

Rothbard's Rejection of Economics: The Ethics of His Non-invasive Society

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A student of Austrian economics today who seeks help in identifying the economics of Rothbard would most certainly be directed to his *Man, Economy and State* (MES – 1962). This is because the followers of Rothbard regard MES as a major work in Austrian economics. They are wrong. It is not economics; it is ethics. In some ways, MES resembles the economics presented in HA. In fact, however, it is very different. I will argue in this essay that Rothbard disguised MES as a book on economics.

The key to recognizing the difference between Rothbard and the Austrian economics taught by Mises is to know the difference between how the two authors defined the “free market,” or the “free society.” Rothbard’s free market is not the one envisioned by the classical economists or by the early Austrian economists. Nor is it the free market that was the subject of Mises’s economics. It is Rothbard’s own creation. He created it as a means to persuade readers to accept his ethical judgments. These judgments, in turn, were the basis for his anti-government ideology and his promotion of an imaginary social arrangement that is today called anarcho-capitalism. The promoters

of Rothbard and Rothbard himself mislead students when they claim that the study of this anti-government creation is the same as the free market studied in Austrian economics or in Mises's economics.

The most direct way to avoid conflating these two concepts of the "free market" is to consistently use an appropriate name to refer to Rothbard's image. In this essay, I use a term that Rothbard himself used, albeit sparingly. The term is *noninvasive society*. I shall consistently refer to Rothbard's image of market interaction as the noninvasive society.

This essay has two related purposes. The first is to describe the noninvasive society. I do this in Part One. The second, which comprises Part Two, is to show that Rothbard did not try in MES to defend the proposition that such a society could exist in reality. He did not show that it was feasible. In light of this result, Part Three evaluates the claims by Rothbard's followers that MES is a book on economics in the Austrian tradition. Part Four compares Rothbard's project with that of Mises.

1. THE NONINVASIVE SOCIETY

Ludwig von Mises showed how to change the ideology of the classical economists into a [science](#). It is to use the theorems of economics to pursue the ultimate goal of evaluating arguments favoring or opposing market intervention. The starting point of economics is to build an image of pure capitalism, which contains a government. He called this image the pure market economy.

Rothbard did not share this goal and did not begin with this image. He built an image without a government for which the most accurate label is the *noninvasive society* (MES: 94). This refers to market interaction under the hypothetical conditions that (1) individuals do not perform invasive actions and (2) all existing property has been acquired through actions that were not invasive. To understand this image, a reader must first know his definition of an invasive action. He defines an invasive action "as any action – violence, theft, or fraud – taking away another's personal freedom or property without his consent" (MES: 176). The terms violence, theft and fraud are reasonably clear. "Personal freedom" and "property" are not. I examine each in turn.

Invasive action: "any action – violence, theft, or fraud – taking away another's personal freedom or property without his consent."

Personal Freedom and Rightfully-Acquired Property

Rothbard does not define personal freedom in MES. However, a definition can be inferred. He writes that there "are two and only two ways that any economy can be organized. One is by freedom and voluntary choice – the way of the market. The other is by force and dictation – the way of the State" (MES: 958). The meaning of this dichotomy hinges on how he defines "the State." His definition is as follows: "the State is the only organization in society legally equipped to use violence" (MES: 877). The state is the equivalent of government.¹ A reader must infer on the basis of this statement that the term "personal freedom," to Rothbard, means freedom from *all* coercion, including the coercion carried out by government agents.

¹He uses these terms interchangeably in his chapter 12.

A second characteristic of the noninvasive society is the existence of property. Property in Rothbard's sense does not mean *legal property*. There can be no legal property without a government to define the property rules and to enforce them. Instead, it refers to *rightfully-acquired* property.² Rothbard provides a somewhat detailed discussion of the means through which property may be acquired rightfully at MES: 92-

Noninvasive society: market interaction under the hypothetical condition that individuals do not perform invasive actions and in which all existing property has been acquired rightfully – i.e., by noninvasive means.

