

## Rothbard's Illusion that Mises was a Radical

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### Appendix: Mises on Anarchy

After Mises retired from public life, Murray Rothbard sought to invoke him as a supporter. Probably the most outstanding example is Rothbard's article "The Laissez-Faire Radical: A Quest for the Historical Mises" (LFR), which was published in 1981 in the libertarian journal that Rothbard edited. In the article, he tells a tale about how Mises, in his younger days before coming to the US, was a radical. He seems to lament that today (i.e., in 1981) Mises is regarded as a conservative. Rothbard cites no fellow interpreters of Mises and he declines to define the terms "radical" or "conservative." The goal of his essay is captured in his conclusion, which expresses what he claims to have discovered about Mises.

We find, then, a Mises with the following strongly held political views: a proclaimed pacifist, who trenchantly attacked war and national chauvinism; a bitter critic of Western imperialism and colonialism; a believer in nonintervention with regard to Soviet Russia; a strong proponent of national self-determination, not only for national groups, but for subgroups down to the village level – and in theory, at least, down to the right of individual secession, which approaches anarchism; someone so hostile to immigration restrictions that he almost endorsed war against such countries as the United States and Australia to force them to open up their borders; a believer in the importance of class conflict in relation to the State; a caustic rationalist critic of Christianity and of all religion; and an admirer of the French Revolution (LFR: 251).

One must assume that Rothbard uses the terms "radical" and "conservative" to refer to ideologies pertaining to the role of government and therefore to government policy.<sup>1</sup> Given this assumption,

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<sup>1</sup>I discuss the difference between a personal ideology and an ideology about government in my essay "How the [Mises Institute Promotes Progressivism](#)."

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such terms are mis-characterizations. Although Mises identified many ideologies, his aim was always to compare them on the basis of whether following a particular ideology could achieve its proponents' aims. Thus, he is best characterized as an expositor of and contributor to [the new economic science of the means](#), at least after the publication of his book on *Socialism* (1922). Mises confirms his discovery of the new science and therefore his status as a scientist in his book *Notes and Recollections*, which he wrote in 1940 but which was not published until almost four decades later. He writes that, in the 1920s, he

introduced a *new perspective* in the handling of [the problems of government policy], the only one that made possible a *scientific* discussion of political questions. I made inquiry into the usefulness of proposed measures, that is, whether the objective that the use of these measures was intended to achieve could actually be obtained through the means recommended and employed (Mises 1940: 98, italics added).

He goes on to say:

If a socialist system *leads to chaos* because it is a system wherein economic calculation is impossible, and if interventionism cannot attain the objectives desired by its proponents, then [supporting] these illogical systems...[is] irrelevant (*ibid.*: 99, italics added).

The most accurate characterization of Mises's approach to government policy is one that he himself would have preferred, namely, that it is neither radical nor conservative, but scientific. In what follows, I refer to this new approach as "Mises's scientific approach."

**Mises's scientific approach to government policy:** to evaluate a proposed policy on the basis of whether the means can achieve the ends of the proponent.

Rothbard's characterization of Mises as a radical seems intended to neutralize Mises's own characterization of himself. Perhaps Rothbard thought that by making a case that Mises was a radical at some stage of his life, he could claim him as his precursor. He must have believed that he could persuade admirers of Mises to regard his ethics more sympathetically.

Rothbard primarily uses three of Mises's writings to document the alleged radicalism: *Nation, State and Economy* (1917); *Liberalism: The Classical Tradition* (1927), and *Socialism: An Economic and Sociological Analysis* (1922). The aim of this essay is to closely examine this documentation. It shows that Rothbard consistently took Mises's statements about ideology out of context. The essay is patterned after his LFR article. It considers, in turn, each of the topics in the article. With the exception of my first section, my headings roughly correspond to his article. This makes it easy for the reader to evaluate my interpretations.

### 1. RADICAL PACIFIST?

In his first section "War and Imperialism," Rothbard writes that Mises "boldly proclaimed his pacifism." His source is Mises's 1927 book from which he takes the following quote:

The goal of the domestic policy of liberalism is the same as that of its foreign policy: peace. It aims at peaceful cooperation just as much between nations as within each nation...The ultimate ideal envisioned by liberalism is the

perfect cooperation of all mankind... Liberal thinking always has the whole of humanity in view and not just parts... Its thinking is cosmopolitan and ecumenical: it takes in all men and the whole world. Liberalism is, in this sense, humanism; and the liberal, a citizen of the world, a cosmopolite (LFR 251; Mises 1927: 105-6).

