way to overcome this epistemological law that requires a separation of material and formal conceptions, would be to construct a theory that mixes the two. The aim of such an undertaking would be to arrive at a theory that had both formal and material elements, and thus satisfied the theoretician's desire for a theory that was both realistic, and also capable of making statements of necessity. Though this would seem an admirable goal, such an undertaking will have to grapple with the following logical problem:

We can think of a mathematical relation, which is a formal conception, and we can write down an equation on a piece of paper. Now, when we ask the question: "what is the effect of this equation, on this piece of paper?", and we intend or

conceive to ask about the effect the lead marks have on the sheet of paper, then there is no problem. Here we have a material event, or sequence of events, that will be subject to Hume's law. When we conceptualize the pencil lead materially, as coming into contact with the sheet of paper in a series of time sequential events, this is the type of cause and effect scenario to which Hume's law is meant to apply. But what meaning could be conveyed by asking "what is the effect of this mathematical relation on this piece of paper?" The mathematical relation, qua formal conception, does not have a material existence, or at least is not conceived this way, when we ask the latter question. So then how can this question be answered, when the piece of paper is conceived as a *material* object? This would seem to be an example of "mixing" material and formal schemes or conceptions. And it has no meaning that can be readily understood.

Rather than achieving a "mixture" of two conceptual schemes, the example above simply reduces back into two *separate* systems of meaningful conception. There is the meaningful conception system comprehending the interaction of the lead with the paper—the system that conceives a material event or sequence of events from which necessity will be absent. Then there is the meaningful conception system of formal relations—which cannot comprehend material reality, but by means of which logical necessity can be demonstrated. These two systems seem to be "mutually exclusive" or "complimentary" as the physicists called it. The mixing of the two is logically problematic.

The relationship of entities within the material conceptual scheme is meaningful and understandable. The logical relations of the formal-logical conceptual scheme are meaningful and understandable. But the relationship of a materially conceived entity to a formal-logical entity seems to lack meaning and understandability.

Conceiving of Events Materially versus Formally

Consider the following event as described by the famous physicist Richard Feynman: “This is how a rocket works. At first it is standing still, say, in empty space, and then it shoots some gas out of the back, and the rocket goes forward. The point is that of all the stuff in the world, the centre of mass, the average of all the mass, is still right where it was before. The interesting part has moved on, and an uninteresting part that we do not care about has moved back. There is no theorem that says that the interesting things in the world are conserved – only the total of everything.”²

The beauty of this simple explanation of the law of conservation, is that it reminds us of the difference between what is important to us in a realistic, daily-life account of things, and what is important from a strictly scientific point of view. From the point of view of the law of conservation, what is important is that the rocket and its contents, and the gas coming out the back of the rocket, are equivalent. From a realistic point of view, the rocket and the people inside are much more important than the gas. So these are two distinctly different ways of looking at things.

If we want to describe or conceive the rocket’s journey realistically, then we describe the rocket using such concepts as: “At first it is standing still, *and then*, it shoots some gas out of the back”, etc. By using the conceptual scheme of temporal-spatial reality and duration, we are able to adequately describe the sense in which the rocket exists as a real, material object, and how events follow one another as in real life. However, in doing so, we lose something important. In conceiving the “material”, we lose the “logical” or “necessary”. When we conceive material objects or events, “necessary following” will be lost between any two such materially conceived objects or events. No particular material event-object B, must necessarily follow any other particular material event-object A. In the intervening time period—the “and then” which exists between the two

events—something may change, and event B may not happen as expected, or even happen at all.

Then there is another way to conceive of or describe the rocket's journey; by formal methods. The formal equations of classical physics can be used to describe the rocket's journey. And as there are mathematical equations expressing, for example, the law(s) of conservation, then an "exact science" or "necessary science" can be applied to the rocket's path. But by the use of these formal concepts and formal laws, "materiality" and "reality" will be lost. The real-material aspect of the rocket will not be captured by the formal mathematical scheme. What is important about this event from a "human perspective"; the meaning of the event from a cultural/ethical standpoint, is not captured by the formal conceptual system of equivalency relations.

In order to describe the rocket's path formally, first the concept of the rocket has to be translated into a different conceptual scheme; a scheme from which the concepts used to differentiate a rocket from other large objects, are absent. The method of describing an aspect of the rocket's changing formally, entails translating from the language of materiality, particularity, and specificity, to the language of non-materiality, non-particularity, and non-specificity.

The formal/mathematical expression of the law of conservation, whereby the rocket's moving forward is exactly and precisely counterbalanced by the gas moving backwards, is an *essentially* different method of expression, than the one used to describe the rocket's path realistically. The mathematical/formal/logical scheme used to conceive physical/material reality, is a scheme from which material concepts have been *removed*.

From this, and from what has been established so far, it follows that whether one wants to describe some phenomenon materially, or formally, is a choice that has to be explicitly made by the theorist. One can't just embark on what one

believes will be an “impartial” description of things, not acknowledging the fundamental difference between the material and the formal, and hope to achieve a logically consistent account of them. If this were possible, then no social *science* would be necessary. Something exists for the theorist, akin to economic laws for the economic actor, to which he has to adjust his theorizing, if his theorizing will be successful. This “something” is a type of epistemological “law” necessitating a clear distinction between material and formal descriptions of nature, whether social nature or physical nature. One not acknowledging this epistemological law, risks having one’s work rendered inconsistent, due to the logically inconsistent mixture of the two conceptual schemes.

Necessity in Cause and Effect: Primary Requirements

How can cause and effect necessity be demonstrated to exist in general, and thus be demonstrated to exist also in social phenomena? For a conception of cause and effect to be meaningful, it must establish a causal relationship between two events which are non-identical in some way. Cause and effect is the idea that event A causes event B, not the idea that event A is event A. So the first requirement of a causal law is *some form* of non-identity between event A and event B.

The second requirement of the causal law is logical consistency and absolute necessity. The law should demonstrate in a logically consistent manner, how A must necessarily be “followed by” or “cause” B, every time, without exception.

And finally, the causal law cannot be contrary to experience. It must not only show how cause and effect may be conceived as operant in phenomena in general, but should be reasonably demonstrable in, and reasonably applicable to, *specific* cases and *specific* instances.

These are three primary requirements of a theory or conception of necessary cause and effect.

Necessity in Cause and Effect: Conception Of

If we consider a relatively complex event, such as the manufacture of an automobile, what if anything can be said about this event which must necessarily be true, and satisfy the requirements of demonstrating necessity in cause and effect? Let's use a realistic example in which an automobile manufacturer seeks to make its automobiles more aerodynamic, in order to increase fuel efficiency. So what must necessarily happen as a result of the manufacturer making the car more aerodynamic? The answer is, if the car is more aerodynamic, it must also be harder to bring to a stop. If the car can move more easily through the air, and provide better fuel economy, by virtue of this, it will slide through the air more easily, and it will be harder (more braking power will be needed) to bring the car to a stop. This is something that is a necessary result of the car's being made more aerodynamic. The "cause" which is making the car more aerodynamic, leads necessarily to the "effect" which is that the car is now harder to stop.

What ultimately makes the relationship between the cause and the effect necessary, is that the two things which are "the increase in aerodynamic" and the "harder to stop", are two aspects of a single change. The change in the shape of the car, decreases the air resistance of the car, and for this reason, makes the car harder to stop. And for this reason, the "effect" which is "harder to stop", must happen every time the "cause" (car is made more aerodynamic) appears. It must happen every time, because the event which is making the car easier to move through the air, is the *same event* which is making it harder to bring to a stop. So every time one event happens, the other *must* happen also.

And yet, there is a sense in which the two events are not the same. There is a very important, even crucial way, that the two

events are non-identical. The two events are non-identical, because a person could intend to cause one event to happen, but not intend the necessary effect to happen. The automobile manufacturer could easily *intend* to increase the fuel efficiency of the car by means of changing its shape, and not *intend* to make the car harder to stop. And that the car now travels longer, or that more braking power must be applied, before it can be brought to a stop, we can easily imagine was not the intention of the automobile maker. The intention was to increase the fuel efficiency of the car, by making it more aerodynamic. But the unintended consequence is that the car is now harder to bring to a stop. And this consequence is necessary. It must happen every time the car is made more aerodynamic.

This conception of necessary cause and effect fulfills all three primary requirements. It shows the sense in which event A is non-identical to event B. It shows how the effect must necessarily follow from the cause, absolutely, with apodictic certainty. And it is consistent with experience, does not contradict already existing instances of cause and effect, and is applicable to specific cases.

This conception of necessary cause and effect satisfies Hume's law, because it does not refer to two events in temporal succession, but rather refers to a single event or change, which can be understood as having two aspects. And yet, it is not contrary to experience, because we can easily see the sense in which it must be true. When we move a glass of water *towards the east*, for whatever reason, we must necessarily move *it away from the west*, even though that was not our real intention. It is necessary that we move it away from the west, but that is not our intention necessarily, in moving the glass towards the east. In this sense only, the event "moving the glass away from the west", is not identical to the event "moving the glass towards the east". There is definitely a form of non-identity in the two events, *from the point of view of the person undertaking or "causing" the events*.