3. All of these methods must conform to the requirement that no one performs an invasive action. He ends the discussion by writing that these “are the methods of acquiring goods that obtain on the free market, and they include all but the method of violent or other invasive expropriation of the property of others.”

The Noninvasive Society, the Free Market and the Free Society

Rothbard uses the term “noninvasive society” only twice in MES. He more frequently uses the terms “free market,” “free society,” “market society,” and the “contractual society.” He seems to prefer terms that do not directly bring to mind the assumption that individuals do not perform invasive actions.³

No Government is Necessary

It is evident that if no individual ever employs coercion against another person or steals; a government is not necessary to enforce private property rights or free enterprise. By assuming that no invasive action occurs and that all possessions are rightfully acquired, Rothbard eliminates any benefit from the monopolization of coercion and compulsion.

²He uses various terms interchangeably to refer to this concept, including “rightful owner” (MES: 180-1) and “legitimate” owner See MES: 179, 181, 802.

³One might ask why Rothbard himself did not consistently use the term “noninvasive society.” After all, it is more descriptive and less misleading. One answer is that his conflation was probably deliberate (see Part Four of this essay). In other words, he seems to have wanted his readers to change their definition of the free market from one in which a government is necessary to one in which it is not. Another possible answer concerns Rothbard's interaction with the ultimate sponsor of his manuscript. During the early 1950s, the Volcker Fund agreed to finance Rothbard's proposal to write a manuscript that he claimed would be in the Misesian tradition. When he completed it in 1955, he sought a major publisher. After several years of frustration, he returned to the Fund, asking its directors to help him publish his work. At that stage the Fund turned over the manuscript to a reviewer, Frank Meyer. The publication of his manuscript now depended on Meyer's opinions. According to Joseph Stromberg, who wrote the introduction to the Scholar's Edition of MES, Meyer required Rothbard to make major changes before he would approve. Meyer recommended leaving out most of the material that criticized government, saying that the parts that contained this criticism were political and dogmatic. Rothbard reluctantly complied. Stromberg writes that Meyer “effectively torpedoed [Rothbard's] pure theory of invasive action” (MES: lxvi).

In the end, however, it appears that Rothbard successfully fooled the Volcker Fund. He did this by substituting the terms “free market” and “free society” for the term “noninvasive society.”

2. THE FEASIBILITY OF THE NONINVASIVE SOCIETY

In MES, Rothbard did not say that the arrangement represented by the noninvasive society is feasible. Nevertheless, he gave this impression. Specifically, he stipulated that “some sort of enforcing agency” would help block invasive actions from occurring. However, the coercion that he attributed to this agency could not block the more serious internal and external threats to person and property. So he avoided introducing such serious threats. At one point he said that the enforcing agency could be a government. Nevertheless, he had no intention of introducing a government in this capacity. In essence, he simply assumed that even in the presence of threats to person and property, some enforcement agency other than a government would deal with them. Then he passed off the supposed capitalism that would exist under such conditions as the free market that economists had always studied. The purpose of this part is to document these points.

Enforcing Agency or Agencies

A strange addition to Rothbard's noninvasive society is his introduction of an “enforcing agency or agencies” (MES: 177, 184). After having built an image of a noninvasive society on the basis of the assumption that no invasive actions occur in the acquisition of property, he writes a section entitled “Enforcement Against Invasion of Property.” To assume, after having built an image of the noninvasive society, that such a function would have to be performed is an obvious contradiction. The astute reader is left to wonder what Rothbard is up to.

He introduces the section with a statement about his book. He writes that it is “largely the analysis of a market society unhampered by the use of violence or theft against any man's person or property.” He goes on:

For the present purpose, it makes no difference whether this condition is established by every man's deciding to *refrain from invasive action* against others or whether some agency is established to enforce the abandonment of such action by every individual. Whether the enforcement is undertaken by each person or by some sort of agency, we assume here that such a condition – the existence of an unhampered market – is maintained in some way (MES: 176).

The attentive reader would ask what his “present purpose” is. He does not say.