One only needs to read the quote carefully to recognize that Mises is not necessarily (1) writing about pacifism in the sense that Rothbard means it or (2) proclaiming *his* pacifism. Mises is saying that the ideology of liberalism *promotes peace* because it enables individuals to take advantage of the division of labor law. When Mises uses the term “cooperation” he is referring to cooperation under the division of labor in an environment of capitalism. This is evident from a clause that Rothbard conveniently omits. Mises writes that

the whole policy and program of liberalism is designed to serve the purpose of maintaining the existing state of mutual cooperation among the members of the human race and of extending it still further (Mises 1927: 105).

He is referring to what he would later call “the system of mutual cooperation...within the frame of the market economy” (HA: 117) and to “society” and cooperation “under the division of labor” (HA: 143-4). Peace, from this point of view, is not an ideology but a means of attaining the consequences of the higher physical productivity of the division of labor. Moreover, a liberalist may decide that the most effective way to achieve peace is to take up arms in defense or even to preemptively attack an enemy in order to block an expected invasion.

Assuming that Mises is a pacifist, Rothbard went on to make an hypothesis about the source of the pacifism. The pacifism, he says, stems from a natural law philosophy. He writes that Mises

made clear that [his pacifism] was to be distinguished from the older sentimental pacifism. Instead his was the “pacifism of the Enlightenment philosophy of natural law, of economic liberalism, and of political democracy, which has been cultivated since the 18th century” (LFR: 238).

He bases this hypothesis on a statement that he quotes from Mises’s 1917 book. Mises had written that the

[pacifism of the Enlightenment philosophy of natural law, of economic liberalism, and of political democracy, which has been cultivated since the 18th century] does not arise from a sentiment that calls on the individual and the state to renounce the pursuit of their earthly interests out of thirst for fame or in hope of reward in the beyond; nor does it stand as a separate postulate without organic connection with other moral demands. Rather, pacifism here follows with logical necessity from the entire system of social life...(*ibid.*; Mises 1917: 114-5).

Note that Mises is not writing about himself. He is not declaring himself a pacifist. He is reporting on the pacifism expressed by the proponents of liberalism. A close reading of the 1917 context of the statement shows that Mises was cataloging and comparing different classes of pacifism. The first type in the catalog is the pacifism of the “dreamers and humanitarians” who want the kings and elites to stop warring with each other. Such pacifists are dreamers because the kings and elites have never in the past renounced their power and cannot be expected to do so in the future. The second type is the pacifism of the Enlightenment to which Rothbard’s quote refers. The third and fourth are the pacifism of the Marxian socialist and that of the nationalistic imperialist. Mises writes that none of these is a “principled opponent of armed intervention” (*ibid.*: 116).

Liberalism differs from these other types, he writes.

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Liberalism rejects aggressive war...from the standpoint of utility. It rejects aggressive war because it regards victory as harmful, and it wants no conquests because it sees them as an unsuitable means for reaching the ultimate goals for which it strives. Not through war and victory but only through work can a nation create the preconditions for the well-being of its members (*ibid.*: 117).

Rothbard provides no direct evidence that Mises's ideology about government – his alleged pacifism – stems from natural law. None of his quotations on this subject are about Mises's ideology; they are about the ideology of liberalism. In fact, Mises denied that the economic liberalism that he describes is based on natural law. Consider what Mises wrote in HA.

[T]he teachings of utilitarian philosophy and classical economics have nothing at all to do with the doctrine of natural right. With them the only point that matters is social utility. They recommend popular government, private property, tolerance, and freedom not because they are natural and just, but because they are beneficial. The core of Ricardo's philosophy is the demonstration that social cooperation and division of labor between men who are in every regard superior and more efficient and men who are in every regard inferior and less efficient is beneficial to both groups (HA: 175).

Indeed, Rothbard probably knew this. In an article published one year earlier, Rothbard wrote that the utilitarian philosophy is “the polar opposite of any natural law philosophy” (Rothbard 1980: 290).

I conclude that there is no reason to believe that Mises held a natural law philosophy, that he supported pacifism on these grounds, or that he held the ideology of pacifism at all. Rothbard's claims are totally false. If he did not know this, he should have.

