

AN OUTLINE OF A PRAXEOLOGICAL THEORY OF POLITICS

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ABSTRACT: Throughout his works on methodology, Mises presented economics as part of a more comprehensive science of human action, praxeology. The relation between the two was hierarchical. Praxeology encompassed economics, which was human action under the conditions of monetary calculation, together with any other number of disciplines that could be derived from the categories of human action under specifically assumed conditions. This paper argues that politics/political science can form a sub-field of praxeology. Based on the dichotomy between the economic and political means, politics is going to be defined as the discipline that studies the logic implied by a specific form of human interaction: one individual living off the efforts of another by extracting his resources. Starting from this, the paper provides an outline of politics, and argues that elements of an *a priori* theory of politics can be found in the writings of Austrian school scholars, although they have not yet been grouped under a specific field. The paper also argues that a distinctive field of politics will aid Austrian scholars in better distinguishing their approach from the positivist insights provided by the Public Choice

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school. A distinctive field of politics will lead to a better understanding of how far the *a priori* can go, and where the thymological enters the scene.

KEYWORDS: politics, praxeological theory of politics, methodology

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INTRODUCTION

In his introduction to *Human Action*, Mises (2008) argues that the subjective value theory that was developed by economists in the 19th century transcended the limits of the market and exchange. It allowed the positive study of every kind of human action.

Economics had been developed by the classical economists as the first scientific study of social interaction. But due to their failure to provide a satisfactory value theory, they “had to satisfy themselves with a theory explaining only the activities of the businessman without going back to the choices of everybody as the ultimate determinants” (Mises, 2008, p. 63).

Subjective value theory changed all that as it made possible the emergence of a general theory of human action. Praxeology, as Mises chose to call it in his later works, encompassed economics (human action with monetary calculation), and any kind of human action analyzed by logical deduction that started from the categories of human action in combination with more restrictive conditions.

Up to this day, economics has remained the centerpiece of praxeology. Its insights and those of the recently developed field of praxeological ethics (Hoppe, 2006a) have provided the scientific basis for historical research and for studies in political economy and political philosophy.

The present paper will argue that politics/political science can be thought of as a praxeological sub-discipline, next to economics and praxeological ethics. Starting from the dichotomy between the economic means and the political means (Oppenheimer, 1975) we will define politics as the field that analyzes coercive action aimed at extracting resources, and we will try to identify the necessary implications of this purposeful human endeavor.

We will argue that some works that belong to the Austrian tradition have already managed to conceptualize a series of

implications pertaining to political action, but have not yet been grouped under a distinctive praxeological field.

The paper is organized into five parts. The first part will provide a general overview of the distinction between the field of the natural sciences and the field of the sciences of human action. Regarding the latter, we will follow Mises's split between praxeology and history. The second part will delimit praxeology, the general science of human action, from economics, its best-developed branch.

This discussion will provide the general framework for our third part. Here we will provide an outline of the other fields that are grouped under the aegis of praxeology. We will see that next to economics, Austrian scholars have developed praxeological analysis of war making, voting and ethics.

The last two parts of the paper will try to delimit the praxeological field of politics and will propose to group under it a series of insights that other authors have identified in their writings. We will argue that a distinctive field of politics will aid Austrian scholars in better distinguishing their approach from the positivist insights provided by the Public Choice school. A distinctive field of politics will aid us in understanding how far *a priori* can go and where the thymological enters the scene.

THE NATURAL SCIENCES AND THE SCIENCES OF HUMAN ACTION

The current stage of human intellectual development delimits epistemology, the theory of human knowledge. Due to our deficient knowledge regarding the ultimate causes of human behavior, a coherent and comprehensive monistic interpretation of all phenomena is not yet available to man as he "emerged from eons of cosmic becoming and as he is in this period of the history of the universe" (Mises, 2006, p. 1). Because the natural sciences cannot reduce human will and volition to mere physical and physiological processes, science is forced to employ a dualistic approach.

Methodological dualism refrains from any proposition concerning essences and metaphysical constructs. It merely takes into account the fact that we do not know how external events—physical, chemical, and physiological—affect human thoughts, ideas, and judgments of value.

This ignorance splits the realm of knowledge into two separate fields, the realm of external events, commonly called nature, and the realm of human thought and action. (Mises, 2007, p. 1)

Thus, the source of this methodological distinction originates in the fact that there can be no final cause attributed to natural phenomena, while the fact that man aims at definite goals is known to us. While the natural sciences search for constant relations among various events, the field of human action searches after “the ends the actor wants or wanted to attain and after the result that his action brought about or will bring about” (Mises, 2006, p. 32).

The field of human action, in its turn, consists of two main branches: praxeology and history. The former is a theoretical and systematic science that describes the invariant consequences of human action, regardless of time and space. The latter is the “collection and systematic arrangement of all data of experience concerning human action... it scrutinizes the ideas guiding acting men and the outcome of the actions performed” (Mises, 2008, p. 30).

The sciences of human action, in their attempt to comprehend the meaning and relevance of human action, apply two distinct epistemological procedures. Praxeology applies the mental tool of conception and deduces the necessary, while history uses the tools provided by all other sciences and applies understanding in order to reveal what is unique to each event (Mises, 2008).

History retrospectively presents the circumstances in which the action took place, asks what were the sought after objectives, and considers the known means at the actor’s disposal. In order to grasp the motives underlying a specific event, the historian employs his knowledge of human valuations and volitions, i.e. thymology.¹

¹ Mises started using “thymology” only in his later works because he considered that the term “psychology” became inappropriate due to its seizure by experimental psychology, a branch of the natural sciences that employed laboratory experiments. Lavoie and Storr (2011, p. 214) provide a quote from the foreword of the third edition of *Human Action* in which Mises explains the reasons for change in terminology:

[I]n the last decades the meaning of the term “psychology” has been more and more restricted to the field of experimental psychology, a discipline that resorts to the research methods of the natural sciences. On the other hand, it has become usual to dismiss those “[S]tudies that previously had been

Thymology is on the one hand an offshoot of introspection and on the other a precipitate of historical experience. It is what everybody learns from intercourse with his fellows. It is what a man knows about the way in which people value different conditions, about their wishes and desires and their plans to realize these wishes and desires. It is the knowledge of the social environment in which a man lives and acts or, with historians, of a foreign milieu about which he has learned by studying special sources. (Mises, 2007, p. 266)

Thus, the historian tries to provide a complete explanation of a complex past event. For this he uses his “specific understanding” in order to grasp the motives behind that event, and the teaching of both praxeological and natural sciences in order to evaluate the success and the consequences of that event. But, unlike the *a priori* and applied sciences, understanding does not yield certain knowledge about events.