In fact, his purpose is to persuade readers that capitalism can exist without a monopoly over coercion and compulsion. In other words, his purpose is to build an image of the “free market” that he can assert is similar to that of Mises and others who wrote in the tradition of Austrian economics but which does not contain a government.

He does not complete this task in MES. In fact, he did not complete it during his lifetime. Nevertheless, he either deluded himself into thinking that he did or he deliberately deceived his followers. In either case, it is essential to closely analyze his various arguments that an enforcing agency or agencies could establish the conditions of capitalism. In the following, I try to determine as precisely as possible what he claims in MES that the enforcing agency is capable of doing.

Rothbard introduces the enforcing agency by writing that the “business of the enforcing agency” is to “enforce against theft of property” and to enforce contracts (MES: 177). He gives the examples

of vandalism (MES: 182) and robbery (MES 183). Then he creates scenarios in which the enforcing agency or agencies deters these actions.⁴

Certainty and Uncertainty about Which Actions are Invasive

To make sense of the enforcing agency's tasks as Rothbard presents them, a reader must provisionally assume that individuals perform two classes of actions that contradict the assumption that no invasive actions occur. First, some individuals in the noninvasive society perform actions that practically everyone regards as invasive, such as theft, vandalism and robbery. Second, some individuals perform actions for which the invasive character has yet to be determined. For the second class of actions, most individuals, or even everyone, is uncertain about whether the action has an invasive character. I begin with the first class.

Rothbard assumes a range of actions in which the invasiveness is known, yet the action is performed anyway. I have already referred to theft, vandalism and robbery. He does not give specifics about these actions. But he does for a different action – that of air pollution, which he equates to vandalism (MES: 182). He refers to the need for judicial action.

A more succinct way of stating his assumption about the enforcing agency's task in dealing with this first class of actions is to say that he *implicitly* assumes the presence of a *core set of social mores* relating to vandalism and similar actions. The function of judges is to determine that the pollution occurred according to the social mores.

It should be noted that while Rothbard mentions only judicial action, what he really has in mind is a combination of judicial determination and penalty administration. He implicitly assumes that the enforcing agency administers a penalty for polluting the air by applying widely accepted standards of conduct. Once a judge determines that a violation of social mores occurred, she orders the violator to submit to the penalty. He does not discuss the nature of penalties.

For the second class of actions, social mores have yet to be determined. Rothbard gives the example of fraud. Suppose that *A* promises *B* to pay a sum of money in a contract. When the time comes to pay, *A* refuses or cannot pay. Suppose that *A* had deliberately lied in order to persuade the creditor to accept the promise. Or suppose that *A* knew that she might be unable to keep the promise but did not share her knowledge with the creditor. Or suppose that *A* did not think about the prospect that she could not keep the promise and that *B* had employed deception or other "hard-sell" persuasion techniques. Or suppose that *A* is able to keep the promise but conceals this fact from a creditor because she believes that keeping her promise would impose an extraordinary burden on her family. In these cases, is her combined action of promising to pay and concealing her ability to pay invasive? The debtor and creditor may disagree. Rothbard assumes that the disagreement could be resolved by the judges of the enforcing agency.

Thus Rothbard assumes on the one hand that there is a class of actions that are covered by the core set of mores. But he also assumes that there is a class of actions that not covered by the core set. He describes the enforcing agency's tasks by referring to these two classes.

⁴It is odd that he does not explain whether he is writing about a single enforcing agency or a set of agencies. Aside from these two instances, however, he writes entirely of a single agency. This seems to be an indication of his intent to conflate his image with that of Mises. One who does not read carefully may overlook the fact that the agency to which Rothbard refers cannot be a government.

The Tasks of the Enforcing Agency

In light of these implicit assumptions, the tasks of the enforcing agency can be succinctly stated. First, the agency punishes actions that are regarded as impermissible according to a core set of social mores. Ordinarily, a person in the noninvasive society would only perform actions in the core set. However, in some cases, Rothbard assumes that he does. The task of the agency in such cases is to determine whether the invasive action occurred and to punish it. Second, the agency determines the permissibility of acts when there is uncertainty. Individuals may disagree over whether a

particular act is invasive. If so, the agency can help them determine by adjudicating a dispute. The task in such cases is first to determine whether the act is invasive and then, if it is, to punish it.