Economic Social Law

The conception of economic social laws partakes of this same general form of law. What exists as a necessary law or necessary relation in economic science, results from the fact that a single change or single event has hidden or unintended consequences the individual may not know about. The idea that some necessary effect attaches to some economic act, derives from the underlying fact that the act and the effect are non-separable aspects of one unitary change or event.

In this sense, it is not entirely accurate when conceiving economic laws, to conceive that some economic act “*must lead to*” or “*must be followed by*” some particular consequence. It is more accurate to understand that our belief that a particular consequence must follow a particular economic act, **derives from**, the underlying fact, that a particular economic act can be conceived as one of two co-existent aspects of a unitary event. In the temporal-material fullness of every day life in which we conceive events as following one another in time, we naturally express this co-existence of the two aspects in our every-day language of time sequential events. And thus we speak of one event necessarily following the other. We do so because the concepts of every-day language include those of temporal-material duration and continuity. We generally do not express every-day events in the scientific language of necessity and equivalency, but rather in the language of material life.

The whole purpose of the scientific language—of the formal praxeological concepts in the case of social science—is to demonstrate the underlying necessity *of* or *in* this material life. And this is done by eliminating the materiality in the conceptions, in order to demonstrate the underlying equivalence between entities, which in the fullness of real life, may appear as (and in every-day language can only be conceived as) separate entities in temporal sequence.

An Analysis of the Law of Decreased Supply and Increased Value

We may understand the economic law establishing a necessary connection between the decreased supply and the increased value of some good in the following way.

Let's say person A strives for 1 unit of some good.

The striving for 1 unit of some good, is **identical to** the not having of a wanted 1 unit of that good.

The striving for 1 unit of some good, is **identical to** the valuing of this 1 unit of some good.

Thus, when A strives for 1 unit of some good, this is identical to **both** the not having of a wanted unit (the "low" supply), and a valuing of that unit (the "increase" in value).

And thus, the "decreased" supply and the "increased" value, are necessarily related. Because in striving for some good, A does that which is to value it, and A does that which is to increase his supply of it.

As we know from established praxeological social science, person A only values "through action". A demonstrates what he "values" through his "action" or "striving". When A strives for something, when he "strives to attain" X, **this is** his valuing of X.

In exactly the same manner, what is a low or "decreased" supply for person A, is demonstrated through action only. A demonstrates which things are not in sufficient supply for him, by "striving" to "attain" them (or more of them). When A strives to attain something, **this is**, his wanting to "increase his supply" of it, which is equivalent to his not having enough of it.

Thus when A strives to attain something, he simultaneously values that thing, and, demonstrates a low supply. And this is why value and supply are necessarily related.

Conversely, when A attains some thing, (the increased supply), A ceases to strive for it, and thus ceases to value it. (the decrease in value)

Here we have to mention that when we say “demonstrates”, we mean that A demonstrates what is valuable and what his state of supply is, *to himself*. As the method of praxeology is methodological individualism—an account of how things appear from the point of view of the individual actor—then the term “demonstrates” is a concept intended to be consistent with the other concepts of praxeology. By the term “demonstrates”, we do not mean to conceive some materially durable “signal”, “bodily movement” or “gesture” A transmits across space and time to another person B.

The Materiality of Striving

What makes the necessity in striving difficult to see clearly, is that real life is ceaseless change, and before we can adequately capture the necessity of any unitary event, another event is upon us. Real life does not stand still so that we could examine all the necessary effects of a unitary event. The event is already gone by the time we consider it, and along with that past event, has gone its necessary counter-event. To see the necessity in that event and others like it, we develop a formal-logical system of concepts. And that is what we call the “science” of those events.

In real life, we speak in terms of an “increasing” or “decreasing” supply of some good, for example. This is a material-temporal conception of things indicating a continuous and deterministic duration of increasing or decreasing supply. When we use conceptions such as these, we generally mean to indicate that some supply is increasing or decreasing, and very

likely to continue increasing or decreasing, at least in the next instant. Of course, logically, by Hume's law, we already know that no temporal-material event must necessarily be followed by any other temporal-material event. Just because the supply was increasing/decreasing in the recent past, or just because the supply has always been increasing/decreasing, does not mean that the supply must necessarily continue to increase/decrease in the future (even in the very near future). There cannot be absolute, apodictic certainty in such a sequence of events. Thus, the necessity in social reality cannot be consistently conceived utilizing "materially full" conceptions such as "an increasing supply", when these concepts denote a continuous, durable event or sequence of events.

In the material fullness of real life, one drives one's car into the gas station, and fills the car with gasoline in a nice and smooth continuum. When the gasoline is pumped into the car's tank, the tank's level rises continually, in a seamless, continual, "non-discrete" way. In this continuum, as conceived, absolute necessity is absent. At any point along this continuum, things may be interrupted, and what was believed would follow naturally from prior events, may not.

In the scientific/formal description of some particular aspect of this continuum, such as the tank filling up with gasoline (which we can conceive of as A striving for a supply or increment of gasoline), the material-temporal continuum is not captured. In this description, the necessity of some event can be captured (as demonstrated by the law of supply and value), but only at the expense of the materiality of the event. The depiction of this event demonstrating formal necessity, will be unsatisfying from the point of view of demonstrating material aspects of this event. But only by this material deficiency, can apodictic certainty be gained.

The formal relations of an increased supply, do not and cannot replicate the real life experience of obtaining an increased supply, any more than the equations of physics can replicate the real life experience of bungee jumping. The

formal logic is devoid of the concepts by which real life experiences are communicated. The formal logic is devoid of materiality.

A Formal Analysis of Supply and Value Continued

Let us consider another way in which a formal treatment of supply and value differs from a “common sense” or “realistic” treatment of supply and value.

In a realistic description of “valuing”, one might agree, at least for the sake of argument, that in striving for some thing, one values that thing. But in a realistic account of things, one would never say that in striving for and valuing some thing, that one then ceases to value other things. Rather, in a realistic account of things, one would tend to conceive that while one is valuing that which one currently strives for, one is still at the same time valuing other things also. One does not “cease to value” one’s friends, just because one is “striving” for some particular thing at the moment. This is the common sense, realistic conception of valuing.

But in a formal and non-material treatment of valuing, we conceive that in valuing X, that person A necessarily ceases to value Y.

In a formal, non-material conception of valuing, we conceive valuing/striving as a discrete, non-continuous change (the change is conceived as not materially or temporally durable). That change which is valuing *some thing*, is precisely the discrete, non-continuous change away from valuing *some other thing*: the change *from* [striving for X] *to* [striving for Y].

Thus, in this view of things, we conceive that in striving for Y, person A does cease to strive for X. In a formal-logical treatment of valuing, when A strives for (values) thing Y, he thereby ceases to strive for (value) thing X.

And thus, the simple formal logic of A's striving for 1 unit or increment of some good, for example, is that in *striving* for some good, A *values* that good. And that in *striving* for some good, A *ceases* to strive for and *ceases* to value *other* goods.

A realistic account of valuing might be that A is valuing some thing Y more now, and valuing other thing(s) X less now, by comparison. But we have to remember that the goal of the formal treatment is not the accurate depiction, representation or re-creation of realistic and materially full life. Rather, the goal of the formal treatment is the demonstration of the *necessity* of or in that life. Those are two separate things.

The formal analysis of the event which is striving for some good, demonstrates why the supply of the good and the value of the good are necessarily related. But this analysis does not depict the realistic way in which value and supply present to the individual in the fullness of his striving reality.

The fact that supply and value are related in the fullness of materially conceived life, **derives from** the underlying fact that striving entails both valuing and seeking to attain (a supply). But the formal demonstration of how this is so, is arrived at by eliminating all references to material conceptions.

Further Remarks on the Nature of Human Striving

Human striving is essentially A's "wanting" or "desiring" to change from state X to state Y, and this regardless of his material efficacy in executing this desire. In conceiving human striving or human action, we do not try to judge A's probable material success. The person who *wishes* for something may get it, and the person who *diligently applies himself* may not. The person who wishes or prays for rain tomorrow strives just as much as the person who goes to the Internet to research cloud seeding techniques. Both seek to change a state of non-rain into a state of rain.

Yet another person gets in his car, and drives towards the location where rain is predicted to fall. But in all three cases, rain may or may not follow the wishing, the Internet research, or the driving. All three events here are conceived as material, time-sequential events.

Praxeology is concerned with the logic of; which means the formality of; which means the non-materiality of; action or striving. This means that praxeology is concerned with that aspect of the rain seeking (striving for rain) for which formal equivalence statements are possible. And praxeology is not concerned with any materially conceived aspect of rain seeking, such as whether or not rain will fall in a particular geographical area following person A's activities.