## 2. EMOTIONAL ANTI-IMPERIALIST?

Later in his section on “War and Imperialism,” Rothbard writes that Mises “denounced the renewed Western imperialism of the late nineteenth century...” (LFR: 238). Rothbard's apparent justification for using the term “denounced” is Mises's phrase “imperialist aggressors.” Mises writes in 1922 that “everywhere we see the imperialist aggressors in retreat or at least already in difficulties” (LFR: 239; Mises 1927: 124). In fact, there was no “denouncing.” A close examination of the passage that Rothbard quotes shows that Mises was writing about the history of imperialism. To call the imperialists “aggressors” is not to pronounce a judgment. It is merely to report the aggressiveness of the means that the imperialist governments used to attain their ends.

A similar statement can be made about the support Rothbard provides for his claim that Mises “was even harsher on European imperialist and colonialist policies pursued since the fifteenth century” (LFR: 239). To back up this statement, he refers to what he calls Mises's “radical philippic against Western imperialism” (*ibid.*).<sup>2</sup> He quotes Mises as follows:

No chapter of history is steeped further in blood than the history of colonialism. Blood was shed uselessly and senselessly. Flourishing lands were laid waste; whole peoples destroyed and exterminated. All this can in no way be extenuated or justified. The dominion of Europeans in Africa and important parts of Asia is absolute. It stands in the sharpest contrast to all the principles of liberalism and democracy, and there can be no doubt that we must strive for its abolition (LFR: 239; Mises 1927: 125).

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<sup>2</sup>One dictionary defines philippic as “a discourse or declamation full of bitter condemnation.”

Yet Rothbard ignores the fact that this statement and others occur in a section entitled “Colonial Policy,” in a chapter entitled “Liberal Foreign Policy,” which is in a book entitled “Liberalism.” Mises is clearly writing about the attitude of the proponents of the ideology of liberalism toward colonial policy, not about his personal ideology. Moreover, Mises had introduced the section with the following sentence: “The considerations and objectives that have guided the colonial policy of the European powers since the age of the great discoveries stand in the sharpest contrast to all the principles of liberalism” (*ibid*: 124-5). The “great discoveries” refer to the division of labor law and the Ricardian law of association.

The words that Rothbard quoted are about a set of actions that Mises asserts would be *opposed* by a person who subscribes to the ideology of liberalism. Mises is not expressing emotions and if he were, the emotions would not be his. What Rothbard interprets to be Mises’s emotional comments are, in fact, statements about how someone who espouses the ideology of classical liberalism would view imperialism and colonialism.

### 3. ON SELF DETERMINATION

Believing that he has made his case that Mises is a radical, Rothbard next attempts to find support in Mises’s words for what he regards as a radical ideology about government that he calls “self determination.” He wants to demonstrate, as he says at the end of the section, that “Mises, at least in theory, believed in the right of individual secession and therefore came close to anarchism...” In this discussion, Rothbard makes two claims that he cannot substantiate. The first is a repeat of the claim that Mises’s statements stem from an ideology about government that is based on natural law. He makes this claim when he refers to Mises’s support for “the right of individual secession.” The second is the claim that Mises came close to anarchism (LFR:241). He can only make these claims by taking Mises’s statements entirely out of context. To show this, I will have to review Mises’s entire discussion of the policies of a liberal government. First, however, I present Rothbard’s argument.

#### **Rothbard’s Statements**

Rothbard writes that Mises is “devoted to the concept of ‘national self-determination’” (LFR: 240). He goes on to say that “to Mises, self-determination of nations and nationalities was simply grounded in the rights of *individuals*. The right of self-determination of nationalities and sub-groups stems from the rights of man” (*ibid.*). To support this, he quotes Mises from his 1917 book:

To the princely principle of subjecting just as much land as obtainable to one’s rule, the doctrine of freedom opposes the principle of the right of self-determination of peoples, which follows necessarily from the principle of the rights of man. No people and no part of a people shall be held against its will in a political association that it does not want (*ibid.*; Mises 1917: 60).

This passage seems to have been translated oddly. In any event, based on the context, Rothbard interprets it correctly as being about the “doctrine of freedom,” which according to Mises implies the principle of the right of self-determination.