Consider how the enforcing agency could determine whether an act is invasive. The agency would presumably learn about the act through a complaint by a person who regards herself as a victim. That person would appeal to the agency, the presumed agency judge would hear the complaint, and make a judgment. Such a hearing would presumably entail an invitation to respond by the alleged perpetrator. If the judge rules in favor of the claimant, the agency would then employ its policing power to enforce the judgment (MES: 1052).⁵

Such decisions would presumably serve partly as precedents for future decisions. By publicizing its decisions, the enforcing agency would be able to incentivize individuals to incorporate new actions into the core set, thereby expanding the core set of mores of the noninvasive society, *ceteris paribus*. It would help people incorporate actions that were previously outside the core or “on the periphery” into the core.

In most modern economies the function of determining which actions are impermissible and imposing penalties is performed by governments. In countries that are civil-law oriented, a combination of the legislature and chief executive perform the function. In common-law oriented countries, government judges typically determine the permissibility of actions and government agents enforce the judgments. Rothbard asserts that this function can be performed by the enforcing agency, or agencies.

Rothbard does not express these tasks and function of the enforcing agency unambiguously. He writes broadly that the function of “*some sort of enforcing agency*” is to combat the “invasion of the

Rothbard's two tasks of the enforcing agency:

1. To make judicial determinations and to punish with police power actions that are already regarded as impermissible according to existing social mores.
2. To decide which actions are permissible in cases where there is a dispute over whether an act is invasive.

The enforcing agency incentivizes individuals to incorporate new actions into the core set of invasive actions, thereby expanding the core set of mores of the noninvasive society, *ceteris paribus*.

⁵Note that the description of the judgment process is taken from his *Power and Market* (1970 – PM). As pointed out below, the enforcing agency's function is left unclear in MES. The Mises Institute combined MES and PM in its 2004 edition of MES.

physical person and property” (MES: 183-184, italics added). A reader must tease them out by closely examining the text.⁶

The Invasiveness of All Government Actions

As mentioned above, in democratic nations, the enforcing agency function is performed by legislation and the criminal and civil justice system. However, Rothbard regards such mechanisms as part of a government, the actions of which are necessarily invasive. He illustrates the invasiveness of government actions by referring to the taxes required to run the government. Taxes, he writes, are an example of a “binary intervention.” A binary intervention is “a *hegemonic* relation...between two people: the intervener and the subject” (MES: 877, italics added). He ruled out hegemonic relationships in the noninvasive society (MES: 84-5).⁷

Another way for a reader to reach the conclusion that Rothbard rules out government is to read his discussion of the government budget. In that discussion, he calls taxation a government intervention. “Government intervention, he says, is not only...like price control; it may also be...taxation, and is therefore imbedded into the very nature of government and governmental activity” (MES: 908).

External and Internal Threats

When Rothbard writes about the enforcing agency's function, he is not concerned with the question of whether such an agency can enable capitalism to exist in the first place. He assumes that objectively-determined invasive actions are absent. For him, this is sufficient to assure that market interaction can occur even without a government. It is especially important to realize that he is unconcerned with national defense. Yet if observation of the modern world provides any information about what to fear from government-less market interaction, it tells one that defense against internal invasive actions may be no more important than defense against foreign aggressors. Bombs, poisons, and sabotage of communication, transportation, and energy networks are means of disabling and overwhelming a defense force that is not prepared for *total war* or that is not aligned with a nation that is prepared.

Rothbard does not allow national defense to be a rationale for a monopoly over coercion and compulsion. “The defense function,” he writes “is particularly vital to the State's existence, for on its virtual monopoly of force depends its ability to extract taxes from its citizens” (MES: 955). But he is not concerned with whether the enforcing agency can supply the national defense service. He

⁶More specifically one must first try to resolve the contradiction between his assumption that no one performs and invasive act and his assumption that the enforcing agency has a function. Then, he must realize that Rothbard had no intention of allowing the enforcing agency to be a government.