True, praxeology historically distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate means. But in a proper understanding of classical praxeology, that one does or does not utilize appropriate means, has no bearing on whether or not one is "acting". The idea of appropriate or inappropriate means was meant to capture the idea that if one wants to make a car easier to bring to a stop, then an inappropriate means for doing so, is to make the car more aerodynamic. But regardless of what one chooses to do with respect to the car, one is at all times acting. One is at all times "trying to" change or change some thing, from state X to state Y.

The formal statement of the scientific laws of things, can be unsatisfactory from the point of view of the meaning of things in our every day lives. It doesn't seem satisfactory to conceive that one who wishes for something, is doing the same essential thing as one who attempts to obtain it by means deemed more efficacious. But paraphrasing Feynman, we should say that with regard to praxeology, there is no theorem that says "only those who may succeed act", there is only a theorem that says "man acts".

Inflation

In understanding whether or not inflation must necessarily follow some event, such as the printing of additional money, we have to be clear about what our question is. Any event conceived materially, can thus not exhibit absolute necessity in a sequence of similarly conceived events.

There can be no necessity in what written price must appear on a particular good. There can be no necessity in any particular price communication or price utterance of a particular person, following some particular event. These are all materially conceived events from which sequential necessity must be absent by Hume's law.

When we conceive inflation due to the printing of additional money, what we are doing is conceiving the "attainment" of additional money by someone. This is the crucial step; the translation of the material event: "printing of additional money", into the formal-praxeological scheme of want "attainment" by person A.

Now, once this translation has been completed, then we know in a formal analysis of want attainment, that when some good X is attained by A, that A ceases to strive for it, and thus ceases to value it.

When we conceive pervasive, chronic, or massive inflation, we are conceiving the case where many people are "attaining" additional quantities of money. Thus, many people are ceasing to strive for money, and thus not valuing money.

When people do not strive for money, by logic, they strive for other things or goods, since people are at all time striving. And thus other things or goods become "valuable" for these people (since they now strive for them), and money "loses" its value (since they no longer strive for it).

That a general increase in prices, or inflation, is believed to follow the printing of additional quantities of money in the fullness of material life, derives from the underlying fact that “attainment” and “not valuing” are necessarily related in the formal scheme of material life.

The law of inflation is a particular application of the law of supply and value. But the law of inflation is not and cannot be a law about particular material prices, or even a law about the overall price level in the economy, when this price level is conceived materially.

CHAPTER 4

The Formal Want Scheme

Methodological individualism is the conceptual approach praxeology utilizes in its attempt to demonstrate social laws. This approach is based on a primary fact of what we refer to as actor A's "striving reality". The fact that social actor A only has one experience (some may say, one "direct" experience) of human striving (human action). Methodological individualism is the theoretical acknowledgement and representation of this primary fact of A's striving reality.

For actor A, there are primarily two things. There are the "entities" of A's striving reality, and there are the relations of those entities. There are the objects and events of A's striving reality, and there are the ways that these events appear to relate to one another. These "relations", akin to "ideas" or "concepts", we conceive as not having material existence themselves, but manifesting in some way through the things (entities) that do have material existence. (The intricacies and most fundamental problems concerning things and their relations, then becomes primarily a matter of epistemology.)

In a formal account of human striving, we conceive that everything that exists for A—every object of A's striving experience (A's experience of action)—exists for A either as something "attained" (or "believed attained"), or as something "striven for". We conceive that A either believes some thing,

entity, or state of things, exists or exists in a certain way, or, A is striving for some thing, entity, or state of things.

The essential idea intended by praxeology is that action is always “aiming at ends”. When we say “striving to attain”, we simply offer what we believe is a more appropriate conceptualization of this same phenomenon of action. For actor A, there is “aiming” and there is “end”. There is “striving” and there is “attainment”.

Incidentally, we note that this same phenomenon of action likely gave rise to Ayn Rand’s definition of “value” as that which one acts to gain and/or keep. Notice how the striving phenomena of “trying to” or “striving to” (Rand’s “acts to”) and of “obtaining” or “attaining” (Rand’s “gain and/or keep”) are accounted for.

Next, what in the classical account of human action is referred to as “satisfaction” versus “dissatisfaction” or “ease” versus “unease”, we conceive broadly as “happiness” and “unhappiness”. These are intended as formal “categories” as it were, meant to conceive the fundamental “duality phenomenon” of human striving; that for actor A, there exists that which is the positive development and that which is the negative development. There is that which is: pleasing, beneficial, amusing, pleasurable, good, enjoyable, etc. And there is that which is: displeasing, detrimental, maddening, painful, bad, distasteful, etc. In the praxeological scheme for conceiving human striving, happiness and unhappiness are formal conceptions accounting for this fundamental “duality phenomenon” of human striving.

Finally, in the formal conceptual scheme of human striving, we define happiness as the change from striven for to attained, and we define unhappiness as the change from attained to striven for. When something A strives for changes to something attained for A, this is happiness. When something attained for A changes to something A strives for, this is unhappiness.

What we intend to conceive formally, is that all instances of “unhappiness” will be describable in terms of some thing actor A “believes attained” changing to something A strives to attain. And all instances of “happiness” will be describable in terms of some thing A “strives for” changing to something actor A “attains”. (We are aware that at this early stage of the development of the concepts, some degree of imprecision and/or unclarity may still exist regarding the optimal way these concepts should be formulated. We do not claim that no further improvement is possible regarding our chosen phrasing. We only claim that the aim of the formal praxeology is to conceive the duality phenomenon of happiness and unhappiness formally, and generally as indicated above.)

The totality of the above described concepts we refer to as the “formal want scheme”. It is a proposed rudimentary formal conception scheme of the most elementary aspects of human striving. Once one has grasped the formal and logical nature of this conceptual scheme, one can begin to conceptualize social phenomena formally and as they appear from the point of view of the individual actor, who we always symbolize as actor “A”.

The Primary Problem of Social Interaction Indicated by A Praxeology of Coercion

In *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, Mises wrote: “The worst enemy of clear thinking is the propensity to hypostatize, i.e., to ascribe substance or real existence to mental constructs or concepts.” (p.80) In this passage, Mises’s point is that only individuals act, and that various collectives such as “society” do not act. He continues: “It [society] does not have “interests” and does not aim at anything. The same is valid for all other collectives.” (p.81) So let us consider this idea of person A ascribing “human striving” phenomena (ascribing “action”) to various collectives, and how we may gain insight into a fundamental problem of human social interaction.

The first question we ask rhetorically is: Is “hypostatization” indeed something that people have the propensity to do? Do people indeed hypostatize? And if so, is hypostatization somehow destructive of the ends of clear thinking as Mises states? The answers to these questions are of more than passing interest. Because as one familiar with Misesian praxeology will know, thinking and acting, reason and action, are one and the same. This is because thinking about something is nothing but the “trying to” or “attempting to” “attain” the solution to some thing. Thinking about something is “trying to attain” a (conclusion, solution, answer, etc.). In a word, thinking is acting. So then if it is true that the propensity to hypostatize is in some way harmful to or detrimental to clear thinking as Mises claims, then this same propensity to hypostatize must also be harmful or detrimental to clear (satisfactory, non-contradictory, non-problematic, etc.) action as well.

In other words, if hypostatization is harmful to A’s thinking, then it must be harmful to A’s acting, since thinking and acting are as one. So these passages of Mises, when considered in this light, are potentially very important insights.

If hypostatization—the ascribing of human striving phenomenon to various collectives—is something harmful to A’s thought and action, then eventually we will arrive at the question as to whether or not this same principle applies to the “collective” which is person B’s body parts and their movements, when considered from the point of view of acting being A. We must remember that our analysis is always via methodological individualism, and never an analysis considering things from the point of view of “objective realism”. If only individuals act, and collectives do not act, then what about the “collective” which is the totality of the material aspects of B, as seen from the point of view of A, a person with only one experience of human striving? Does or do the material aspects of B “act”?

Obviously we can approach this question “realistically” and answer immediately that yes, of course the totality of the material aspects of B must act, because individuals act, and B is an individual by any realistic account of things.

But this is not our question. Our question is, from the point of view of individual actor A, an actor with only one experience of action (of striving), considering things conceptually via methodological individualism: Do B’s material aspects “act”? And our answer is that they may not. The fact that A may consider B’s various material presentations as acting, may constitute a form of “hypostatization”; of ascribing action to a collective of things (in this case, the various material aspects of person—being, object, entity, etc.—B).

It is important to realize that in analyzing things this way, we in no way intend to deny the real existence of other people, as really existing people, of the same striving nature as ourselves. Rather we only intend to point out, that from an analytical point of view, there may be something fundamentally problematic, when other people are considered from the point of view of a person A, who has only one experience of striving. Of course we are aware that some may dispute that A only has or can have one experience of striving. But our analysis makes the theoretical assumption that A *does* only have one experience of striving. And our question is whether from the point of view of such an acting being, the ascribing of “action” to the material “parts” of B, is a case of hypostatization, essentially no different than the hypostatization that occurs when A ascribes the phenomena of his own striving reality, to collectives such as “society”.

