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Hoppe Turned Me into an “Extreme Apriorist”

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“If the power of government rests on the widespread acceptance of false indeed absurd and foolish ideas, then the only genuine protection is the systematic attack of these ideas and the propagation and proliferation of true ones.”

—Hans-Hermann Hoppe

1.

IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF 2006 when I unexpectedly received a package from Llewellyn H. Rockwell Jr., the founder and chairman of the Ludwig von Mises Institute in Auburn, Alabama, USA. In it was the second edition of Hans Hermann Hoppe’s book *The Economics and Ethics of Private Property: Studies in Political Economy and Philosophy* (2006). Reading Hoppe’s book has influenced my thoughts and actions like no other economic-philosophical work. In fact, by the time I had finished and closed it, I found myself faced with the shambles of many of my previous academic endeavours—and I suspect that many others who also encountered Hoppe’s writings, particularly at a time when they already considered themselves rather well-read and well-informed economists—experienced a similar shift in perspective.

Looking back, I would describe myself as a type of “mainstream economist” of a monetarist brand (although I had never entertained Keynesian ideas). Consequently, I saw no issue with conducting empirical studies in my academic work—mostly on monetary topics and financial market matters. By the time I received Rockwell’s book as a gift, I had already encountered some of Ludwig von Mises’s (1881–1973) works—after I had read plenty of the publications of Friedrich August von Hayek (1899–1992). However, it was Hoppe’s writings that made me really understand what Mises conveyed, ultimately leading me to embrace an “extreme apriorist” stance: This means, most

importantly, I now adhere to the epistemological position that the science of economics is an a priori science of human action rather than an empirical science.¹

Hoppe's work is built on the foundational ideas of two remarkable thinkers: Ludwig von Mises and his most important disciple, Murray N. Rothbard (1926–1995). However, Hoppe's contribution extends beyond merely continuing the legacy of these two brilliant intellectuals. Hoppe also succeeds in upholding and advancing existing epistemological inquiries, illuminating issues and questions that had previously not been fully appreciated in Mises's and Rothbard's work. For instance, a notable example is Hoppe's "a priori of argumentation,"² with which he provides Rothbard's idea of the possibility of rational ethics—which he had previously grounded solely in natural law—with an a priori foundation.³ Another example is Hoppe's elucidation and justification of Mises's logic of human action (praxeology) as the suitable scientific method for economics. Let's briefly review Hoppe's approach.

2.

Mises posed a fundamental question: How can laws, or: regularities, be discerned in economics, a scientific discipline that belongs to the realm of human action? His response was that the appropriate scientific method of economics is the logic of human action or *praxeology*. Hoppe elucidates with unparalleled epistemological rigour and clarity that Mises's assertion holds true; the social and economic sciences can indeed only be meaningfully conceptualized as an a priori science of action but not as an empirical science. In my opinion, Hoppe's particularly important contributions in this context are *Kritik der kausalwissenschaftlichen Sozialforschung Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung von Soziologie und Ökonomie* ("Critique of Causal Scientific Social Research," 1983) and *Economic Science and the Austrian Method* (1995).

The decisive reason why the scientific method of the natural sciences, rooted in positivism-empiricism-falsificationism, cannot be applied in economics is human actors' *ability to learn* ("Lernfähigkeit"). The assertion that human actors possess the ability to learn cannot be denied without logical inconsistency.⁴ Rather, it stands as an a priori

¹ An assertion is considered a priori when its truth value is independent of experience, when it can claim strict universality. One cannot consistently deny an a priori statement without implicitly presuming the statement to be valid. For further exploration, refer to, for instance, Tetens (2006), Kant's "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" ("Critique of Pure Reason"), pp. 36–37; also Willaschek (2023), Kant, pp. 285–295.

² See Hoppe (2006), On the Ultimate Justification of the Ethics of Private Property.

³ See Rothbard (1983), "The Ethics of Liberty".