⁷Also see his discussion of inalienable personal rights.

Because a man's self-ownership over his will is inalienable, he cannot, on the unhampered market, be compelled to continue an arrangement whereby he submits his will to the orders of another, even though he might have agreed to this arrangement previously (MES: 164).

The complete adherence to such inalienable rights is incompatible with government-enforced capitalism since government enforcement of the conditions of capitalism requires resources.

simply ignores the issue as if not only a specific nation, but the whole world, is a noninvasive society.

In addition to the external threats, there are internal threats that arise from the incentive to take by force rather than produce. Gangs and coalitions of gangs have incentives to extort whatever wealth is produced. The threat from such gangs dis-incentivizes the accumulation of capital goods and, as a result, the prospect for capitalism in the first place.

Why Did Rothbard Not Defend the Feasibility of the Noninvasive Society?

Rothbard did not defend the feasibility of the noninvasive society in MES. This is perplexing to the typical reader. A possible explanation is the difficulty he faced in trying to get his original manuscript published. He began work on this manuscript in the early 1950s after receiving a grant from the William Volker Fund. As a condition of sponsorship, he submitted (1) periodic reports of his plans and (2) drafts of parts of the manuscript that he eventually expected to be his treatise. In 1955, he began to seek out major publishers for his book. All rejected his plan, presumably based on the chapters he sent to them (MES: lix-lxv).

Several years later, having been unsuccessful at finding a publisher, he approached the Fund again, hoping that it would sponsor the manuscript's publication. The fund agreed but only if he would purge the original manuscript of his anarcho-capitalism ideas. He responded by retaining his image of the noninvasive society while minimizing the use of the term and omitting any defense of its feasibility. He later published an attempt at such a defense in PM. That defense was part of the original manuscript (MES: lxv-lxix, lxx).⁸

Resentment

In order to persuade the Volker Fund to sponsor the publication of MES, Rothbard had to make substantial changes to the original manuscript, as per the recommendation of Meyer (see footnote 3 in Part One of this essay), the Fund's reviewer. Rothbard complied but objected privately that Meyer had misunderstood. Amazingly, according to Stromberg, Rothbard

maintained that he never advocated policy in the treatise. Quoting from a letter, he reports that Rothbard complained that his proposition that a "price control leads to shortage and misallocation of resources" is "in no sense a value-judgment or a political stand on my part; it is purely a scientific economic conclusion of an economic analysis" (MES: lxviii).

This is certainly true about a price control. However, Rothbard defined an intervention as any government action. For him to refer only to a price control was disingenuous. It might be true that he did not advocate a particular policy. But he was disillusioned to think that he could build a useful image of capitalism by assuming the absence of invasive actions and/or the absence of serious internal and external threats.

⁸Jörg Guido Hülsmann (2007: 935-42) also presents a partial history of Rothbard's frustrating efforts to publish his treatise.

3. ECONOMICS IN THE AUSTRIAN TRADITION OR ETHICS?

Rothbard's elucidation of the image of the noninvasive society was totally new. No one who would have been regarded as an Austrian economist prior to him had sought to build economic theorems for the noninvasive society. It is worthwhile, in light of this fact, to examine his justification for doing so. The examination leads one to recognize a mass of confusion.

Mass of Confusion

The Free Market

The greatest confusion is in his final chapter, which he entitled "The Economics of Violent Intervention in the Market." He begins the chapter with an obvious falsehood. He writes:

Up to this point we have been assuming that no violent invasion of person or property occurs in society; we have been tracing the economic analysis of the free society, the free market, where individuals deal with one another only peacefully and never with violence. This is the construct, or "model," of the purely free market. And this model, imperfectly considered perhaps, has been the main object of study of economic analysis throughout the history of the discipline. In order to complete the economic picture of our world, however, economic analysis must be extended to the nature and consequences of violent actions and interrelations in society, including intervention in the market and violent abolition of the market ("socialism") (MES: 875).