Historians may disagree for various reasons. They may hold different views with regard to the teachings of the nonhistorical sciences; they may base their reasoning on a more or less complete familiarity with the records; they may differ in the understanding of the motives and aims of the acting men and of the means applied by them. All these differences are open to a settlement by “objective” reasoning; it is possible to reach a universal agreement with regard to them. But as far as historians disagree with regard to judgments of relevance it is impossible to find a solution which a sane man must accept. (Mises, 2008, p. 58)

Even in the event that a historian² manages to grasp the exact relevance (weight) each element played in the outcome of a

called psychological as ‘literary psychology’ and as an unscientific way of reasoning. Whenever reference is made to ‘psychology’ in economic studies, one has in mind precisely this literary psychology, and therefore it seems advisable to introduce a special term for it. I suggested in my book *Theory and History* ([1957] 1969, pp. 264–274) the term “thymology,” and I used this term also in my recently published essay *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science* ([1962] 1978). (Lavoie and Storr, p. 214 apud. Mises [1949] 1966, p. vii)

Mises (2006, p. 43) considers thymology a “branch of history” that “deals with the mental activities of men that determine their actions. In doing economic history, the scholar must use *verstehen* or understanding, which is a “thymological category” (p. 45).

² The entrepreneur applies the same type of thymological understanding when he elaborates forecasts regarding the allocation of scarce resources toward future uncertain production. Also see (Salerno, 2010) for an extended discussion on the methodology of historical studies.

historical event, this does not amount to the discovery of a law of history. History can never repeat itself due to the absence of any constant relations in the field of human action. Even if the same circumstances occurred, changing human valuation would ensure a different prioritization, thus altering the relevance once attributed to every element.

Up to this point, we have distinguished between the field of natural sciences and the field of the sciences of human action, and followed Mises's split of the latter into the branches of praxeology and history. The remainder of this paper is going to focus on praxeology and its subfields. Before tackling this subject we should mention that the branch of history also includes, in its turn, a number of subfields:

It is on the one hand general history and on the other hand the history of various narrower fields. There is the history of political and military action, of ideas and philosophy, of economic activities, of technology, of literature, art, and science, of religion, of mores and customs, and of many other realms of human life. There is ethnology and anthropology, as far as they are not a part of biology, and there is psychology as far as it is neither physiology nor epistemology nor philosophy. There is linguistics as far as it is neither logic nor the physiology of speech. (Mises, 2008, p. 30)³

Many researchers involved in the study of these specialized fields consider that their efforts can lead to the discovery of hard scientific truths. Armed with a positivist worldview, they try to infer laws from historical patterns.

Mises's synoptic image of the disciplines that are grouped under the aegis of history allows us to better understand the Austrian approach vis-à-vis the one endorsed by positivism, and draw a line between the two. A similar point is going to be made in the last section of this paper, where we will identify the insights and limits of a praxeological theory of politics versus what should be considered a historical/thymological understanding of political action.

³ In a footnote that appears in the same section, Mises specifies "economic history, descriptive economics and economic statistics are, of course, history."

PRAXEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

Praxeology starts from the category of human action⁴ and deduces, i.e. makes explicit, the subsidiary notions that are implied by action. All praxeological theories start from *a priori* knowledge, that is to say, from categories that must precede any experience,⁵ and apply logical reasoning in order to obtain apodictic certainty. Praxeology produces economic laws that are universally valid and irrefutable by historical experience.

The scope of praxeology is the explication of the category of human action. All that is needed for the deduction of all praxeological theorems is knowledge of the essence of human action. It is a knowledge that is our own because we are men; no being of human descent that pathological conditions have not reduced to a merely vegetative existence lacks it. No special experience is needed in order to comprehend these theorems, and no experience, however rich, could disclose them to a being who did not know *a priori* what human action is. The only way to a cognition of these theorems is logical analysis of our inherent knowledge of the category of action. We must bethink ourselves and reflect upon the structure of human action. Like logic and mathematics, praxeological knowledge is in us; it does not come from without. All the concepts and theorems of praxeology are implied in the category of human action. (Mises, 2008, p. 64)

After unbundling the notions contained by the universal conditions of acting, one can “go further and define—of course, in a categorical and formal sense—the less general conditions required for special modes of acting” (Mises, 2008, p. 64). Thus, one can make the transition from the more general field of praxeology (the logic of human action) to more narrow subfields. Because the

⁴ The fact that human beings act can be considered an axiomatic statement. See (Rothbard, 2011), esp. “Praxeology: The Methodology of Austrian Economics” and “In Defense of ‘Extreme Apriorism’” for an Aristotelian approach that argues that the fundamental axiom of action and the subsequent axioms that can be deduced from it are derived from experience and are therefore in the broadest sense empirical. Also, see (Hoppe, 1995) for a Kantian argument of the synthetic *a priori* character of the axiom of action.

⁵ “They are the necessary mental tool to arrange sense data in a systematic way, to transform them into facts of experience, then [to transform] these facts into bricks to build theories, and finally [to transform] the theories into technics to attain ends aimed at.” (Mises, 2006, p. 14)

end of science is to know reality and not mere “mental gymnastics or logical pastime,” one must restrict his inquiry by analyzing the implications of “those conditions and presuppositions which are given in reality” (Mises, 2008, p. 65).

Economics is just a subfield of praxeology that uses the same methodological framework, but restricts its inquiry to special conditions. In his introduction to *Human Action*, Mises clarifies the relationship between praxeology and economics, or, to be more precise, between the subjectivist economic theory and what it enabled: the analysis of every kind of human action.

Subjective value theory was developed in the field of political economy, later dubbed economics, and was employed in order to explain the nature of value, economic goods and market prices. The classical economists failed to provide an explanation for the relationship between utility and market prices, and used objective labor value theory as proximate cause for the latter. All this was cleared away in the second half of the 19th century, when Menger, Walras and Jevons developed theories that explained market prices as the result of individual evaluation of a need vis-à-vis a marginal unit of a good. Prices could now be explained based on the principle of marginal utility.

As Hülsmann (2003, p. xiii) points out, this breakthrough had “two more far-reaching implications that at first escaped the attention of the pioneers of the new approach.” First, the marginalist approach offered a positive explanation of human action, thus making it devoid of any normative statements and capable of offering universally valid scientific results. Second, “the new marginal-utility theory explained human behavior in general; that is, both within and outside of a market context... [t]he new marginal-utility theory turned it into a science that dealt quite generally with acting man.” (Hülsmann, 2003, p. xiv)

The development of the subjective theory of value marked the beginning of a new stage in the study of social phenomena. By understanding that value theory applies to all human endeavors, independent of time and space, we discover that it represents the starting point for a more general theory of human action. Most members of the Austrian School recognized the fact that insights originating from the more narrowly defined field of economics

could be applied to analyzing the broader field of “sociological” studies, but for the purpose of this paper, we will focus on Mises’s view of the relationship.