⁴ See Hoppe (1983), *Kritik der kausalwissenschaftlichen Sozialforschung*, pp. 13 ff. We cannot deny that humans have the ability to learn. If you say "Humans are not able to learn", you explicitly or implicitly assume that the person you are talking to is able to learn—otherwise you would not say what you just said. To argue that "Humans are not able to learn" is a *performative contradiction* and thus false. And if you say

truth—its truth value can be established independently of empirical experience, it does not require proof or disproof through experience, nor is such verification or falsification in this way possible, and it can claim universal applicability. Consequently, in human action, there cannot be quantitative behavioural constants like those observed in natural sciences, such as the relationship “If *A* increases by *x*%, *B* reacts by *y*%.”

There are no analogous (homogeneous) observations (data points) in the realm of human behaviour that would allow us to predict future human actions based on past observations. Instead, each human action must be considered unique, occurring under specific conditions that cannot be replicated identically. Consider the a priori of the capacity to learn in this context: It implies that an actor’s knowledge, which determines his actions, evolves, changes over time. As a result, actions taken by an actor at different points in time cannot be treated as uniform. Therefore, in the sphere of human action, a database of comparable observations akin to what is attainable in the natural sciences through experimentation does not exist.

Mises argued that, given the current state of scientific knowledge, it was impossible to scientifically explain and predict the ideas that undeniably shape human actions solely based on external factors, be they chemical or biological—leaving room for the expectation that some day it might be.⁵ Through his a priori concept of the ability to learn, however, Hoppe elucidates that the ideas guiding human action can *never* be scientifically explained by external factors for logical reasons. If I were to possess knowledge of all my future actions, it would imply knowing, in the present, all my future actions—a notion inherently contradicting the a priori truth of the ability to learn, rendering it a fallacious statement.⁶ As we cannot ascertain (all of) an actor’s future knowledge, predicting their future actions remains unattainable.

Hoppe not only presents the conclusion that the social and economic sciences can only be meaningfully understood as a priori science of human action, but he also meticulously addresses the challenges that arise when these disciplines are pursued as empirical sciences—which is the case today, almost without exception. In this context, Hoppe also delves into the reasons behind the preference among scientists and economists for such an epistemological approach. In doing so, he provides substantial and nuanced support for critiques akin to those articulated by Helmut Schelsky in *The Work is Done by Others: Class Struggle and the Priestly Rule of the Intellectuals* (1975) and

“Humans are able to learn *not* to learn,” then you get caught up in an *outright contradiction*. That said, the statement “Humans are able to learn” cannot be challenged without implicitly admitting that it is correct, it is valid a priori.

⁵ See Polleit (2022), Ludwig von Mises. Der kompromisslose Liberale.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 44–47.

Stanislav Andreski in *The Sorcerers of the Social Sciences. Abuse, Fashion, and Manipulation of a Science* (1977).

Hoppe explains unequivocally that the social and economic scientists who approach their discipline as an empirical science are not merely generating unscientific results. Instead, framing economics as an empirical science serves, first and foremost, the career advancement and self-interests of the social and economic scientists themselves.⁷ By adopting methodologies akin to those in the natural sciences, social scientists can embark on a seemingly infinite number of research endeavours, produce numerous articles and books, appear in the media, secure generous research grants, and organise countless conferences without ever achieving scientifically robust results. By embracing the scientific approach of natural sciences, sociologists and economists become particularly attractive to the state, politics and, of course, special interest groups.

Even the most ludicrous theories—like advocating for the replacement of gold and silver money with state-monopolised fiat money under the guise of economic growth enhancement or proposing socialism as a means to a better and more prosperous world—stand a chance of implementation.⁸ This is because if economics is considered an empirical science, the only method deemed acceptable for verifying the truth value of economic theories is through testing, practical application. Those opposing such a process are often dismissed as unscientific, anti-progress, backward-thinking. Economists who align themselves with the empirical science paradigm can anticipate various rewards, including state-sponsored prestigious titles, stable incomes, pensions, and ample research funding. Ultimately, Hoppe argues that the empirical science orientation of economics not only undermines the integrity of the discipline, easily corrupting it, but also distracts it from its pursuit of truth, rendering it susceptible to manipulation by special interest groups, and, above all, reducing it to a state propaganda instrument.⁹

3.