Here he states that his "economic analysis" pertains to the image of the "free society" and "free market." As pointed out in Part One, these are synonyms for the noninvasive society. He implies his use of this image with his statement that there is "no violent invasion of person or property." Then he writes that the theorems of this "free society" – i.e., his noninvasive society – provides a "picture of our world." Here is where the confusion begins. What, one must ask, does he mean by "our world." The image of the noninvasive society is not an image of the reality of any known capitalist society. He is wrong to say that it is a picture of our world. He is likewise wrong to say that this image has been the "object of study...throughout the history of the discipline."

The confusion is compounded in the chapter's conclusion where he writes:

[Our] investigations have shown [that] the network of...free exchanges in society – known as the "free market" – creates a delicate and even awe-inspiring mechanism of harmony, adjustment, and precision in allocating productive resources, deciding upon prices, and gently but swiftly guiding the economic system toward the greatest possible satisfaction of the desires of all the consumers.

On the other hand, coercion has diametrically opposite features. Directly, coercion benefits one party only at the expense of others (MES: 1024-5).

This statement may be an accurate report of the conclusions drawn from the assumptions required to build the image of the noninvasive society. But they are irrelevant to the imaginary construction that Austrian economists previously regarded as the "free market."

Praxeology

Equally astounding is that he invokes the term "praxeology" to refer to the method he used to reach these conclusions. This generates even greater confusion. He writes:

Praxeology, through its *Wertfrei* laws, informs us that the workings of the voluntary principle and of the free market lead inexorably to freedom, prosperity, harmony, efficiency, and order; while coercion and *government intervention* lead inexorably to hegemony, conflict, exploitation of man by man, inefficiency, poverty, and chaos. At this point, praxeology retires from the scene; and it is up to the citizen – the ethicist – to choose his political course according to the values that he holds dear (MES: 1025, some italics added).

He cannot be referring to “praxeology,” as Mises defined this term. What he has in mind is “economic analysis,” in the sense that he used the term in the above quote from MES: 875. But even that term – “economic analysis” is a misnomer. His sweeping conclusions are based on unrealistic assumptions that only noninvasive acts can occur. A serious reader might concede that the conclusions he reaches about government based on his assumptions about non-invasive actions are logical. But these conclusions have nothing to do with praxeology and they are irrelevant to anyone who is concerned with economic policy and the actions of government agents in reality.⁹

Policy Relevance

In fact, Rothbard explicitly denies that economics has any specific policy relevance. When he equates the citizen to the ethicist, he suggests that his analysis is only relevant to right and wrong. The questions he suggests can be answered are whether the noninvasive society should be judged as moral and whether an individual's actions are right or wrong.

Rothbard's statement about *Wertfreiheit* is especially misleading to a reader who is familiar with, but not an expert on, Mises's treatise. Mises makes a series of statements with respect to the laws of economics at the end of HA that seem similar. First, he concludes his next to last subsection entitled “Economics and Judgements of Value” with the statement about value neutrality. He writes

that economics is apolitical or nonpolitical, although it is the foundation of politics and of every kind of political action. We may furthermore say that it is perfectly neutral with regard to all judgments of value, as it refers always to means and never to the choice of ultimate ends (HA: 884-5).

Second, in his concluding subsection, he writes about how people can accept or reject the “treasure” of the teachings of economics (HA: 886). This seems similar to Rothbard's assertion that “it is up to the citizen – the ethicist – to choose his political course according to the values that he holds dear” (MES: 1025, as quoted above). A closer reading of Mises, however, shows that the treasure of knowledge does not refer to anything like the theorems that Rothbard develops for the noninvasive society. The knowledge that Mises has in mind is the division of labor law. He writes:

The body of economic knowledge is an essential element in the structure of human civilization; it is the foundation upon which modern industrialism and all the moral, intellectual, technological, and therapeutical achievements of the last centuries have been built. It rests with men whether they will make the proper use of the rich treasure with which this knowledge provides them or whether they will leave it unused (HA: 885).

⁹Note the difference between Mises and Rothbard on the concept of harmony and its antithesis, the absence of conflict. In Mises's economics, the harmony is due to the division of labor law. Conflict is absent because Mises assumes that the government establishes and enforces the conditions of capitalism. For Rothbard, harmony is due to the assumption that individuals do not perform invasive actions.