Mises was one of the early economists in Austria who realized that Menger’s marginal-value theory had a much wider range of applicability than mere “economic” phenomena such as market prices. He conceived of economics as a part of a more encompassing sociological theory at least from 1922, the year in which he published the first edition of *Gemeinwirtschaft*... [The relationship between sociology and economics] was in his eyes a hierarchical relationship between a more general discipline (sociology) and a more narrow part thereof (economics), which deals with particular cases of human action. (Hülsmann, 2003, pp. xv–xi)

Throughout all his works, Mises maintained his view that economics was the more specific subfield of a more general and encompassing discipline. Only due to historical developments did he find it necessary to change the name of the latter from “sociology” to “the science of human action” and finally to “praxeology.”⁶

The modern theory of value widens the scientific horizon and enlarges the field of economic studies. Out of the political economy of the classical school emerges the general theory of human action, praxeology. The economic or catallactic problems are embedded in a more general science, and can no longer be severed from this connection. No treatment of economic problems proper can avoid starting from acts of choice; economics becomes a part, although the hitherto best elaborated part, of a more universal science, praxeology. (Mises, 2008, p. 3)

Both economic science and praxeology deal with teleologically oriented subjects that act in a purposeful manner in order to substitute a more satisfactory state of affairs for a less satisfactory. In this sense, acting individuals make choices regarding the scarce means that they dispose of, in order to achieve subjective chosen ends that are prioritized according to an ordinal value scale. At the same time, “[praxeology and economics] are fully aware of the fact that the ultimate ends of human action are not open to examination from any absolute standard.... They apply to the means only one

⁶ In *Human Action*, Mises (2008, p. 30) considers sociology as being used with two different meanings. Both descriptive and general sociology are grouped under the field of history.

yardstick, viz., whether or not they are suitable to attain the ends at which the acting individuals aim" (Mises, 2008, p. 95).

What distinguishes the more general discipline of praxeology from its "best elaborated part" is precisely the following distinction:

- Praxeology implies the study of human choice that is guided by value judgment alone;
- While economics implies personal value judgment and economic calculation (Hülsmann, 2003, p. xxiv).

Thus, economics is a subfield of praxeology that studies the implications of human action in the special conditions of a precise institutional setting: private property over the means of production and exchange on the market, which make possible monetary calculation.⁷

The field of economics or catallactics is concerned both with the subject matter of "economics in the narrower sense," i.e., the explanation of the formation of money prices on the market, and with the study of related issues that the economist is asked to address.

[Economics] *must study not only the market phenomena, but no less the hypothetical conduct of an isolated man and of a socialist community.* Finally, it must not restrict its investigations to those modes of action which in mundane speech are called "economic" actions, but must deal also with actions which are in a loose manner of speech called "uneconomic." (2008, p. 235, emphasis added)

But the study of such issues is possible only by understanding and contrasting them to the workings of monetary exchange, i.e. calculated action.⁸

⁷ That is to say, pure value judgments, which are unquantifiable, impossible to interpersonally compare and in constant flux, gain an objective expression only in the form of monetary prices. In this context, entrepreneurs can make rational resource allocation decisions when they engage in bidding for the factors of production. Their projects, which are nothing more than value judgments regarding the future needs of the consumers, are thus guided and validated *ex post* through monetary calculation.

⁸ In the absence of monetary prices there can be no calculation.

It is a fictitious assumption that an isolated self-sufficient individual or the general manager of a socialist system, i.e., a system in which there is no market for means of production, could calculate. There is no way which

PRAXEOLOGY, ECONOMICS AND BEYOND

Although economics is the most developed branch of praxeology and “up to now the only part of praxeology that has been developed into a scientific system” (Mises, 2006, p. 38), it seems only a question of time until the methodological framework of praxeology is applied in connection to other specific conditions. In this section, we will briefly mention what attempts have been made in this direction.

1. Praxeology and Conflict

By 1962, the year Mises’s last great work on method was published, only one attempt of extending the subfields of praxeology is mentioned: “A Polish philosopher, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, is trying to develop a new branch of praxeology, the praxeological theory of conflict and war as opposed to the theory of cooperation or economics” (Mises, [1962] 2006, p. 38).

Recent works by Salerno (2008) and McCaffrey (2014, 2015) have addressed the logic of war making in a manner that is consistent with the praxeological method.⁹ These attempts are still in an

could lead one from the money computation of a market economy to any kind of computation in a nonmarket system. (Mises, 2008, p. 206)

Robinson Crusoe takes into account only his preferences, while in the socialist commonwealth only one will prevails: that of the planner. Under these circumstances, individuals have only ordinal scales of value to guide their action. See (Machaj, 2007)

⁹ Salerno considers that “[t]he basic axiom of this praxeological discipline is that war is the objective outcome of the human endeavor of *war making*” (Salerno, 2008, p. 447, emphasis in the original). The special conditions that are taken into consideration focus on violent interaction between states. In this sense, the author proposes an analytical framework that “takes into account the war makers’ goals, the means at their disposal, the benefits they anticipate from the war, and the costs they expect to incur in executing it” (Salerno, 2008, p. 447–448). The subsequent conclusions that are reached draw heavily on what can be considered political science. E.g., the state implies coercion of an unproductive minority over a majority; there are two classes—tax earners and tax consumers.

McCaffrey’s analysis of the writings of two military strategists: Sun Tzu and Sun Pin focus on identifying the economic ideas underlying these texts.

early development phase as they rely primarily on the insights of economics and political science (see below).

2. Rothbard—Game Theory and Voting

In 1951, prior to the publication of *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, Rothbard ([1951] 2011) elaborated an outline of the categories of praxeology of his own, where he identifies five categories (A–E).