The a priori theory of human action extends beyond isolated economic occurrences, such as the effects of an expansion of the money supply, reductions of market interest rates by central banks, increases in income taxation, or the imposition of import tariffs or other protectionist measures. It can also be applied to socio-macroeconomic phenomena projecting the outcomes of specific human actions, human-created institutions. Hoppe demonstrates such an a priori assessment of consequences (or: progression-theoretical thinking) in his essay “Banking, Nation States, and

⁷ See in this context, on the role and fate of the intellectuals, Hoppe (2006), *Natural Elites, Intellectuals, and the State*.

⁸ See, for instance Hoppe (2006), *Austrian Rationalism in the Age of the Decline of Positivism*.

⁹ See Hoppe (2021), *The Role of Intellectuals and Anti-intellectuals*.

International Politics: A Sociological Reconstruction of the Present Economic Order” (2006).¹⁰ The paper is of significant importance for many reasons.¹¹

It represents a potent blend of rigorous a priori analysis, historical interpretation and conditional forecasting of future developments and outcomes. Hoppe begins by explaining that the state as we know it today, is a group of people that act as a *territorial, coercive monopolist with the ultimate decision-making authority over all conflicts within its territory and tax authority*, endeavours to monopolise money production to bolster its authority and enrich itself. Internally, the state is aggressive towards its own populace through escalating taxation, imposing an increasing number of regulations and laws, causing chronic inflation through fiat money expansion. And as if that weren’t already enough, the state also engages in external aggression against other states.

The economically and militarily dominant state, whenever and wherever possible, exerts influence over economically and militarily weaker states, coercing them into obedience, demanding their allegiance, and imposing its fiat currency for international transactions and as foreign reserve holdings. According to Hoppe, a state of a economically strong country with relatively liberal internal policies stands poised to expand its power most effectively, leveraging extensive resources with relatively little strain on its domestic economy and society, keeping resistance at bay, thus facilitating the pursuit of aggressive foreign policies. Hoppe further deduces that a community of states—as we know them today—does not represent a stable equilibrium but rather propels towards the formation of a global entity, a world state or government, that will introduce a singular global fiat currency.

Hoppe’s progression-theoretical framework offers a robust intellectual lens through which developments in the monetary and banking systems, state formation and expansion, and foreign policy can be meaningfully explained. Within this context, it becomes evident, for example, that the creation of the euro is not a “natural outcome” but rather the result of the states’ deliberate efforts to eliminate currency competition, even if it only existed between state fiat currencies, and to assert total control over the monetary realm. A rather uncomfortable truth emerges: The existence of the state as we know it today, or a coalition of states, harbours a disastrous dynamic, leading towards the

¹⁰ See Hoppe (2006) “Banking, Nation States, and International Politics: A Sociological Reconstruction of the Present Economic Order,” pp. 77–116. The original was published in the *Review of Austrian Economics*, 4 (1990).

¹¹ I first addressed the topic at Hoppes Property and Freedom Society in 2013, under the title “Organized Crime and the Progression Towards a Single World Fiat Currency” (available at www.propertyandfreedom.org/paf-podcast/pfp104-polleit-organized-crime-single-world-fiat-currency-pfs-2013/). In 2020, I published a book titled *Mit Geld zur Weltherrschaft*, an English version followed in 2023 with the title *The Global Currency Pot: How the Deep State Will Betray Your Freedom, and How to Prevent It*.

emergence of a singular world state or government, a prospect fraught with the potential for unparalleled tyranny.