The passage appears to support Rothbard's claim. It does not. First, it is essential to realize that the passage is taken from Mises's 1917 book, which does not always reflect what I have called Mises's scientific approach. Second, Mises is not writing about his personal ideology, as the following passage from the same section illustrates:

Against the princely state there then arises in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the idea of freedom. It revives the political thought of the republics of antiquity and of the free cities of the Middle Ages; it links up with the monarchomachs' hostility to princes; it patterns itself on the example of England, where the crown had already suffered a decisive defeat in the seventeenth century; it fights with the entire armament of philosophy, of rationalism, of natural law, and of history; it wins over the great masses through literature, which puts itself entirely at its service. Absolute kingship succumbs to the attack of the *movement for freedom*. In its place appears here parliamentary monarchy, there a republic (*ibid.*: 57-8, italics added).<sup>3</sup>

In this passage Mises refers to the "movement for freedom." We know this because in the passage quoted by Rothbard, he uses the term "doctrine of freedom." It is evident that the "doctrine of freedom" refers to the ideology about government held by the participants in a broad-based movement. Mises is certainly not referring to his own ideology about government.

Rothbard then shifts to Mises's 1927 book. He begins by quoting Mises on "the right of the inhabitants of every territory to decide on the state to which they wish to belong" (Mises 1927: 109; LFR: 240). Mises calls this the "right of self-determination."

The right of self-determination in regard to the question of membership in a state thus means: whenever the inhabitants of a particular territory, whether it be a single village, a whole district, or a series of adjacent districts, make it known, by a freely conducted plebiscite, that they no longer wish to remain united to the state to which they belong at the time, but wish either to form an independent state or to attach themselves to some other state, their wishes are to be respected and complied with. This is the only feasible and effective way of preventing revolutions and civil and international wars (Mises 1927: 109; LFR: 241).<sup>4</sup>

Rothbard uses a different term: the "principle of secession." Mises does not use this term presumably because he is viewing secession through the eyes of the supporter of a liberal government. Such a government (i.e., a representative democracy) must, by the definition of liberalism, allow secession as a matter of policy.

Then Rothbard asks what he regards as the telling question. Would Mises, he asks, "allow "self-determination for the ultimate [administrative] unit, for each individual?" He proceeds to comment that "[a]llowing each individual to remain where he lives and yet secede from the State is tantamount to anarchism..." He concludes that Mises "comes very close to anarchism, blocked only by practical technical considerations" (*ibid.*) To document his speculation, he quotes again from Mises's 1927 book:

If it were in any way possible to grant this right of self-determination to every individual person, it would have to be done. This is impracticable only because of compelling technical considerations, which make it necessary that a region

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<sup>3</sup>The monarchomachs were originally French Huguenot theorists who opposed monarchy at the end of the 16th century.

<sup>4</sup>In light of his approach to democracy, as described in Part Two of my essay "[Statism and Democracy: Mises vs. Rothbard](#)," he is referring here to the liberals' conception of the function of democracy.

be governed as a single administrative unit and that the right of self-determination be restricted to the will of the majority of the inhabitants of areas large enough to count as territorial units in the administration of the country (*ibid.*; Mises 1927: 109-10).

### **The Context of Mises's Statements about Self Determination**

To evaluate Rothbard's speculation about Mises's position on anarchism and self determination, it is essential to put these quotations in their proper context. Mises introduces the liberal foreign policy goal with the following statement.

The goal of the domestic policy of liberalism is the same as that of its foreign policy: peace. It aims at peaceful cooperation just as much between nations as within each nation. The starting point of liberal thought is the recognition of the value and importance of human cooperation, and the whole policy and program of liberalism is designed to serve the purpose of maintaining the existing state of mutual cooperation among the members of the human race and of extending it still further. The ultimate ideal envisioned by liberalism is the perfect cooperation of all mankind, taking place peacefully and without friction (Mises 1927: 105).<sup>5</sup>

The goal of a liberal foreign policy, he says, is peace in accordance with the desire to achieve human cooperation under the principle of the higher physical productivity of the division of labor. Such a policy aims to include everyone, which implies that everyone is to be included in a single international capitalist system and, therefore, that everyone be subject to the same government and same rule of law.

#### *Anarchism*

It follows, broadly speaking, that the liberal foreign policy is the antithesis to anarchism. In fact, Mises writes as much.