Rothbard groups under Economics A. *The Theory of the Isolated Individual (Crusoe Economics)* and B. *The Theory of Voluntary Interpersonal Exchange (Catallactics, or the Economics of the Market)*,¹⁰ and adds to the list C. *The Theory of War—Hostile Action*, D. *The Theory of*

McCaffrey identifies concepts like: the role of incentives in promoting desired behavior, entrepreneurial discovery, scarcity, and resource management all of which lead to the integration of the war making in the field of praxeology. As the author explains,

The popularity of the *Art of War* is largely due to its ability to describe complex problems of conflict using a series of simple conceptual categories. These categories distill core elements of competition into concise, universally applicable principles of strategic decision-making. (McCaffrey, 2015, p. 2)

¹⁰ In his “Praxeology: Reply to Mr. Schuller,” originally published in the *American Economic Review* and reprinted in *Economic Controversies*, Rothbard ([1951] 2011, p. 117) provides the following outline:

Praxeology—the general, formal theory of human action:

- A. The Theory of the Isolated Individual (Crusoe Economics)
- B. The Theory of Voluntary Interpersonal Exchange (Catallactics, or the Economics of the Market)
 - 1. Barter
 - 2. With Medium of Exchange
 - a. On the Unhampered Market
 - b. Effects of Violent Intervention with the Market
 - c. Effects of Violent Abolition of the Market (Socialism)
- C. The Theory of War—Hostile Action
- D. The Theory of Games (e.g., von Neumann and Morgenstern)
- E. Unknown

Games (e.g., von Neumann and Morgenstern), and *E. Unknown*. Unlike Mises, Rothbard considers game theory a subfield of praxeology.¹¹

Almost ten years after the initial reply to Schuller, in *Man, Economy, and State*, Rothbard restates the relationship between praxeology and its subfields, to which he adds “the logical analysis of voting.”

What is the relationship between praxeology and economic analysis? Economics is a subdivision of praxeology—so far the only fully elaborated subdivision. With praxeology as the general, formal theory of human action, economics includes the analysis of the action of an isolated individual (Crusoe economics) and, especially elaborate, the analysis of interpersonal exchange (catallactics). The rest of praxeology is an unexplored area. Attempts have been made to formulate a logical theory of war and violent action, and violence in the form of government has been treated by political philosophy and by praxeology in tracing the effects of violent intervention in the free market. A theory of games has been elaborated, and interesting beginnings have been made in a logical analysis of voting. (Rothbard, 1962 [2009], p. 74)

Throughout *Man, Economy, and State* and *Power and Market*, Rothbard makes explicit what this last addition consists of. The interesting beginnings refer to Schumpeter’s ([1943] 2013) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and Anthony Downs’s (1957) article “An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy.” Voting is analyzed only in relation to politics, i.e., decisions that imply coercion and the imposition of the will of the majority over a minority.¹²

¹¹ For Mises (2006, p. 38n), “the theory of games has no reference whatever to the theory of action.” A game is nothing but a pastime activity that, by definition, has a zero-sum outcome. In Austrian circles, game theory aroused mixed feelings. For a discussion that shows the pros and cons of this approach, see (Foss, 2000). Although the theory uses many assumptions that distance it from realist and subjectivist approach of the Austrian School, all in the name of formalization, intuitively the theory can be placed under the aegis of praxeology (unlike pure mathematics, it implies the categories of time and causality). Because it operates under very restrictive conditions it can only have a very limited applicability for both the historian of the future (the entrepreneur) and for the historian of the past.

¹² Voting related to corporate governance is mentioned only in passing in order to contrast it with democratic voting. In the absence of coercion, shareholders have absolute power over their property because they can sell their stock at any time, thus escaping from undesired situations. Also, shareholders own a company’s

Rothbard keeps his analysis of voting within the constraints of praxeology. Voting appears as a decision making process that must produce a governing body that will adopt decisions pertaining to the allocation of resources in the absence of monetary calculation.

[V]oting for politicians and public policies is a completely different matter. Here there are no direct tests of success or failure whatever, neither profits and losses nor enjoyable or unsatisfying consumption. (Rothbard, [1962] 2009, p. 1070)

Lacking such an objective instrument, the voter is left open to making decisions in matters concerning complex phenomena for which he is poorly equipped to understand. This leaves the voter susceptible to propaganda. But this is not a manifestation of any imperfection inherent to human nature. On the contrary, this result is reached because actors always understand and balance costs and result.¹³ Rothbard builds on the idea of the rational ignorant voter when he states,

Very few voters have the ability or the interest to follow such reasoning, particularly, as Schumpeter points out, in political situations. For in political situations, the minute influence that any one person has on the results, as well as the seeming remoteness of the actions, induces people to lose interest in political problems or argumentation. (Rothbard, [1962] 2009, p. 1071)

The problems do not end after election day. In the absence of monetary calculation, the electorate cannot discern whether a

stock in proportion with their capital contribution, thus not every individual has an equal say in matters concerning company decisions.

¹³ Although his work is *not in the praxeological tradition*, Caplan has employed Austrian insights in his analysis of voting. Voters are presented as worse than rationally ignorant. Because “there is no associated private benefit of rationality, there is no incentive to exert efforts to learn” (Caplan, 2003, p. 222), thus voters are presented as *rationaly irrational*. This leads to a series of systematic errors, or biases as Caplan (2007) calls them—the anti-market bias, anti-foreign bias, make-work bias, and pessimistic bias. Also, Caplan (2004) identifies in the (thymological) works of Bastiat and Mises claims that the failure of democracy is due to the ignorance of the voters, whose biases are taken into account and actually put into practice by the elected officials.

political decision attained its goal, nor the quality of the expertise that went into its design.

Since there is no direct test in government, and, indeed, little or no personal contact or relationship between politician or expert and voter, there is no way by which the voter can gauge the true expertise of the man he is voting for. (Rothbard, [1962] 2009, p. 889)

Like any political decision, voting produces winners and losers and makes opting out impossible. It is irrelevant if an individual voted or abstained, because someone will still rule over him with ample discretion until the next election.

3. Praxeological Ethics

The latest attempt to present an encompassing view of the field of praxeology is that of Jakub Wiśniewski (2012).¹⁴ Besides the fact that the schematization has the merit of offering a general overview of Mises's framing of the sciences of human action, the diagram adds a new subfield to praxeology: "praxeological ethics."

¹⁴ As far as the author of the current paper knows, Wiśniewski's schematization of the fields of the sciences of human action have, up to this date, made the subject of a blog post, and was not published in another publication.