Hoppe offers a revelation that may surprise some and most likely overwhelm many: namely, that the existence of the state as we know it today has set society and all of civilisation on a destructive path. Through the application of a priori progression-theoretical analysis, it becomes evident that even a minimal state will inevitably evolve into a maximal state and pave the way for a single world fiat currency. He asserts:

[T]he “phoenix” (or whatever else its name may be) will rise as a one-world paper currency—unless, that is, public opinion as the only constraint on government growth undergoes a substantial change, and the public begins to understand the lesson explained in this book: that economic rationality, as well as justice and morality, demand a worldwide gold standard and free, 100-percent reserve banking as well as free markets worldwide; and that world government, a world central bank and a world paper currency—contrary to the deceptive impression of representing universal values—actually means the universalisation and intensification of exploitation, counterfeiting-fraud and economic destruction.¹²

4.

As pointed out before, Hoppe has extensively explored the epistemological underpinnings of the social and economic sciences, particularly focusing on the logic of human action (praxeology) as articulated by Ludwig von Mises. According to Mises, the study of human action is not an empirical science but can only be conceptualised as an a priori science. At the core of praxeology as a scientific method lies the proposition “Man acts”, which serves as a foundational principle, as the Archimedean point, so to speak. Hoppe has meticulously examined the epistemological status of the proposition and categorises it as a synthetic a priori judgment in the tradition of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1781–1804). While differing views on this issue may exist, I would like to offer additional supporting remarks to bolster Hoppe’s stance.

In his *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant was not concerned with a priori knowledge per se.¹³ Rather, he specifically delved into the notion of “pure” a priori, as indicated by the adjective “pure” in the title of his book. In this context, Kant refers to “pure concepts of understanding”, that is, to special a priori concepts that lack experiential content and originate solely from human understanding. According to Kant, these pure concepts of understanding are always presupposed by empirical concepts. Unlike general concepts, they are not derived from other sources, and following

¹² Hoppe (2006), *Banking, Nation States, and International Politics*, p. 116.

¹³ See Kant (1781), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. A second, revised, edition of the book was published in 1787.

Aristotle's tradition, Kant refers to them as "categories," the fundamental concepts of thought. Kant derived these "pure" a priori concepts of understanding from his "table of categories" and "table of judgments" — which, however, are not universally accepted in professional philosophical circles.¹⁴

But even if his table of categories was not consistently derived and filled, Kant did introduce certain concepts within it that can reasonably be classified as pure a priori concepts of understanding, such as, for instance, logical operators (like, say, negation ("no") and conjunction ("and")). Moreover, Kant seeks the origin of the "unity in the conditions of our objects of experience," that is, the source from which we unify and comprehend the diversity of sensory perceptions in a coherent manner and from which all categories ultimately emerge. Kant's exploration centres on the "original-synthetic unity of apperception", which denotes the capacity of the human understanding to construct objects of experience or conceive them from sensory perceptions through synthesis or unification. Kant identifies the source of all unity in our objects of experience within the self-consciousness of the subject. According to Kant, "I think" is the irreducible idea—the original synthetic unity of apperception—that must accompany all experiences.

Kant articulates this idea as follows: "The 'I think' must accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought; in other words, the representation would either be impossible or at least be, in relation to me, nothing."¹⁵ Viewing thinking as a concrete form of human action, Mises's assertion "Humans act," or more personally expressed, "I act," is thus an irreducible concept.¹⁶ This notion suggests that the diversity of all sensory perceptions, including those related to the categories of action, is inherently bound to precisely this condition of "I act." From this perspective, Mises's statement "Humans act" not only qualifies as a priori but also a pure a priori. Mises appears to allude to such an interpretation: "It is our human characteristic that we are thinking and acting beings, and as humans, we know what thinking and acting mean. If we weren't thinkers and actors ourselves, no experience could tell us what thinking and acting are."¹⁷

¹⁴ See Hoeffe (2007), Immanuel Kant, pp. 92–97.

¹⁵ See Kant (1781), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, §16. Von der ursprünglich-synthetischen Einheit der Apperzeption der reinen Vernunft, pp. 114 ff.

¹⁶ Mises (1962), *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, suggested this point (pp. 35–36): "In acting, the mind of the individual sees itself as different from its environment, the external world, and tries to study this environment in order to influence the course of events happening in it."