Liberalism is not anarchism, nor has it anything whatsoever to do with anarchism. The liberal understands quite clearly that without resort to compulsion, the existence of society would be endangered and that behind the rules of conduct whose observance is necessary to assure peaceful human cooperation must stand the threat of force if the whole edifice of society is not to be continually at the mercy of any one of its members. One must be in a position to compel the person who will not respect the lives, health, personal freedom, or private property of others to acquiesce in the rules of life in society. This is the function that the liberal doctrine assigns to the state: the protection of property, liberty, and peace (*ibid.*: 37).<sup>6</sup>

Two pages later, he discusses "the conditions that a state must fulfill in order to correspond to the liberal ideal." The state, he says, "must not only be able to protect private property; it must also be so constituted that the smooth and peaceful course of its development is never interrupted by civil wars, revolutions, or insurrections" (*ibid.*: 39). The most feasible way to avoid interruptions, he says, is constitutional democracy. He sets up the argument by first referring to a government that is not a democracy. He writes that in "the long run no government can maintain itself in power if it does

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<sup>5</sup>See also his statement two pages later: "It is from the fact of the international division of labor that liberalism derives the decisive, irrefutable argument against war" (*ibid.*: 107).

<sup>6</sup>With regard to "a sect that believes that one could quite safely dispense with every form of compulsion and base society entirely on the voluntary observance of the moral code," see Mises's discussion at *ibid.*: 36.

not have public opinion behind it, i.e., if those governed are not convinced that the government is good." If a government lacks this support, the majority may resort to the expedient of "civil war, revolutions, insurrection. But it is just this expedient that liberalism wants to avoid. There can be no lasting economic improvement if the peaceful course of affairs is continually interrupted by internal struggles" (*ibid.*: 41).

The liberal solution to the potential problem of interruptions is democracy:

Here is where the social function performed by democracy finds its point of application. Democracy is that form of political constitution which makes possible the adaptation of the government to the wishes of the governed without violent struggles. If in a democratic state the government is no longer being conducted as the majority of the population would have it, no civil war is necessary to put into office those who are willing to work to suit the majority. By means of elections and parliamentary arrangements, the change of government is executed smoothly and without friction, violence, or bloodshed (*ibid.*: 42).

### *Self Determination*

Mises goes on to write about secession. He writes that a person, and a collective of persons, may, under liberalism, hold a plebiscite. What if a majority of the inhabitants decides by plebiscite to secede from the democracy of which it has previously been part? What if it votes to form its own government? The answer for liberalism is that the larger government must allow the new, smaller, government that is located within its geographical borders to secede. In answering this question, Mises refers to the "right of self-determination" under liberalism. He writes one of the passages quoted by Rothbard.

Let us assume that a plebiscite is conducted by a group that aims to get rid of government altogether. If it is successful and secedes, the people will no longer be under the umbrella of the larger democracy. The ideology of liberalism does not deny individuals or groups the legal right to secede. It even permits them to secede into a situation where there is no government. But the fact that Mises states these characteristics of the liberal ideology in no way indicates Mises's own ideology about government to the effect that "Mises, at least in theory, believed in the [natural] right of individual secession and therefore came close to anarchism..." (LFR: 241, as quoted above). The anarchism discussed here is not part of the ideology of liberalism that Mises is describing. That people are free to try out anarchism on a small scale is an implication of the liberal ideology. If the members of a group living under a liberal government believe they will be better off under anarchism, the liberal ideology requires that, after a plebiscite, they be permitted to give it a go. It would be absurd to infer from these passages that Mises "came close to anarchism."

Rothbard's followers might be inclined to argue that the anarchism about which Mises is writing in these passages differs from the anarcho-capitalism that Rothbard touted. This is probably true for the statements he wrote before he read Rothbard's MES. Whether it is true for the statements he wrote afterwards is doubtful, as discussed in the conclusion. In any case, the purpose in this part is only to evaluate Rothbard's claim that Mises was a radical.

#### 4. THE SOVIET THREAT

Rothbard's next section is entitled the "Soviet Threat." It is unclear why Rothbard includes this section. He writes that its purpose is to show that Mises was not a conservative. One must presume that Rothbard had in mind conservatism in 1981, during the cold war. Yet the sources Rothbard uses to demonstrate that Mises was not a conservative were documents from before that time, when the Soviets posed no threat to the US. Nothing more needs to be said about this.