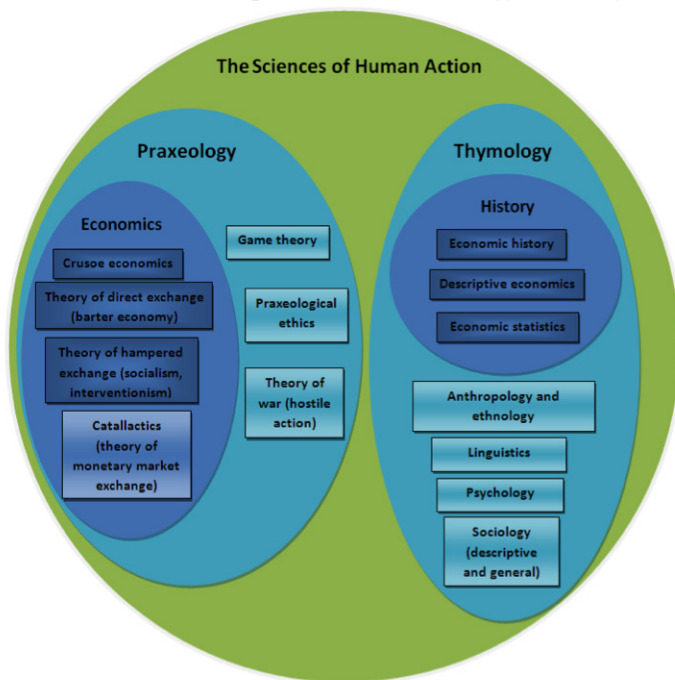
Figure 1. The Relationship Between Praxeology and Thymology

Diagram by Jakub Bożydar Wiśniewski (<http://jakubw.com>)

By including ethics in this list, Wiśniewski takes into account Hoppe's (2006a, 2010) achievement of deducing, from the *a priori* principles of argumentation, an objective ethical system based on self-ownership.

I demonstrate that only the libertarian private property ethic can be justified argumentatively, because it is the praxeological presupposition of argumentation as such; and that any deviating, nonlibertarian ethical proposal can be shown to be in violation of this demonstrated preference. Such a proposal can be made, of course, but its propositional content would contradict the ethic for which one demonstrated a preference by virtue of one's own act of proposition-making, i.e., by the act of engaging in argumentation as such. (Hoppe, 2006a, p. 341)

Hoppe offers a completely value-free justification of private property that cannot be contradicted without self-refutation on the part of the individual that argues or acts against it. This allows him to surpass any objection that could be raised against Mises's utilitarian position or Rothbard's natural rights approach.¹⁵

TOWARD A PRAXEOLOGICAL THEORY OF POLITICS

In the following section we will argue that politics or political science can represent yet another branch of praxeology. Furthermore, we will attempt to present some elements that could be integrated under the aegis of a praxeological theory of politics, many of which have been tackled by economists affiliated with the Austrian school, but never were specifically delimited from economics or political philosophy. Also, in the last part of this section, we will briefly touch upon the relation between the Austrian and Public Choice school approaches.

1. Possible, but Not Quite There Yet

In *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, Mises ([1962] 2006) paints a bleak picture of political science.

What is today called “political science” is that branch of history that deals with the history of political institutions and with the history of political thought as manifested in the writings of authors who dissented about political institutions and sketched plans for their alteration. It is history, and can as such, as has been pointed out above, never provide any “facts” in the sense in which this term is used in the experimental natural sciences. There is no need to urge the political scientists to

¹⁵ Rothbard (2011, ch. 5) criticizes Mises's utilitarian approach, although he appreciates his mentor's attempts to rationally justify private property and Liberalism. While Mises saw Liberalism as a scientifically backed system that could improve in the long run the welfare of all individuals *qua* consumers, Rothbard argues that an economist must make his ethical position explicit before advising on political matters. When reviewers criticized Hoppe's theory, Rothbard defended the soundness of his philosophical argument. See (Rothbard, 1990). For a critique based on hermeneutics see (Boettke, 1995). For a critique of both Rothbard's and Hoppe's interpretation of self-ownership and homesteading as based ultimately on faith see (Terrell, 1999). For a recent restatement based on Hoppe's position see (Hülsmann, 2004).

assemble all facts from the remote past and from recent history, falsely labeled “present experience.” (Mises, [1962] 2006, p. 72)

It comes to no surprise that Mises, a staunch adversary of the Historical School and of the American Institutional School, criticized any attempt of extracting scientific laws from the study of past experience. This kind of approach can, at best, be considered political history or sociology, which are part of the field history and cannot lead to scientific results.

In the same quote, Mises, a defender of *wertfrei*, criticizes the authors who propose scientific plans for institutional reform. For Mises, both the plans of utopian writers and the scientific design of the perfect system of government are just sterile attempts. The utopians imply that only the will of the designer prevails; the common people are not asked what they want. In this sense, “[t]he Soviet dictators and their retinue think that all is good in Russia as long as they themselves are satisfied” (Mises, [1962] 2006, p. 73). At the same time, drafting the plans for a political order that may function automatically, or for the ideal constitution, are incompatible with human nature. Due to the inherent shortcomings that characterize human character, voluntary submission to a perfect order that goes against “whims and fancies” is unconceivable.

In this context of inappropriate scientific methodology that is employed in chasing after unattainable ideals, Mises makes the following statement:

It would be preposterous to assert apodictically that science will never succeed in developing a praxeological aprioristic doctrine of political organization that would place a theoretical science by the side of the purely historical discipline of political science. All we can say today is that no living man knows how such a science could be constructed. But even if such a new branch of praxeology were to emerge one day, it would be of no use for the treatment of the problem philosophers and statesmen were and are anxious to solve. (Mises, [1962] 2006, p. 73)

2. An Outline of a Praxeological Theory of Politics

A praxeological theory of politics starts from the simple fact that actors can choose to alleviate the uneasiness brought about by

scarcity by employing either the economic means or the political means, *tertium non datur* (Oppenheimer, 1975). Based on the same distinction, and by corroborating it with Hoppe's insights on self-ownership, Hülsmann (2004) has proposed a framework that allows economists to engage in aprioristic and realistic analysis of the impact of positive law.

Consensual appropriation entails specific consequences in comparison to non-consensual appropriation, and vice-versa. These relative consequences are constant through time and space. They constitute a special class of *a priori* laws, which we have called counterfactual laws of appropriation. (Hülsmann, 2004, p. 66)

But this type of analysis, which traces its origins back to a venerable tradition of Franco-Austrian economists, is primarily concerned with the economic consequences of coercion. It has the role of complementing Mises's writings on interventionism,¹⁶ a

¹⁶ Interventionism, in the Misesian understanding of the term, is defined as a "limited order" (Lavoie, 1982), in the sense that it does not seek to take expropriation to its limit, and obtain total control over the means of production as in the case of Socialism. In interventionism, the government "wants production and consumption to develop along lines different from those prescribed by an unhampered market economy, and it wants to achieve its aims by injecting into the workings of the market orders, commands, and prohibitions for whose enforcement the police power and its apparatus of violent compulsion and coercion stand ready" (Mises, 1998). Interventionism cannot be considered an economic system, as it can never reach the ends that it aims for, and thus must be considered unworkable. State command cannot alter economic law (Böhm-Bawerk, 2010). The only alternatives left are outright abandonment of the measure, or the adoption of a complementary one, a path that ultimately leads to socialism.

For a Kirznerian approach to interventionism, which is based primarily on Hayekian knowledge transmission, entrepreneurial alertness and the negative effects of government interference on plan coordination, see: (Kirzner, 1982), (Ikeda, 2003a; 2004).