This is obviously a question of importance to the theoretical science of human action.

The Primary Problem of Social Interaction – Continued

Our present analysis of the situation takes the following general form.

Person A “strives” to “attain” things as happiness. These “things attained” or “striven for” we stipulate, appear to A in the form of what we will call a “material presentation”. That is, what is “attained” for A or “striven for”, “presents” to A in the form of some thing describable in terms of spatio-temporal duration. By this account, what A “attains” is some “object”, “event”, or “state” (i.e., some differentiable entity), conceivable as a materially durable, spatio-temporal entity. (This would be the “real substance” or “real existence” in the Mises passage)

As contrasted to these things present in/for A’s striving reality, A experiences the “relation” of these things generally as happiness and unhappiness. A experiences the way events correlate or relate to one another in his own striving reality. These “relations”, “ideas” or “concepts” correspond to Mises’s “mental constructs” or “concepts” in the aforementioned passage.

Given these two fundamental aspects of A’s striving reality, then our analysis focuses on the logical problems surrounding the possibility that A may view or treat the “relations” of his striving reality as “objects” (Mises’s “collectives”) of his striving reality.

A Simple Formal Analysis of Coercion

In a simple formal analysis of coercion, as opposed to a general theory of human social interaction, we conceive things in the following way:

In every day, real-life terms, actor A plans to coerce person B. Describing things realistically, A plans in terms of a sequence or series of spatio-temporal events. A's plan will be something like: I will drive to B's house, *and then* I will walk up to B's door and knock, *and then* when B answers I will point a gun at him and ask him for the money, *and then* B will give it to me, *and then* I will drive to the next town, *and then* I will spend the money, etc.

Each event A envisions or plans is an "end" which in turn becomes a "means" for something else. The objects and events themselves are not "ends" or "means". Rather, they become means or ends according to the meaning actor A attaches to them. (As one familiar with praxeology will know.)

So at this point, regardless of the morality of A's plan, A's plan is reasonable. A plans a series of events, the most important of which for our analysis is the "coercive encounter"; the event when A points a gun at B and demands the money.

As described previously, the meaning of coercion is that A strives to change a want A believes is "attained" for B, into a want B strives for. (This, always seen from the point of view of A, by methodological individualism, and never in the "objective" or "realistic" sense.) The meaning of the coercive encounter is that A intends to change a want A believes is attained for B (B's "life", "safety", "well being", "health", "freedom from harm", etc.), to a want B strives for. As seen from the point of view of A, if this event is successful, if A can "attain" this want change for B, then B will be striving for his [life, safety, well being, health, freedom from harm, etc.]. Then A plans, *in the next event*, to offer back to B his safety, well being, etc., in exchange for the money A wants from B.

For the purpose of our analysis, whether or not B does hand over the money; whether or not A's attempt to coerce B is successful, is not important. Because we are only concerned with the "logic of" the coercive encounter itself, and not it's

subsequent success or failure. We are concerned only with A's *attempt* to coerce B.

With respect to this event our question is: Is it possible for A to experience this event—possible for A to be involved with this event, to “live” this event—without “striving” to “attain” a “want change” for person B?

We claim that this question is important. Because for A, “want change” is an idea or relation of A's striving reality. The concepts of “striving” and “attainment” are ideas or relations of the objects of A's striving. If/when A, in some way, “strives” to “attain” that which is the *relation of* the objects of A's striving reality, this may constitute something problematic, perhaps akin to “hypostatization” for A.

If indeed something like hypostatization is present for A, when/if he attempts to treat the relations of his striving as material objects of his striving, we might attempt to describe the situation in the following way: If A experiences his striving reality via the relation of objects that are material-spatio-temporal in nature, and if A attempts to treat a “relation” as one of those objects, there is a sense in which A thereby attempts to “place” a “relation” of his striving in a spatio-temporal “location”. We conceive this as actor A, experiencing the relation of objects, and attempting to “locate” this relation as a spatio-temporally durable object.

What is potentially problematic for A, is that anything spatio-temporally located for A may necessarily have to be spatio-temporal in nature, and thus an object and not a “relation”. If A's “idea” or “concept” of striving, is something akin to a “relation” for A, and not a thing of spatio-temporal nature, then, A's attempt to “locate” this idea (of striving) must be co-present with this idea being a non-idea. That is, something spatio-temporally located, is identical to that thing being a spatio-temporal thing. For A, a spatio-temporal thing is the *object* of A's striving reality. If A treats as “located” the *relations* of the objects of his striving, A may *unintentionally*

change his idea or relation of the objects of his striving reality, into, an object of his striving reality. That is, the “locating” of his “idea” may be co-present with it’s not being an idea, but *unbeknownst* to A. The hidden, unintended necessary consequence to A’s idea being located, may be that the idea is fundamentally changed. But A may not know this.

With regard to cause and effect, this means it would in principle be possible for A to want to avoid that which is “fundamentally changing” his idea, but not knowing the necessary cause as “locating” his idea, then he would not have the means to intentionally prevent it. An obvious example that comes immediately to mind, is the scientific attempt to “locate” the psychical in physical reality, which only succeeds in finding physical processes. Another example is the attempt to know what another person’s thoughts or feelings “really are”, when all that is knowable is that person’s “body language”.

The Logical Circumstance of Coercion

When we speak about A’s striving, often we speak of something as “presenting” for A. We speak for example, of something “presenting as” striven after for A, or “presenting as” attained for A. There is a specific reason for our doing so. In conceiving A’s striving phenomena, in conceiving what A experiences, and what must be the logically co-present necessities to those experiences, we are primarily (and we might say “exclusively”) concerned with the “logic of” *when/if* something [happens, develops, exists, etc.] for A. And we are not concerned with the question of *how or why* this something came to be, or what, if anything, A may do to avoid such things happening or existing for himself. How and why something comes to be for A may be important, but it is not important to our purpose. We want to know the “logic of” something happening for A, *when/if* it does happen, and not the reasons for its having happened. Our goal is always to arrive at a logically certain statement in “if-then” form. “If” such and such exists for A, “then” too, must so and so exist for A. So

this is why we utilize the term “presents” as indicating only the fact of something existing for/in A’s striving, without reference to “how” or “why” it does exist for/in A’s striving. The concept of something “presenting” for A, is simply a way of saying that some thing exists for A either as striven for or as attained.

Thus, with respect to coercion, and any logically certain co-presences that it may entail, we are only concerned with the case when coercion “presents” for actor A. And we are not concerned with the how or why coercion came to be “present” for him.

Our reasoning is as follows:

We propose that in order for A to coerce B, that A must believe B is a “striving being”, a being who strives to attain wants as happiness, and who is unhappy when attained wants become striven for. In proposing this, we follow Mises when he states that: “No sensible proposition concerning human action can be asserted without reference to what the acting individuals are aiming at and what they consider as success or failure, as profit or loss.” (Ibid.p.82) In a similar vein, we claim that no sensible plan of A’s to coerce B can be envisioned in which A does not refer to B’s “striving reality”, the belief A has that B strives just as A does.

On the other hand, we propose that any change in B for A, A can only describe to himself meaningfully in terms of material-spatio-temporal objects and their movements or changes. Every aspect of B will be an “object” for A, of the same essential nature as all the other objects of A’s striving reality. That is, we propose that A will not be able to find B’s *striving nature* among the objects of his (A’s) striving reality, if/when he tries to do so in a way that is meaningful (non-problematic, non-contradictory, etc.) to himself. B and all his aspects will be material-durable type things for A, things essentially no different than the other things of A’s striving reality.

And this is the crux of the logical circumstance of coercion, as one instance of social interaction. For A to coerce, he must try to effect some change in an object of his striving reality (person B). Specifically, to coerce, A must try to effect some change in the part of this object B, that is B's "striving nature". (That B "strives" or "acts" must be for A, a "component" or "differentiated"/"entity-ized" aspect of B, in order for A to coerce or attempt to coerce B). However, for A, any part of B can meaningfully be a "part" of B only as an *object* of A's striving.

Thus, from A's point of view, striving being (person) B, can only be comprised of "objects", and not of "relations" (ideas, mental constructs, etc.). When B is present in/for A's striving, the "relations" (the ideas) belong to A. B, and B's parts or components are "objects" of A's striving reality that "relate" to one another in/for A's striving reality.

If coercion is present for actor A, so too is a problematic (irreconcilable, conflictory, etc.) circumstance present for A. On the one hand, A can only coerce when he believes that B is a striving being. On the other hand, B can only be comprised of objects for A, and can never be comprised of a "relation". "Objects" and their "relations" are what constitute a striving being as A experiences this himself. But from the point of view of A, at least one of the "parts" of what constitutes a striving being is absent from B. Yet, if coercion is present for A, then so too is a striving being—a being comprised of both objects and relations—present for A.