#### 5. IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONS

Rothbard chooses to represent Mises's view of immigration restrictions by saying that

Mises's laissez-faire radicalism was marked by uncompromising attachment to freedom of immigration. Not only that; so bitter was he at any immigration laws that at times he came close to calling for war against those nations, such as the United States and Australia, who persisted in locking up parts of the earth and keeping out other peoples (LFR: 242).

Note the reference to Mises's "bitterness." This is another effort to persuade readers that Mises was emotional. To support his propositions about Mises's position on this issue and his state of mind, Rothbard refers to three books. In the first, Mises's 1927 book, Rothbard finds only bland statements. He claims to find "less gentle" statements in Mises's 1917 book. I cannot judge what Rothbard means by gentle. However, it is evident that all of Mises's statements about free immigration in the 1917 book are about the League of Nations, not about his personal animosity towards nations that restrict immigration. In any case, Rothbard dismisses these statements, preferring to cite a 1935 article published in a Viennese newspaper (LFR: 243). He calls the statements there Mises's "most bitter assault upon American and Australian immigration barriers..." (*ibid.*). He quotes several passages but none of these amount to bitterness or an assault on America or Australia. Nor do any of them support the claim that Mises "came close to calling for war." All are about the policies of the League of Nations. The logic is similar to that contained in his other books.

Mises's statements are meant to support his view that the participants in the League do not realize that the best way to avoid a future war is to expand the international division of labor by promoting free immigration. In the absence of free immigration, the "common man" in low wage nations is more likely to be persuaded by the argument that war is the most suitable means of raising his wages.

#### 6. OTHER SECTIONS

The last three sections of Rothbard's article prior to his conclusion are "The Theory of Class Conflict," "Christianity and the Social Order," and "the French Revolution." His aim in these sections, like in the others, is to show that Mises was no conservative. Rothbard makes no reference to Mises as a radical or to a display of emotions. Accordingly, these sections are not relevant to Rothbard's main goal to show that Mises was a radical or to the aim of this essay.

One issue that deserves to be addressed, however, is a statement that Rothbard made in his conclusion that Mises was “a caustic rationalist critic of Christianity and of all religion” (LFR: 251, as quoted above). This assertion directly contradicts what Mises wrote about the sciences of human action and the policies of liberalism. These are *not*

antitheistic and hostile to religion. They are radically opposed to all systems of theocracy. But they are entirely neutral with regard to religious beliefs which do not pretend to interfere with the conduct of social, political, and economic affairs (HA: 155).

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have argued that Rothbard misinterpreted passages from Mises's earlier writings on liberalism. Why did he do this? I believe that he sought to promote a self-serving myth that Mises, at least as a young man, may have supported Rothbard's ethics. Rothbard himself was a radical as evidenced by the fact that he based his judgments about policy on his ethics. It would serve his purpose of promoting his ethics if he could successfully paint Mises as a radical. Rothbard's technique consisted not only of misrepresenting passages that seemed to support his claims but also of totally ignoring passages that would have refuted them. Most of the passages he cited were not about Mises's personal ideology about government but about the ideology of liberalism.

It is appropriate in this light to end the essay with a quote from Mises's last and, one could say, definitive book, which he published in 1962.

Government as such is not only not an evil, but the most necessary and beneficial institution, as without it no lasting social cooperation and no civilization could be developed and preserved. It is a means to cope with an inherent imperfection of many, perhaps of the majority of all people. If all men were able to realize that the alternative to peaceful social cooperation is the renunciation of all that distinguishes Homo sapiens from the beasts of prey, and if all had the moral strength always to act accordingly, there would not be any need for the establishment of a social apparatus of coercion and oppression. Not the state is an evil, but the shortcomings of the human mind and character that imperatively require the operation of a police power. Government and state can never be perfect because they owe their *raison d'être* to the imperfection of man and can attain their end, the elimination of man's innate impulse to violence, only by recourse to violence, the very thing they are called upon to prevent.

It is a double-edged makeshift to entrust an individual or a group of individuals with the authority to resort to violence. The enticement implied is too tempting for a human being. The men who are to protect the community against violent aggression easily turn into the most dangerous aggressors. They transgress their mandate. They misuse their power for the oppression of those whom they were expected to defend against oppression. The main political problem is how to prevent the police power from becoming tyrannical. This is the meaning of all the struggles for liberty. The essential characteristic of Western civilization that distinguishes it from the arrested and petrified civilizations of the East was and is its concern for freedom from the state. The history of the West, from the age of the Greek down to the present-day resistance to socialism, is essentially the history of the fight for liberty against the encroachments of the officeholders.