While Mises starts from the assumption that policy makers are benevolent (a methodological makeshift that allows him to demonstrate that interventionism is simply an inappropriate means for achieving the publically professed goals), the Kirznerian approach focuses on the unintended consequences of interventionism.

In Hülsmann's (2006) recent restatement, interventionism's failure is explained through the forced separation of ownership and effective control, which pits owners against the state and *vice versa*. Owners will try to avoid ceding resources to the government, while the government is left with two choices: close the

sub-field of economics. A praxeological theory of politics, while starting from the same distinction, focuses on the political means involved by the Oppenheimerian dichotomy.

Politics analyzes the logic of coercion as it emerges from the interaction between an aggressor (bandit or state) and a victim. Unlike the logic of war making, which involves the interaction of at least two parties (adversaries) that are in active opposition with each other, and are teleologically oriented toward victory, politics is interested in the logic of one individual living off the efforts of another. In the case of warfare, the actors are involved in strategic thinking; they rationalize by anticipating the moves of their adversary, and allocate their resources in consequence. Politics, on the other hand, considers only the aggressor as playing an active part in what concerns the use or threat of force.¹⁷ His goal is to extract resources, while minimizing the costs of dissent. For this he must anticipate the actions of his victim, and must balance out the amount he is going to extract, i.e. the gains, with the costs of his action, i.e. loss of support or even active opposition, which leads to war. Both war making and politics lead to zero-sum outcomes. The former results in one party obtaining victory over the other. In the case of the latter, the use of the political means does not have any wealth producing capabilities; it can only extract resources and redirect them.

One may object to this claim by pointing out the case of state owned enterprises (SOE) or the socialist economies. Politics is preoccupied with the initial act of expropriation regarding these cases and with the fact that the policy maker must allocate these resources in such a manner as to remain in power, but it also has something to say about the functioning of the system.

If the SOE operates strictly based on profit and loss, politics can analyze only the initial expropriation. If the SOE is kept in operation

loopholes or restrict its infringement of property rights. "The essence of interventionism is precisely this: institutionalized uninvited co-ownership." (Hülsmann, 2006, p. 41)

¹⁷ In this case, the victim can oppose its aggressor, but does so 1. in self-defense or 2. by not conceding to the aggressor, but without taking up arms against his overlord. An example for the latter point would be an individual that tries to minimize his tax burden. By trading on the black market he has no intention of defeating the state in a military sense.

artificially or operates at a lower profitability than it could possibly achieve, then politics can provide insights about the role of such enterprises in maintaining content among the majority of the population. Also, Mises's (1944) analysis of bureaucracy could provide insight in this case, as it clearly demonstrates that in the absence of a price system, political command must direct resources.

In the case of socialism, only the will of the planning board prevails, and that leads to the impossibility of economic calculation (Mises, 1990; Salerno, 1993; Machaj, 2007). But expropriation is not total, as people still owned their own bodies. In this context, the challenge of politics is to explain how the planning board imposed its will over the majority. In the market, production is directed to serve the will of the consumer. In this sense, the market perfectly coordinates production with leisure preferences, risk preferences, time preference and liquidity preferences (Salerno, 2010). In socialism, production is attuned only to the will of the planning board. But, in order to put this will into practice, political thinking is necessary. The Soviet "price" and taxation system constitute very good examples of this. These (in name only) economic instruments were used primarily as a means of controlling and incentivizing the management of state enterprises (Bornstein, 1962). Political logic can also explain Stalin's salary policy. Workers would be paid only a subsistence wage for working a normal shift, but they were allowed to keep a greater part of their overtime proceeds (Olson, 2000) thus forcing the workforce to comply with the requirements of the dictator's plan.

3. The Minimum Conditions for Political Action

The study of politics involves the application of praxeological reasoning to a specific human endeavor:¹⁸ the extraction of resources by coercive means. Thus, its aim is to logically deduce *a priori* true propositions from the general praxeological insight that humans act, to which the condition of coercion is added. This minimal condition can be complemented by still further conditions

¹⁸ In this vein, we can assert that political action is not the result of instinct, but it presupposes that the praxeological categories (means and ends; costs and proceeds) already exist in the human mind.

with the aim of keeping the analysis relevant for real-life action. An example that will be analyzed below is the implication of coercion in a society characterized by the division of labor.

Political action begins with the means-ends, costs-proceeds framework of the roving bandit. This instance, in particular, does not necessitate a complex chain of deductive reasoning. It starts when the isolated individual, Robinson Crusoe, meets Friday. Instead of cooperating, he first analyzes his means and anticipates that he could overpower the latter. Because Crusoe has a comparative advantage in matters concerning violence (let us suppose that he has firearms) he can choose whether he is going to cooperate with Friday, or use coercion to rob him of his earthly possessions or enslave him, i.e., impose a hegemonic relation. Economic logic informs us that both Crusoe and Friday would be better off if they chose to cooperate, but under the conditions used in our construct, Crusoe's ends lead him to employ coercion.

Thus far, our analysis involved at least two individuals: the aggressor and the victim. Both of them must own at least their bodies, but the aggressor does not recognize his fellow's claim over his appropriated resources (his body and any extensions of it in the Lockean sense).

By using his reason, the aggressor considers that it is in his interest to use coercion against Friday. Because the victim did not anticipate Crusoe's intentions or because he found it in his interest not to oppose him in open combat, Friday was constrained to cede his property to the aggressor.

Starting from this simple situation, political analysis can be taken a step further by assuming that political action occurs in a society, that is, in a group of more than two individuals. This implies that the division of labor enters the picture.

Economic logic tells us that the aggressor and his retinue can represent only a minority. This is not due only to productivity limits. A situation can be imagined in which human development reaches a stage at which only a small part of the population can produce sufficient output in order to sustain itself and a majority that lives off it. The *a priori* motive behind the fact that political rule presupposes a ruling minority is to be found in the law of comparative advantage. Because skills and resources are unequally distributed among the

members of society, only a few will choose to specialize in the employment of coercion in order to extract resources.

The same law of comparative advantage informs us that the division of labor is a process that grows both intensively (as the produced output increases each member of society can specialize in a more specific task and exchange his product with that of others, thus setting in a reinforcing effect) and extensively (as more members join the market).¹⁹ Due to this fact, during the early phases of the division of labor, the emergence of a pure hegemonic relation, i.e. a situation in which an aggressor engages only in socially unproductive activities and lives off his victims, is highly unlikely. Most probably, the aggressor also engaged in other voluntary-based activities. Only with the passing of time, as the division of labor advanced, were the aggressors able to dedicate all their energies to ruling. Thus, we can understand how a political class emerges, or, to use the classical-liberal distinction, how tax-consumers impose themselves on tax-payers (Hoppe, 1990; Raico, 1993). In this sense, politics can prove instrumental in supporting the endogenous theory of the state, as it provides us with a theoretical justification for the gradual transition from a system of settling disputes by a voluntary recognized elite to its ultimate monopolization by a monarch (Jouvenel, 1962; Benson, 1999; Hoppe, 2014).