This circumstance indicates a necessary co-presence attendant to the social means coercion. The ideas and thoughts (relations) of B must be fundamentally elusive; fundamentally unknowable. Because when A tries to "locate" something like his own ideas "in" B, only objects can present. Yet, if coercion presents for A, A must believe those ideas (relations) of B to exist.

Coercion and Happiness-Unhappiness

When/if something is logically problematic or contradictory, then this must indicate some human attempt at something. Because as we commonly conceive things, nature itself is not “problematic” or “contradictory”. As we understand nature commonly, nature “is what it is”, and the various means man utilizes can be contradictory or contrary to purpose.

The formal description of physical nature, and the mathematical expression of the law(s) of conservation, may demonstrate the logic in a man’s attempting to lift himself off the ground, by placing his hands under his feet and pulling upward. These laws demonstrate, not whether man “should” or “should not” try this, but rather, from a physical standpoint, what must be the case “when” he does try this. (to use our terminology, when trying to do this “presents” for someone)

Similarly, our formal account of coercion is not intended to demonstrate that man should or should not coerce another, for example, in self-defense. It is only intended to demonstrate what must be the case “when” coercion “presents” for someone.

Of course, what physics demonstrates with regard to this instance of lifting, only applies to the extent that this situation occurs for A. If A attempts to lift one’s body off the ground in the manner indicated, only a little, then we conceive that whatever physics demonstrates with regard to this, only applies to that extent. If however, A tries to do so “pervasively”, then what physics demonstrates applies pervasively also.

Similarly with coercion. We conceive that any phenomenon co-present with the social means coercion, only occurs for A when and to the extent that coercion occurs for A.

Social Interaction – Rothbard’s Challenge

The manifestation of the underlying logic of social interaction, is that from the point of view of person A, what person B’s values, motives, or intentions “really are” is always problematic. This fact of social reality was famously acknowledged in the debate between Mises and Rothbard, when Rothbard wrote: “For how does Mises know *what* the advocates of the particular policy consider desirable? How does he know what their value-scales are now or what they will be when the consequences of the measure appear? One of the great contributions of praxeologic economics is that the economist realizes that he doesn’t *know* what anyone’s value scales are except as those value preferences are *demonstrated* by a person’s concrete action.”³ And again: “Given Mises’s own analysis, then, how can the economist know what the motives for advocating various policies really are, or how people will regard the consequences of these policies?”⁴

These were the questions professor Rothbard posed to Mises in the context of their debate over praxeology versus objective ethics. In posing these questions, Rothbard’s point was that, as some things are unknowable to the praxeologist as social scientist, this *fundamental* lack of knowledge, as Rothbard believed, adversely impacts the subjectivist-deductivist social scientist’s ability to effectively advance the cause of human liberty (especially in social, non-economic matters). For our present purpose however, what is important is that professor Rothbard’s argument relies on the fact that a *specific type* of knowledge is *in principle, unknowable*.

In these passages we note that from the point of view of praxeology, all the key terms used by Rothbard above, eventually reduce to the fundamental formal concepts of human action and human striving. All the key terms referred to by Rothbard essentially denote the “ideas” or “thoughts” (i.e. “striving phenomenon”) of other person B, from the point of view of person A (A being Mises in Rothbard’s challenge).

In praxeology, what one **values** is simply what one is striving for. One's **motive** is the goal animating one's activities; is the end of one's action; is what one is striving to attain. How one would **regard the consequence** of a particular policy, means, whether one would be pleased or displeased with the consequence of a policy, which is whether one would be happy or unhappy about the consequence of that policy. And what one **considers desirable**, is again, what one would consider pleasurable or valuable, and thus what would make one happy, or would be worth striving for.

Thus, when Rothbard questions Mises's ability to know these things, Rothbard is essentially acknowledging and counting on—even if for only dialectical reasons—the fact that Mises, as person A, does not “know” the “striving reality” of other person B. Person A in principle cannot know the ideas and thoughts, and thus, values, motives and intentions, of other person B (as we believe we have demonstrated by our analysis). Our analysis demonstrates formally, what Rothbard asserts descriptively in these oft-quoted passages: That knowing another person's thoughts (and thus values, motives and intentions) is problematic. Knowing what another person's “true feelings” really are, is problematic, since the underlying logic of human striving indicates that it may be impossible.

The formal logic of human striving indicates why in real life, we believe there is a recurring difficulty; an ever-present uncertainty and doubt when it comes to knowing another person's “true thoughts”. This phenomenon, that knowing another person's thoughts is *fundamentally* problematic, is acknowledged by Rothbard when he advances this fact as the cornerstone of his critique of Mises's praxeology.

A Praxeology of Coercion

The above reasoning constitutes the essential argument for a demonstrated logical connection between coercion and harm to the one who coerces, as first published in March of 2006 in

the essay *A Praxeology of Coercion*. With full knowledge that coercion is only one (albeit an important one) phenomenon of human striving, we nonetheless suggest that if the argument holds, this may constitute a praxeological demonstration, showing necessary harm to A, when/if A attempts to coerce B. Since social coercion, as defined, is a pervasive social means, and the means by which the modern welfare state continues to exact involuntary contributions from its citizens, such a demonstration if correct, is of significant importance.

The theory and the concepts it employs have wider implications for a general theory of human social interaction. But at this time, the argument is limited to describing only one phenomenon of social interaction, and the way one may attempt to demonstrate necessity with respect to it. The argument constitutes a demonstration of the way in which praxeology might aspire to treat social, non-economic phenomena. This runs counter to contemporary social science doctrine, that praxeology is only suited to treat economic phenomena, and not ethical phenomena.

CHAPTER 5

The Meaning of A Praxeology of Coercion

What is important about ethical theory from a libertarian perspective?

What are we trying to get at, by constructing a theory of social action that tries to demonstrate a necessary consequence to ethical social acts?

In other words, from a libertarian point of view, what are important societal ethical problems needing a *libertarian* as opposed to a mainstream treatment? Why is specifically *libertarian* social theory important or necessary?

Is it because sociopathic crime is rampant, and contemporary society does not adequately address it? Is it because common criminal activity is too widespread, and threatens general social welfare? Is it because there are too many liars, and this damages social cooperation? Do we need a libertarian treatment of ethics because businesses need better ethical guidance? Or do we need a libertarian treatment of ethics simply for the general purpose of becoming better citizens?

The answer to all these questions is: No.

What calls forth a specifically libertarian treatment of ethics is something different than this. What motivates the libertarian theoretical ethical movement is that in contemporary

society, it is illegal to implement libertarian ethics. Libertarians are prevented from interacting amongst themselves and with other of their fellow citizens according to the libertarian ethics of voluntary, non-coerced relationships. This is what impels the libertarian to pick up his pen and write down his grievance; not the urge for more knowledge about ethics in general; not to help in the fight against common crime.

What does it mean to say “it is illegal to implement libertarian ethics”? Essentially this means that the vast majority in contemporary society believes it is acceptable behavior to use police power (coercion) to prevent perfectly normal and moral people from forming their own types of relationships (and thus societies).

What motivates libertarian social theory, is a particular belief, held by almost every citizen living in contemporary society: That social coercion of this type is ethically acceptable, and perhaps is even beneficial and necessary.

What motivates libertarian social theory is that contemporary society believes the same police power employed in bringing criminals into submission, is also an appropriate means to attain all other social ends as well.

In short, what motivates libertarian social theory is primarily the phenomenon of social coercion.

The De-Legitimization of Social Coercion

If social coercion is de-legitimized, this means people begin to realize there is something wrong with utilizing these means against their fellow citizens in order to obtain the goods and services they want.

When they believe that social coercion is illegitimate, for whatever reason, then they begin to abstain from it as a means

to attain their ends. (Here, we're talking about average citizens, not criminals.)

When they begin to abstain from using social coercion, this means less and less things are “illegal”. The sphere of individual freedom enlarges as coercion is used less and less to “criminalize” normal, ethical behavior.

What is illegal today? The libertarian ethics of voluntary, non-coerced relationships. All those associations between individuals that are regulated by central authority, rather than by the wishes of those involved.

Social coercion as believed in and implemented through the politics of average citizens, is the main problem of contemporary society. Not common criminal activity.

If social coercion of this type diminishes, if social coercion of this type becomes illegitimate in eyes of average citizens, then free societies can emerge.

As long as social coercion is legitimate, as long as the average citizen—the next door neighbor, the shopper in the supermarket—believes nothing is wrong with social coercion, then all good citizens believe that preventing libertarian ethics and libertarian society by police power is legitimate.

The problem with contemporary society is that almost everyone believes in this social outlook implicitly. They don't believe anything is wrong with it. They believe that welfare-state democracy and its criminalization of free association is necessary, and generally benign. In a word, they believe social coercion is legitimate.