A shallow-minded school of social philosophers, the anarchists, chose to ignore the matter by suggesting a stateless organization of mankind. They simply passed over the fact that men are not angels. They were too dull to realize that in the short run an individual or a group of individuals can certainly further their own interests at the expense of their own and all other peoples' long-run interests. A society that is not prepared to thwart the attacks of such asocial and short-sighted aggressors is helpless and at the mercy of its least intelligent and most brutal members. While Plato founded his utopia on the hope that a small group of perfectly wise and morally impeccable philosophers will be available for the supreme conduct of affairs, anarchists implied that all men without any exception will be endowed with *perfect wisdom and moral impeccability*. They failed to conceive that no system of social cooperation can remove the dilemma between a man's or a group's interests in the short run and those in the long run (UF: 98-9, italics added).

This passage does not refer directly to Rothbard's assumption that there are no [invasive actions](#). Nor does it deal with [defense agencies](#). That is one reason why I wrote separate essays on these subjects. But there can be little doubt that Mises provided a scathing critique of the no-government anarcho-capitalism that Rothbard and his followers tend to explicitly or implicitly promote.

## APPENDIX

## MISES ON ANARCHY

Mises's proposition that the operation of capitalism requires government is in direct opposition to the proposition that the free market can exist in the absence of government – i.e., under anarchy. The latter proposition was promoted by Rothbard and has since been promoted by writers at the Mises Institute. In light of these promotions, it is worth quoting Mises on the prospect for capitalism under anarchy. He argues that anarchy and the division of labor (society) are incompatible.

The anarchists overlook the undeniable fact that some people are either too narrow-minded or too weak to adjust themselves spontaneously to the conditions of social life. Even if we admit that every sane adult is endowed with the faculty of realizing the good of social cooperation and of acting accordingly, there still remains the problem of the infants, the aged, and the insane. We may agree that he who acts antisocially should be considered mentally sick and in need of care. But as long as not all are cured, and as long as there are infants and the senile, some provision must be taken lest they jeopardize society. An anarchistic society would be exposed to the mercy of every individual. Society cannot exist if the majority is not ready to hinder, by the application or threat of violent action, minorities from destroying the social order. This power is vested in the state or government (HA: 149).<sup>7</sup>

The quote is taken from the chapter in which he is examining the historical and philosophical implications of the discovery of the division of labor law. This discovery, he points out, demolished what he calls the “holistic and metaphysical view of society.” Society, as he had defined it, consists of cooperation under the division of labor. Given that the people use money in exchange, society means capitalism. The classical economists had shown that capitalism is a more efficient means than alternatives for humankind to attain their material ends. Moreover, they showed that such a conclusion could be established by means of reason. Nevertheless, religious philosophers still promoted doctrines maintaining that in the absence of divine intervention, humankind would be doomed. But for a deity or a combination of deities, there would be no problem of scarcity because there would be no material goods at all (HA: 145-7). In addition, the socialists conjured up a vision of a future in which actors would no longer pursue their self-interest but would pursue the interest of the collective. Under such circumstances, they maintained, cooperation and a division of labor could be achieved without private property rights. Finally, anarchists denied that a government is necessary. Mises argues in the quote that the anarchists, in effect, disregarded the internal and external threats to the citizens of a capitalist nation.

A shallow-minded school of social philosophers, the anarchists, chose to ignore the matter by suggesting a stateless organization of mankind. They simply passed over the fact that men are not angels. They were too dull to realize that in the short run an individual or a group of individuals can certainly further their own interests at the expense of their own and all other peoples' long-run interests. A society that is not prepared to thwart the attacks of such asocial and short-sighted aggressors is helpless and at the mercy of its least intelligent and most brutal members. While Plato founded his utopia on the hope that a small group of perfectly wise and morally impeccable philosophers will be available for the supreme conduct of affairs, anarchists implied that all men without any exception will be endowed with *perfect wisdom and moral impeccability*. They failed to conceive that no system of social cooperation can remove

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<sup>7</sup>On the impossibility of a viable capitalism under anarchy, see also UF: 98-9.

the dilemma between a man's or a group's interests in the short run and those in the long run (UF: 98-9, some italics added).

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