This body of knowledge was produced by the classical economists and revised by the individualist economists and Mises in HA. See my essay "[Brief History of Pre-Mises Economics](#)." Such knowledge, as interpreted by Mises, is ultimately useful in evaluating the effects on the amounts of material consumer goods of market intervention and socialism. This knowledge is clearly not that which is embodied in Rothbard's ethical theorems.

The Major Function of Economics

In order to clear up the confusion, a reader might try to identify statements in MES that reflect Rothbard's goal. The most revealing statement that I could find is in the very last paragraph of the main body of text. It is the following sentence on the function of economics. Referring to what economics informs us about, he writes:

The major function of praxeology – of economics – is to bring to the world the knowledge of these indirect, these hidden, consequences of the different forms of human action. The hidden order, harmony, and efficiency of the voluntary free market, the hidden disorder, conflict, and gross inefficiency of coercion and intervention – these are the great truths that economic science, through deductive analysis from self-evident axioms, reveals to us (MES: 1025).

Here he says that the function of economics is to help readers reach specific conclusions about the "voluntary free market" and about government intervention. Yet the theorems derived for the noninvasive society cannot be the "great truths of economic science." A scientist's subject matter, whether he is an economist or a natural scientist, is always reality. He aims to reach conclusions that can be applied to the real world.

A Reader's Burden

The typical reader of MES might well overlook this mass of confusion. To identify it at the outset, she would have to begin with Rothbard's conclusion. Then she would have to realize that "free society" and "free market" refer to the noninvasive society and not to what Austrian economists have traditionally called the free market, market economy, and capitalism. To achieve this realization, the reader would already need knowledge of the Austrian tradition. Next, she would have to form a clear image of the noninvasive society. This is not without difficulty, since Rothbard does not introduce that image until his chapter 2.

Few readers would approach their studies of MES by doing this. It is far more likely that they would consult Rothbard's preface where he says that his work "attempts to isolate the economic, fill in the interstices, and spell out the detailed implications, as I see them, of the Misesian structure" (MES: xciv). A reader who superficially compared HA with MES might be inclined to agree. Rothbard did articulate a number of theorems that Mises built in HA and the sequencing of his chapters correspond roughly to that of Mises. It is clear, however, that Rothbard's non-invasive society is not Mises's pure market economy (pure capitalism). Yet Mises spends most of his lengthy part 4 of the treatise building economic theorems to elucidate this image.

4. DECEPTION?

Rothbard's decision to conflate his image with that of tradition and his frequent references to Mises warrants the tentative conclusion that Rothbard may have deliberately misled his readers both about Austrian economics and about Mises. In this part, I consider this possibility. Consider Rothbard's description of his MES project. He says that he aims to develop "an analysis of the workings of a society based purely on voluntary action, entirely unhampered by violence or threats of violence" (MES: 84). To achieve this aim, he plans to contrast "the laws of [what he calls] the *unhampered market*" with "the nature and results of hegemonic relations – of actions based on violence or the threat of violence" (MES: 85). He later writes that "[t]his work is largely the analysis of a market society unhampered by the use of violence or theft against any man's person or property" (MES: 176). Since he had already in MES assumed that all property is rightfully acquired, it is clear that he is referring to the noninvasive society. Yet he was certainly aware that Mises was not writing about such an imaginary system. In light of this, if Rothbard intended to describe the Misesian structure and tell its implications, he surely would have emphasized his differences with Mises on the concept of the market society. Yet he wrote as if the two systems are identical.

The cynical reader of this chapter may now agree that Rothbard and Mises employed different images of the free market. But she may think that the author's implication that Rothbard concealed this difference amounts to an unwarranted stretch. Yet how else can one explain the fact that, in MES, Rothbard cites Mises on at least two occasions in relation to his use of the term "free or unhampered market" (MES: 585, 661)? Surely, he had to realize that his image of the free or unhampered market economy was different from that of Mises.

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