By taking only realistic conditions into consideration and by applying them to the praxeological categories, we have deduced the mechanism involved by the simplest form of political action (which presupposes the interaction of only two individuals) and extended it to include the emergence of institutionalized aggression: the state. This analysis rendered two results that are apodictically true:

1. Political action can be imagined only in a relation of subsequence to private property. First of all, self-ownership is the prerequisite of any action. Second, political action can

¹⁹ (Fukuyama, 2011) and an extensive anthropological literature mention the importance of severing kinship (blood ties) for developing a hegemonic based entity that is able to implement policies dictated by the a center of power and avoid fission (secession). Once blood ties are severed and an independent bureaucracy appears, we can talk of a transition from tribe/chieftdom to early state.

only live off and extract the product of another individual's endeavor. Even in the case of socialism, where all the means of production have been coercively expropriated, the planning board does not own the bodies of the citizens. The planning board must conceive an incentive structure in order to determine plant managers and the workers to produce according to the priorities of the ruling elite. The theory of politics applies only in situations in which some form of ownership still exists. We can assert that political action faces an *objective limit*: the resources that can be exploited. Of course, this limit can be interpreted in the *absolute sense*, i.e. the victim has no more property left that the aggressor can extract, or in a *praxeologically relevant sense*, i.e. until the economy implodes. To give just two examples: a currency that is destroyed by central bank induced hyperinflation; or the "exhaustion of the reserve fund" (Mises 2008), which is a result of interventionist measures taken to extremes, until production grinds to a halt.

2. Political action that takes place in a society that is characterized by the division of labor will represent the main activity of only a minority of its members. This is due to the fact that only a few members can possess a comparative advantage in exerting coercion.²⁰ Due to the small number of the ruling elite, political action is constrained by a *subjective limit*, i.e. whether or not the vast majority of the population is willing to continue accepting their rule. This fact is independent of the ideological preferences of the political actors.

POLITICS: WHO NEEDS IT?

The stake involved in the existence and study of any subfield of praxeology is that it can teach us something about reality. More precisely, it can aid us in gaining conceptual knowledge about time and space invariant results that occur when certain conditions are given. In this sense, we have deduced that political action is constrained by two limits.

²⁰ These minorities will tend to ensure their monopoly on coercion over a given area in order to optimize the amount of extracted resources. In this sense, Olson's (1982, 1993) differentiation between the roving and stationary bandit proves insightful.

Much of this analysis is not new. Just by arguing that a praxeological analysis of politics is possible, and that that a new field of analysis can become standard equipment for the student of praxeology does not mean that all the theories that are going to be deduced from it are novelties. On the contrary!

Due to the fact that subjective value theory has practically opened all conceivable manifestations of human action to praxeological and historical analysis, it is no surprise that Austrian economists have discussed in their political economy and political philosophy works concepts that can be introduced in a standalone praxeological discipline of politics. By claiming such a field as praxeological discipline we stand to gain on two fronts:

1. A better systematization of already discovered praxeological insights;
2. A reference point when it comes to the relationship between the Austrian school and other approaches, like the one put forward by the Public Choice school.

In the following, we will briefly address each of these points in turn.

1. Contributions to Politics from Earlier Austrian Works

Thus far, we demonstrated that politics/political science could be included next to economics and the other sub-fields under the aegis of praxeology. In this sense, it must be delimited from political philosophy, which imposes ethical judgment pertaining to the ideal political order: how society should be organized for it to be considered just (Rothbard, [1982] 2003). Also, it is distinct from political economy, as long as the term delineates a discipline that allows value judgments on the part of the economist (Robbins, 1981).

But many Austrian works do offer *a priori* insights in matters concerning the use of coercion as a means of one individual extracting resources from another. The fact that a minority must exploit a majority of producers has been an integral part of a number of works. Just to give a few examples: Hoppe (1990) and Raico (1993) deduce this insight in their philosophical and intellectual history of liberal class theory. Also Rothbard (2000) uses the same distinction in his essay “The Anatomy of the State,” a work that combines deductive reasoning and thymological

insights to produce an explanation of the present day manifestation of the state.

Thymological explanations of the role played by court intellectuals in their aggrandizement of the state and in justifying state intervention can be found in the works of Hayek (1949), Mises (1978), Rothbard (2000), and Hoppe (2006b). All these analyses implicitly recognize the subjective limit of state action. Also, Higgs' (1987) *Crisis and Leviathan* recognizes the importance of ideology in making state growth palatable, while Ikeda (2003a) uses insights from his work to propose an endogenous explanation of state growth.

As shown above, in *Man, Economy, and State* Rothbard ([1962] 2009) recognizes the logic of voting as a praxeological sub-field. By analyzing it as a means of appointing individuals to positions that allow them to coercively extract and allocate resources, and by deducing the type of decisions and behavior that such a mechanism will encourage, Rothbard's analysis can easily be conceived as part of politics. Simply put, it is political action under specific conditions: a democratic system.

The fact that democratic and monarchic systems tend to produce different results, *qua* institutional arrangements, has been analyzed by Hoppe (2001). The monarch disposes of a virtually unlimited time in office and the possibility of appointing an heir. By corroborating this with a clear class differentiation between the ruler and the ruled (an ideological constraint), Hoppe concludes that a monarch will tend to have a lower time preference as opposed to a democratically elected politician. Thus, Hoppe distinguishes between a privately owned government and a government that is under the temporary tenure of an administrator, and deduces that exploitation is going to be lower in a monarchy.

All these elements are scattered in economic and philosophic writings, but can be easily and intuitively fitted in a distinct praxeological discipline of politics.

2. Politics in Relation to Public Choice

This brings us to the second point: politics as a reference when it comes to the relation between the Austrian school and the Public Choice approach.

Public Choice comes closer to being an approach to political science than a school of economics (Butler, 2012). Characterized by Buchanan (1999) as “politics without romance,” the Public Choice scholars apply neoclassical economic theory and methodology to the process of political decision-making.