A Short Summary of the Praxeological Theory of Coercion

Strictly speaking, a praxeology of coercion as we conceive it, is a formal-logical treatment of the social phenomenon of coercion, that attempts to arrive at strict laws in regard to it. By contrast, what we might call a praxeological *theory* of coercion, is a wider concept, that includes not only the formal analysis itself, but ancillary/supporting social insights as well as explanations about the meaning of and aims of the praxeology. What we will call here the praxeological “theory” of coercion, is the more general argument and wider context in which the praxeological analysis is intended to be understood. The meaning of the praxeology of coercion can be more easily understood in the broader context of the overall theory. What follows is a condensed summary of the praxeological theory of coercion.

1. It won't suffice to state merely what from a libertarian point of view, may *possibly* be wrong with social coercion. We have to be able to say what *must necessarily* be the case, what must *necessarily* be wrong with social coercion. Otherwise our arguments against it will have little effect. The praxeology must contain a theory of necessity.
2. When we want to say what must necessarily be wrong with social coercion in a logically consistent, scientifically demonstrable way, this immediately restricts our statements about this social phenomenon. Only formal demonstration can arrive at statements of necessity. So before a formal analysis of coercion can say something necessary about it, first it must “formalize” social phenomena, so these phenomena can be conceived within a formal scheme demonstrating logical necessity. This process of formalization is analogous to those of mathematics or formal logic. The praxeological theory of coercion holds that the conceptual schemes of material reality and of formal necessity, are mutually exclusive. A social theory

that attempts to be both “realistic” and demonstrate formal necessity will be logically problematic. (inconsistent)

3. When ethical phenomena are formalized within a formal scheme, then it becomes possible, in principle, to conceive the necessity in social-ethical acts. The praxeology is an attempt to demonstrate a necessary unintended consequence to the social means coercion. The coercing person A, can only see as “objective” that which he believes is an “idea” of person B. What A *can* strive for and attain as happiness, are those things describable and conceptualizable as real, material, spatio-temporal things, and B’s “striving reality” is not such a thing. A cannot in principle strive for and attain this “entity”, since every time he tries to know the *ideas* of person B, only *objects* present. Nonetheless, A does indeed try to do this, and thus any time spent trying to do this, any effort expended in attempting this (as with trying to lift himself off the ground by placing his hands under his feet), is time and effort the result of which cannot be A’s happiness. The normal and natural function of A is want attainment as happiness. It is A’s nature to strive after and attain differentiated entities of a certain type. To the extent that more and more A does not do this, but instead strives after a different kind of entity, one that in principle is unattainable—perhaps “hypostatizing” his idea of striving as an aspect of material reality—then it follows that more and more A cannot experience happiness. When A, in “real life”, substitutes more and more the striving after things that cannot be obtained, for the striving after things that can be obtained, this must be experienced by A as an increasing inability to experience happiness.
4. Next, there are many competing social theories. Each social theory necessarily teaches, either implicitly or explicitly, some method of thought and action. Each social theory essentially reduces to an admonition towards a specific method of thought and action (those two being the same thing from the point of view of praxeology). In an

atmosphere where no strictly scientific demonstration has been able to show anything wrong with social coercion, many of these theories freely espouse the utilization of social coercion as a means for their adherents to legitimately, and without necessary consequence, attain what they seek. But it is impossible to think about and practice coercive social interaction without concerning one's self with other people's motives and intentions. One must get involved to some extent in some type of interpersonal, political "struggle". One must form opinions about what other people want, and how to prevent them from getting it. One must begin to see other people as adversaries who need to be prevented from what they intend to do by coercive means. In short, one must involve one's self with the unknowable motives, thoughts and intentions of others. In a pre-scientific atmosphere, were no one believes in a necessary connection between coercing others and harm to themselves, a large number of people are willing to utilize the means of social coercion in all its forms, both physical and psychical. Coercion is legitimate in their eyes, since it appears to them to be a method that while having many *possible* negative consequences, has no *necessary* negative consequences. Therefore, they not only willingly utilize these means themselves, but they expressly encourage, persuade and authorize others to use these means also.

5. Generally, there are two fundamental causes and/or types of human unhappiness: The chemical/medical, and the rational. There are types of unhappiness or pain that are physical or biologically based. And there are types of unhappiness that are "rational" in nature. Receiving a phone call that one's loved one has passed away, causes a type of unhappiness that is not primarily physical. Rather, this type of unhappiness primarily results from "idea" phenomena. When what one believes is the case is no longer the case, but one wants it to still be the case, this is unhappiness, and it is not primarily a physical matter.

6. There are many people who are unhappy due to rational causes of unhappiness. There are millions of people suffering from various forms of unhappiness generally defined as some form of depression. Many are on medication. There are untold numbers of people who would like to be happier than they are. All this is true. But there exists *no strict science of the rational causes of happiness or unhappiness*. People who are unhappy (angry, depressed, anxious, etc.) have only two choices for treatment: They can seek medical treatment, or they can seek rational, but unscientific treatment. They can treat their unhappiness by medication. Or they can try to address their ways of thinking, their beliefs, their mental approach to things, etc. But this latter will not be strictly scientific. It will be “common wisdom” type treatment. Regardless of the degree of educational or professional training a practitioner may have, scientific knowledge that does not exist, cannot be used in treatment. As there exists no strictly scientific explanation of the rational causes of unhappiness (none that are logically rigorous), and as there are many competing “theories” about the causes of unhappiness, none more provable than the next, then by virtue of this fact, strictly scientific advice on the rational causes of one’s unhappiness cannot be given. Such scientific information is simply not available. The person seeking treatment for the rational causes of his unhappiness may get the best efforts of intelligent, educated and experienced professionals. But in the end, he will be getting advice which is based on the generally accepted wisdom of the day, not scientific advice that is universally valid.
7. Since there is no strict science of the rational causes of unhappiness, then all the people receiving advice, all the millions of people who are unhappy for rational, non-medical reasons, are not being instructed in a scientific manner on which rational “acts”, “thoughts” or “approaches” to abstain from, in order to remove the obstacles to their happiness. If no science of the rational causes of unhappiness exists, then no logically consistent

advice can be given. Only contradictory and pre-scientific advice can be given. No one is currently being given consistent, non-contradictory advice, on how various social “means” can impact their happiness. They are not receiving universally valid and logically consistent instruction on how, for example, abstaining from coercive means can improve their happiness.

8. In a society where almost no one knows of any necessary connection between the social method or outlook of social coercion, and any effect this has on their happiness, how many people would it take, to abstain from this general approach, before this would constitute a noticeable difference in society’s overall level of social coercion? More specifically, how many intelligent people would it take—who now believing social coercion is not appropriate and not good for people—to tell others, and thus effect a significant change in society’s attitudes? Comparatively, only a very few people are needed to make a difference. The stated opinions of only a few highly trusted or highly regarded people, can change the course of history. The praxeological demonstration of the effects of coercion on individual happiness, does not have to be taken to each in society, one at a time. If society’s opinion leaders come to believe something as true, they will tell others who will listen. It only takes a very few important leaders in society to come to believe that some ethical act previously believed acceptable, is unacceptable. This begins the de-legitimizing of this ethical act in the eyes of many in society. A de-legitimization of social coercion, is a diminishment of social coercion, which is the emergence of libertarian ethics and society.

The Importance of a Praxeology of Coercion

Why should person A abstain from some act? To this question the praxeological theory of coercion answers: Ultimately because this act is harmful to A in some way.

Praxeology seeks to discover and conceive the “laws” of *all* social phenomena. These laws demonstrate the hidden or unintended consequences to specific social acts. To date, no laws of social phenomena are known to exist aside from the economic laws of market (catallactic) phenomena.

Praxeology takes an important step toward conceiving social-ethical laws, when it succeeds in formalizing ethical phenomena via the formal want scheme. When praxeology formalizes human happiness and unhappiness, this constitutes the basis of a formal social logic that can accurately conceive the necessity in human ethical action or striving.

Through its formality, praxeology decreases harmful social acts by demonstrating a hitherto unknown negative consequence to those who would undertake specific social acts.

Those wanting to assess the importance and relevance of a praxeology of social, non-economic phenomena should ask themselves a few simple questions:

Are there or are there not, rational, as opposed to chemical/medical, causes of human unhappiness?

If so, does one believe the rational causes of human unhappiness are due (in part or in whole) to the ways of thinking, to the methods of approaching things, that are freely chosen by the individual?

If so, then where is the social science instructing on how the ways of thinking and approaching things impacts on one’s happiness? Which particular social science instructing people on the rational causes of unhappiness does the social thinker subscribe to?

These are simple questions which those who are serious about human well being and human ethics can ask themselves. The praxeology of coercion is a proposed conceptual foundation for a *praxeological* treatment of social phenomena;

the same praxeological method that has proven successful in conceiving economic social phenomena.

The Primary Focus of the Praxeological Theory of Coercion

The praxeology of coercion is not yet a general theory of human social interaction. Rather, the current praxeology is a more narrowly tailored analysis, that seeks to conceive only one important social phenomenon: Social coercion.