¹⁷ Mises (1940), *Nationalökonomie*, p. 16 (my translation).

5.

Hoppe may be most recognised by a wider public for his book *Democracy: The God That Failed—The Economics and Politics of Monarchy, Democracy, and Natural Order* (2006). However, as already noted before, I personally did not become an “extreme apriorist”¹⁸ through Hoppe’s criticism of democracy, revisionist interpretation of history, destruction of the “myth of the state,” the debunking of the idea of “public goods”, and other exciting contributions he has made (of course I was certainly enlightened by them). Instead, it was the study of Hoppe’s foundational work on epistemology, his exploration of the scientific method, and his elucidation of the epistemological writings of Ludwig von Mises and Murray N. Rothbard that proved pivotal in becoming an extreme apriorist myself. What exactly is an extreme apriorist?

The extreme apriorist acknowledges and embraces the inherent limitations of scientific knowledge in the realm of human action. He understands that (economic) laws cannot be discovered through empirical investigations and are not subject to validation or refutation by experience. Instead, he asserts that a select few economic truths are apodictic, such as the fact that voluntary exchange is mutually beneficial for those participating in the transaction; an increase in the money supply reduces the purchasing power of money (compared to a situation in which the money supply remains constant); that the state as we know it today relies on coercion and violence rather than a voluntary consensus; that interventionism, if allowed to go unchecked, will inevitably lead to socialism, which is inherently unfeasible. These are just a few examples of the scientific insights embraced by the extreme apriorist.

At the same time, the extreme apriorist recognises the existence of numerous intriguing questions that, however, surpass the realm of the science of human action and elude scientific resolution—questions such as: Will stock prices rise or fall in the future? Will central bank councillors adjust interest rates in the coming months? Will the economy fall into recession in the coming quarters or not? Will capital market interest rates keep trending downwards? The extreme apriorist abstains from attempting to answer such questions (which tend to be of great interest to many) with the help of complex econometric models. In fact, he refrains from giving his audience the false impression that any of these questions can be effectively resolved through scientifically-sounding but misplaced methodologies that seek to impress the layman.

Instead, the extreme apriorist does his best to debunk and expose as inappropriate, as false, as a pseudo-scientific approach, the use of the scientific method of the natural sciences in the realm of the social and economic sciences, as it is unfortunately commonly practised today. Specifically, he openly challenges the notion that economics, in

¹⁸ I borrowed the term from Rothbard (1957), In Defense of “Extreme Apriorism.”

particular, can be approached as an empirical science, and it is here where he shows no compromise. Furthermore, he is unafraid to assert that many social and economic scientists fail to deliver the benefits they claim to offer. Rather, they often belong to a “false intellectual priestly caste”¹⁹ that pursues their professional and personal interests at the expense of the general population and, in doing so, facilitates the implementation of harmful ideologies and detrimental political measures.

The extreme apriorist remains steadfast in his principles, refusing to compromise merely for social approval and career advancement. Aware that he may receive little or no support from mainstream social and economic scientists, let alone from the state, he stands resolute. Hoppe’s epistemological contributions are invaluable in upholding truth and integrity in the social and economic sciences, shaping peoples’ thinking and their actions. Like Mises and Rothbard, he is a social and economic scientist who fearlessly presents his work, often with a refreshingly candid and scathing tone, despite facing harsh attacks. Hoppe epitomises the essence of extreme apriorism, standing apart in his unwavering commitment. His timeless contributions warrant the utmost attention; his scientific courage, intellectual incorruptibility, and academic integrity should serve as us a role model.

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¹⁹ Exemplifying this in the context of the monetary system, see Polleit (2023), *Die falsche Priesterschaft der Intellektuellen und das Fiatgeld* (podcast: www.youtube.com/watch?v=CubkVEZ7Ulc); and Polleit (2022), *Helmut Schelsky’s ‘Let the actual work be done by others. Class struggle and the priestly dominion of the intellectuals’ revisited*.

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