Public choice theory essentially takes the tools and methods of approach that have been developed to quite sophisticated analytical levels in economic theory and applies these tools and methods to the political or governmental sector, to politics, to public economy. (Buchanan, 1999, p. 48)

It is worth mentioning that Buchanan saw himself as having “a great deal of affinity with Austrian economics and I have no objection to being called an Austrian” (Buchanan, 1987, p. 4). Buchanan (1954) cites approvingly Mises’s view of the ballot of the market, where each vote counts as opposed to political voting.²¹ Also, Buchanan agrees with Mises that an individual might have vested interests when voting, thus he will not take into account all the costs that are involved. “[This] difference in responsibility provides a basis for Professor Mises’ argument that an individual is ‘less corruptible’ in the market” (Buchanan, 1954, p. 337).

In his work, DiLorenzo (1981, 1988) has a series of contributions that combine Public Choice and Austrian insights. In this sense he notes that:

[S]ubjective cost theory lies at the heart of many of Buchanan’s contributions to economic theory. Moreover, other Austrian-school insights, such as methodological individualism and an emphasis on market (and non-market) processes, as opposed to equilibrium conditions or end states, also figure prominently in Buchanan’s work. (DiLorenzo, 1990, p. 180)

Also, Rothbard (1995) lauds the insights revealed by Tullock’s analysis of bureaucracy, although, in this particular case, the

²¹ In discussing the effect each dollar vote has when it comes to acquiring a commodity and, consequently, in shaping the economic environment, Buchanan (1954, p. 339) states that “a dollar vote is never overruled; the individual is never placed in the position of being a member of a dissenting minority.” In the footnote that corresponds to this quote, Buchanan makes the following referral: “For an excellent summary discussion of this point see Von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics*, p. 271.”

analysis is closer to a historical (thymological) approach than to a positive analysis.

Public Choice has revolutionized the study of the democratic decision making process by dropping the benevolence assumption, and by taking into consideration the behavior of individual (as opposed to aggregate) voters, bureaucrats and politicians as utility maximizers that react to incentives. Starting from these assumptions, Public Choice shows that government intervention can result in government failure.

In this apparent agreement between the two paradigms, a number of incompatibilities can be pointed out.

First of all, there is a problem when it comes to the methodological approach implemented by Public Choice.

The science of politics, normative and positive, should be confined to the study of the political order. The positive aspects of this science should include the derivation of propositions that are conceptually refutable. (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962, p. 213)

This positivist requirement of continually testing the theory against empirical fact until an exception is found, is taken a step further when the authors say:

[T]his assumption about human motivation is perhaps the most controversial part of our analysis. It seems useful to repeat, in this methodological context, that, by making this assumption, we are not proposing the pursuit of self-interest as a norm for individual behavior in political process or for political obligation. The self-interest assumption, for our construction, serves an empirical function. As such, it may or may not be "realistic" (Buchanan and Tullock, 1962, p. 224).

Both Arnold (1993) and Rothbard (2011, ch. 51) raise the issue of the distinctive positivist methodology of Public Choice. Furthermore, Rothbard criticizes the social contract approach of Buchanan and Tullock and the unanimity rule which endorses the status quo without any inquiry about the method of obtaining it.

Second, Ikeda (2003b) brings into discussion the question of what exactly is implied by the concept of government failure. Because of its neoclassical price theory approach, Public Choice considers that political action generates deadweight loss, a concept

that implies utility aggregation and comparison. Furthermore, because Public Choice employs the same knowledge assumption as standard microeconomics, perfect information is assumed. In turn, this assumption is used to infer intent out of result. Thus, Public Choice reaches conclusions in matters concerning the ends of policy makers. Because they are perfectly informed about the results of their actions, policymakers must actively seek to sacrifice the larger public's interest in favor of narrow self-interest, while deliberately deceiving the electorate by engaging in doubletalk.

Taking into account the Austrian school's remonstrance of the Public Choice approach, we can understand why a standalone praxeological theory of politics is important. The Austrian approach to politics can provide *a priori* valid insights in matters concerning the use of the political means. It can also offer an integrated framework for vote analysis and for institutional comparison. The theory does not assume any explicit kind of behavior, nor does it need a social contract explanation for explaining the emergence of the state.

Two last remarks should be made before concluding.

1. It might seem strange that a subject that studies political action does not mention constitutions or the importance of checks and balances. On the one hand this could be due to the relative backwardness of politics, but a closer analysis might reveal that such an approach might prove to be of secondary importance. The fundamental distinction that underlies both economics and politics is between the economic means and the political means. Only by starting from this property approach can we advance an *a priori* theory of politics.²²

²² Above we have shown that Mises considered the study of constitutions and the attempt to create the perfect political system to be futile endeavors as long as they pretend to be scientific. For Austrians, who understand the crucial importance of subjective value theory, the impossibility of quantifying utility, and the role of monetary calculation, such discussions as the ones concerning the legal framework of state action are only of secondary importance. It is not important that a certain policy is constitutional or not. What is important is that it is not based on profit and loss calculation (the consumers' wants become sidelined) and that it involves coercion. As Mises explains:

Those documents [constitutions, bills of rights, laws, and statutes] aimed only at safeguarding liberty and freedom, firmly established by the operation of the market economy, against encroachments on the part of officeholders.

2. A good grasp of the a praxeological theory of politics is important in aiding scholars to clearly distinguishing between the *a priori* part of their analysis and the historical (thymological) part that can be informed by it. Although Austrian economists are inclined to be free market oriented, they should not entertain any value judgment in their scientific analysis. If their studies start from the assumption that government is ruled by narrow self-interest, they should make clear that they take into consideration the thymological relevance of such an assumption, and are thus adding their contribution to historical studies.

CONCLUSION

This paper began by following Mises's distinction between the natural sciences and the sciences of human action and between the sub-disciplines that are contained by the latter. It then proceeded to provide a brief account of the scientific branches that make up praxeology.

Starting from this outline, the paper tried to argue that politics/ political science could be integrated as part of praxeology. Based on the exhaustive classification of the means that are at the disposal of actors to alleviate scarcity, i.e. the economic and the political means, we have defined politics as the discipline that studies the logic implied by a specific form of human interaction: one individual living off the efforts of another by extracting his resources. Under these conditions we have shown that political action employs specific instruments that lead to specific results.

Although politics has not been explicitly individualized as a standalone field of praxeology, the Austrian school has produced over the years a number of works that reach *a priori* true statements regarding the logic and implied results of coercively extracting resources. In this sense, we have argued that the field of politics can accommodate the concepts that, up to now, have been bundled up with economic analysis, political economy and political

No government and no civil law can guarantee and bring about freedom otherwise than by supporting and defending the fundamental institutions of the market economy. (Mises, 2008, p. 283)

philosophy. By understanding the insights and the limits of a praxeological approach to politics, the Austrian school can better relate to the neoclassical and positivist based research program conducted by other schools.

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