What particular phenomenon is treated by the praxeological method is a decision on the part of the praxeologist. The praxeology of coercion for example, is not directly a treatment of the social phenomena of “violence”, “murder” or “fraud”. These are undoubtedly important phenomena. But from the point of view of relevance, pervasiveness and legitimacy, they pale in importance when compared to the phenomenon of social coercion. Common violence, murder and fraud are not legitimate in any society. Social coercion is legitimate in every existing society.

What prevents a libertarian society from forming is not violence, murder or fraud primarily, but rather a particular type of coercion, one that society believes is legitimate. Many in society also believe its use is benign with regard to their own *individual* welfare. They believe that the social means of coercion may make those who are coerced angry, and they may believe they will have to deal with these “possible” results. But there is no *necessary* consequence to their utilizing coercive means, as far as they know.

The particular social phenomenon the praxeology of coercion is concerned with, is the social exchange exemplified by the contemporary welfare state. In the contemporary welfare state, libertarians and others must provide to the state, real goods and services (generally in the form of taxes, or

obedience to regulatory commands), and in turn, the state provides the good which is “staying out of jail”. This is a coercive exchange, and is the primary type of social exchange and social interaction the praxeology of coercion is concerned with.

Thus, while the praxeology of coercion applies to *all forms of coercion* that meet the formal definition of coercion, the larger praxeological *theory* of coercion is not primarily concerned with the issue of common crime or pathological crime, and is not primarily concerned with analyzing coercion as it may be used in self-defense. All these are important social phenomena, but not as important, from a libertarian perspective, as the *legitimized* form of social coercion practiced in contemporary society. Common criminal activity and self-defense are not what prevent a libertarian society from emerging.

Regarding criminal activity, as a general matter, we may posit that a pathological criminal, as one who lives in a world of “coercive-type” thoughts, will thus likely experience what the praxeology demonstrates to a much larger degree than the person who commits an isolated act of coercion. The otherwise ethical person, who for some reason coerces another, then returns to his generally ethical way of social interaction, we conceive experiences less unhappiness and/or less inability to experience happiness, than someone we conceive of as always behaving in a coercive manner. This is analogous to how printing only a little extra currency is conceived to have only a negligible effect on currency devaluation. But the praxeological *theory* of coercion is not aimed at this limited, isolated type of coercion specifically, though its concepts are able to conceive and demonstrate necessary consequences with regard to it. The praxeological theory of coercion, our current argument that contains the formal praxeology as one of its elements, “singles out” and emphasizes the type of coercion that average citizens practice, but which is not viewed as criminal or unethical behavior in contemporary society. The praxeological theory of coercion is not primarily interested in

those activities that contemporary society already views as criminal (and thus strongly discourages) even though these may be important, and even though the praxeological concepts can be used to address these behaviors also.

The same goes for coercion as used in self-defense. When a property owner uses a gun to evict a trespasser from his property, this is a form of coercion. And what the praxeology demonstrates applies to this situation. In the case where we conceive of such a property owner as a non-coercive person who must resort to coercion as a means of protecting himself, then we conceive him as returning back to his normal non-coercive life once the coercive encounter ends, and thus the necessary effects of his utilizing coercion is limited, relatively isolated, and not pervasive.

Things are different when we conceive of a person who actively pursues coercive ways of interacting socially with his fellow citizens. Such a person experiences the negative effects of coercion to a much larger extent and much more pervasively. This is a person who has adopted a “theory” of coercive action (whether implicitly or explicitly). This is a person who has a coercive “attitude” and who habitually approaches other individuals, society and social matters with coercive intentions and expectations. Whether this person is a criminal, or whether this person is not technically a “criminal” but simply one who is philosophically inclined towards hostile and “controlling” social thoughts and methods, may be an important distinction when deciding whether he should go to jail. But from the point of view of libertarian social theory, what is important is that the coercive person who is not considered criminal, is actually the person preventing a libertarian society, since he does not believe in voluntary society, and also does not believe that coercive methods *necessarily* impact his happiness. He thus freely utilizes, promotes, and believes in social coercion as a means to prevent libertarian ethics, and believes his doing so is consequence-free to himself.

Ethics or Social Science as Absolute Crime Prevention

There is no science, there is no ethical code, and in fact there is no police power, that can serve as fool-proof deterrence to sociopathic or maniacal behavior.

If those who pursue ethics or libertarian social science generally are looking for an ironclad way to prevent such behavior absolutely, then there are important things they are not understanding about the way human choices are made. Ultimately the choice to commit some act of violence, is due to the fact that what the violent offender believes he is going to get, seems worth the price he believes he will have to pay *at the moment he commits the crime*. In principle, there is no way to monitor all people at all times, to ensure they do not arrive at this type of subjective value judgement, and therefore do not commit the crime. There is no way to prevent these types of crimes absolutely, without putting everyone in jail or killing everyone.

Therefore, any ethical argument, that sets as its standard, whether or not an ethical or social theory can prevent crime absolutely, is simply misguided. No social theory claims reasonably to be able to prevent crime absolutely. The social theory only tries to instruct those who would behave in a certain way, what the consequences will be. It is always up to the individual actor to decide whether what he hopes to gain by some act, is worth the price (he expects) to pay.

The praxeological theory of coercion is not primarily concerned with crime of this type. What the praxeology of coercion implies, is that for those who increase their use of social coercion, and begin to utilize coercion as an overall theory of social interaction, by definition, begin to utilize coercive means more comprehensively and systematically. They in a sense, begin to “integrate” a “theory” of social coercion into their daily lives and thoughts. They think about many aspects of social interaction and society in a coercive oriented manner. They focus more on the unknowable

intentions and motives of others, more on the thoughts of other people, and they focus less on “observable” things of a more knowable nature.

It is impossible for one to take some social theory to heart, and to try to faithfully live up to its ethical-behavioral commands, and not have the attempt to do so have an effect on ones thoughts and actions. To think about a particular ethical code, to “live” such an ethical code, is to conceive of its teachings and implement them systematically in one’s life. The organizing of one’s life and thoughts according to a particular ethical code, has profound effects one one’s spiritual and material life. Socialism is a world ethical code of pervasive influence. So are the ethical codes of the world religions. The libertarian private property ethics is also an ethical code.

The praxeology of coercion begins to demonstrate in what way the teachings of various ethical codes impact the happiness of those utilizing them.

The Meaning of Social Law

The meaning of social law is not that it prevents socially harmful acts absolutely. And the meaning of social law is not that it “justifies” A’s behavior towards B.

The meaning of social law is that it provides person A the means to prevent harm to himself, when before there were *no means*.

Before the establishment of the law of inflation, even good and moral libertarians would not have the means to prevent inflation if and when they viewed it as harmful to themselves. They would not know its cause. After the establishment of the law of inflation, even radical leftists who acknowledge the law are now in a position to prevent massive inflation if and when they want to, since they now know its cause.

The meaning of the establishment of social law, is not to absolutely prevent all socially harmful behavior. The meaning of the law is to discover and demonstrate a necessary connection or cause where none had previously been known to exist. This then provides those who want to avoid harm with the certain means for doing so, when before they had no certain means.

The praxeological law gives all those who possess knowledge of it, a previously unknown means to prevent harm *to themselves, if and when they want to*. When they utilize the knowledge praxeology imparts, and when they abstain from certain acts as a means to prevent harm to themselves, then this has (or can have) the subsidiary effect of lessening socially harmful acts in society generally. Then, other persons B, C and D may experience the abstention from self-harming acts by A, as the abstention from acts they view as harmful to themselves.

This is the import of praxeology, and of the praxeological theory of coercion.

Praxeology as Natural Law

According to a leading libertarian scholar, the program of natural law provides or will provide the laws of man's nature from which ultimately the man-made positive laws of a future libertarian society will be derived. Natural law science is to be the science of the laws of man's nature. And we can be reasonably certain that natural law can succeed in discovering and formulating laws of man's nature—especially his ethical nature—because what natural law seeks in regard to man's nature, is the same thing it seeks in regard to physical nature. Man is an entity of a distinct and specific nature. It follows that in principle, "The observable behavior of [the entity man] is the law of [his nature], and this law includes what happens as a result of the interactions. The complex that we may build up of these laws may be termed the structure of *natural law*"⁵ "...when [men] meet and interact, a specifically delimitable

and definable *result* will occur. In short, specific, delimitable *causes* will have specific, delimitable *effects*”⁶

So this general program of using man’s reason to discover and accurately conceive the laws of man’s nature, constitutes the program of natural law. Natural law is essentially the idea that by use of man’s reason, the laws of man’s ethical nature can eventually be accurately captured and depicted conceptually, using the same general principles of reason man has used to capture and depict the laws of physical nature.

Of course, praxeology too is the result of man’s reason, and praxeology too arrives at laws of man’s social nature. In fact praxeology also conceives man as a being of a distinct and specific nature: Man “acts” or “strives”. Praxeology begins with a detailed conception of man’s nature, and from this, attempts to arrive at the laws of man’s nature. And proceeding further, then praxeology builds a structure of concepts that accurately conceives what happens upon the interaction of different men in economic and/or non-economic social interaction. Praxeology arrives at scientific cause and effect laws of man’s nature, and demonstrates the necessary effects from specific social acts (or causes).

So the question becomes, if praxeology succeeds in fulfilling the program of natural law, then is it possible that praxeology is actually natural law, at least substantively? Or if praxeology is not to be considered natural law, or not to be considered as largely having fulfilled natural law’s own program, then why not?

From a libertarian perspective, there could be several related reasons why one might believe that though praxeology fulfills a large part of natural law’s program, that it still is not natural law as one conceives it, and that something like natural law is still needed to inform man about (for example) his ethical choices.

What we have in mind is that since praxeology is “formal” in nature, that therefore it appears to some as “lifeless” or “bloodless”; a kind of mathematics of human nature, from which real man, and real guidance on real human issues are absent. One may believe that science is supposed to offer such real guidance on real human problems. And since praxeology seems to offer only general formulas for human behavior, and not specific guidance, this is one reason why some different kind of social science is still needed.

Another way of saying essentially the same thing, is that while praxeology tells us what the results of certain acts will be, it does not tell us which acts we *should* undertake; what things we *should* aim at. Praxeology says: If X, then Y. If X happens, then Y will be the result. But praxeology does not tell us whether or not we should aim at X. Praxeology is “if-then” science. But some people want to know what they should do. They want a science of “should-do”. And for this reason, some will suggest that praxeology is not natural law, even though it arrives at laws of man’s nature.

From the point of view of praxeology, of course it is realized that praxeology, as a formal science of man’s nature, does not and cannot provide concrete guidance on man’s daily choices. For example, if person A is considering buying a house, then a simple formal statement in “if-then” form, about the purchasing of this house is: If \$200,000 is used for the purchase of the house, then this is \$200,000 that must be forgone towards the purchase of other wants.

But person A may have another type of question he wants answered. A may be considering two houses. One house is in a better neighborhood, but costs more. The other house is less expensive, but is in a less attractive neighborhood. Both houses exist as parts of physical nature, and the various pros and cons of each alternative exist as ethical or aesthetic or economic considerations for person A. So there is nothing strange or foreign about this situation. In principle, A may believe, there should be a science possible in regard to this

choice, since all the constituent elements which comprise it, are of a completely familiar nature. So the question A asks is, which house *should* I buy? Where is the science that tells me which house I *should* buy?

When A asks this question, he does not want to hear that if he buys the house, he will have \$200,000 less than before. And he does not want to hear that if he buys the less expensive house, he will have more money, but like his neighborhood less. What A really wants to know is which choice will end up being the better choice for him as he will judge it in the *future*. He wants to know which choice will make him more satisfied or more happy. He doesn't want to know the "logic of" his choice at the time of choosing, rather he wants to know the relative results each choice will "lead to", so that he can decide among them. He wants to know which choice suits him better as an individual, and will lead to his greater happiness.

From the point of view of strict social science, there is nothing at all wrong with A wanting to know this, and nothing wrong with A trying to make the best decision for himself. The only problem arises when A believes that there is a scientific answer to his question, when by scientific we mean an answer that must necessarily be the correct choice. The problem arises when A believes that there is a type of necessity in time sequential events, such that a science could conceivably be constructed that tells what that necessary sequence of events must be. If when A asks his question, he means to ask, which choice, which sequence of events in regard to the two possible house purchases, will *necessarily... lead to* my being more happy, then A has asked for scientific advice that in principle cannot exist. Person A is then asking for a science aspiring to reach *certainty* about the occurrence of a *future event*, as opposed to a science of the certainty corresponding to a future event when/if it should occur.

When A asks for such a science, he implies that a science of both *material future events*, **and** *absolute necessity*, is possible. Whereas what is possible is a logical science of

necessity (if-then), or, a science of material future events from which necessity is absent (should-do). The choice is mutually exclusive, and one can't have it both ways.

Thus, we come back to the question of whether praxeology is natural law. Praxeology is natural law, if natural law is understood as a science arriving at the strict laws of man's nature. Praxeology is not natural law when natural law is understood as a science attempting to provide material, concrete guidance on mankind's, or a particular man's decisions. But when natural law is understood as such, strict social science will maintain that such a science loses the ability to make necessary statements, and becomes a science of individual judgement and generally accepted wisdom, but not one imparting knowledge of the laws of man's nature.

The Difficulty in Grasping A Praxeology of Ethical Phenomena

There is an understandable difficulty in first grasping the idea of a praxeology of social, non-economic phenomena. Primarily this is due to the unknowable nature of the mind experiences of other people. The "striving reality" or "acting reality" as it is directly experienced by each individual is hidden from the view of every other individual. There is no way to observe the changes in the happiness or unhappiness of others as they utilize various social means. By contrast, in economics, as that science is currently conceived, many economic phenomena are objective, and it is possible to observe increases and decreases in prices and the scarcity or abundance of goods. For this reason, economics developed as a science ahead of ethics.

Because the mind experiences of each is hidden from the other, human nature is to make a "default assumption" about the mind experiences being felt by others. When we are not engaged in actively thinking about such matters, we tend to

assume that the mind experiences others are having, are generally the same as our own. There is a tendency for those who are happy to believe others are happy, and for those who are unhappy to believe that others are as well. Dishonest people have a tendency to mistrust others, and so on. Since there is no direct experiencing the minds of others, a tendency prevails, as a matter of expediency, to “automatically” assign to other people, the same kind of mind experiences one has, as a kind of “default” attribute.

Later we may find out that large numbers of people are dissatisfied with the “mind experiences” they are having. In a word, they are unhappy. We may be surprised to find out that many more people than we believed are receiving counseling or treatment. Perhaps some are ashamed or embarrassed about seeking such treatment, so they don’t announce it. They quietly take what they feel are the necessary measures, and only close friends and family know about it. To everyone else, the unhappy person seems normal, since to everyone else, there is no direct access to anyone else’s mind experiences.

Because of this general predicament, there is widespread belief that no science of this hidden world can be really scientific. Many believe that a science of the “subjective” is impossible. But this belief is mistaken. A science of the subjective is only impossible when the attempt is made to “objectify” the subjective inadvertently by means of material concepts. When one tries to conceive of ideas by resorting to the conceptual scheme of material reality, one inadvertently “places” ideas in a spatio-temporal “location”. And thus necessity, consistency, and all hope for a strict science of those phenomena vanishes. It is the attempt to construct a realist-materialist science of the subjective that must end in failure. But a *correctly conceived* science of the subjective, a praxeology of the subjective, need not end in failure.

Praxeology does not attempt an intersubjective comparison of the mind experience of several people. And praxeology does not try to make a conclusive judgement about the material

existence of such experiences. Rather, praxeology constructs a logical as opposed to material, science of man's "acting" or "striving". This formal science, similar to mathematics and formal logic, is "a-temporal" in nature. It does not depict reality in its material fullness, but instead depicts the underlying "laws" of that material fullness.

That praxeology is a science of this nature, some may find aesthetically unpleasing. Like mathematics, praxeology is "bloodless" and "lifeless" in the sense that there are certain types of meaning it cannot convey. Some hold out the hope for a future "super science" of man, one that expresses that which is necessary in human conduct, by means of materially full, realistic concepts. Others do not comprehend the importance of deductive-formal-logical social science, and believe that a proposed science of man's proper ends, and not a science of appropriate means, should be man's most urgent concern. Many of these beliefs persist because people hold conflicting and logically inconsistent views, but don't know it. They don't believe that their concepts and conceptual schemes are irreconcilable or mutually exclusive *in principle*. They believe that given more time and effort, a logically consistent theory will emerge. Thus the continued effort to construct objectivist-realist theories of social phenomena; an effort that has not succeeded still. Of course, due to the subjective nature of human social phenomena, everyone believes their view is equally plausible and equally valid.

Conclusion

The praxeology of coercion is motivated by a desire to conceive the hidden and unintended consequences of an important ethical phenomenon preventing libertarian ethics and libertarian society from being realized. Contemporary society views social coercion as legitimate and as benign with respect to individual happiness.

The current praxeology is a formal framework for conceiving human social interaction in general, but which treats coercion only, since coercion is deemed the most important social phenomenon from a libertarian point of view. However, a general praxeology of human social interaction is already implied in the formal conceptual system.

Today there is renewed interest in praxeology. People are beginning to consider applying the scientific method of praxeology to important social phenomena. However, it is no understatement to say that the level of understanding about what praxeology is, is very low. Social philosophers and would-be social philosophers would like to think and write powerfully and consistently about social phenomena, and they sense that the insights gained from the praxeological method may be the key to achieving this. There is a rebirth of this science underway. The deductive science of human action as conceived by Ludwig von Mises.

¹ Ivar Ikeland, *Mathematics and the Unexpected*, (p62-64)

² Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law*, (p83)

³ Murray Rothbard, *The Ethics of Liberty*, (p.207)

⁴ *Ibid.* (p.208)

⁵ *Ibid.* (p.10)

⁶ *Ibid.* (p.9)