One of the great stumbling blocks in the path of popular economic understanding has always been the concept of economic equality. While the reasoning through which this concern is expressed has widely varied, an emotive rejection of the unhampered market due to a perceived lack of fairness and equity has long provided a skeptical opposition to economic logic. Rothbard recognized that “probably the most common ethical criticism of the market economy is that it fails to achieve the goal of equality.”¹ Concerns over the distribution of wealth and “dangerous” or “harmful” levels of inequality are common themes of mainstream economic and political discourse. The Austrian advocate must seriously engage with this argument if their argumentation is to break through the barriers of popular prejudices. Accordingly, Mises and Rothbard devote significant attention throughout their works to the question of equality. While any account of such varied and interconnected analysis will necessarily be limited, this article seeks to identify the broad contours of the response found in these key thinkers, explore the similarities and differences in their approaches, and begin to apply the lessons revealed towards providing a more robust response to the continuing concern over equality and inequality.

While the doctrine of the absolute equality of men seems to have fallen somewhat out of favor in recent decades (though there is little reason to see this as a permanent

gain), the ideological climate in which Mises and Rothbard both lived necessitated a firm response to the notion that an unqualified and total equality ought to serve as a primary goal of society. Such a principle of equality is anathema to liberty and the operation of the market, as “the inequality of individuals with regard to wealth and income is an essential feature of the market economy. The fact that freedom is incompatible with equality of wealth and income has been stressed by many authors.”

2 Not only is inequality necessary, but a conception of total equality is simply wrong, as “the fact that human beings are born unequal in regard to physical and mental capacities is not denied by any reasonable man” and “all human power would be insufficient to make men really equal. Men are and will always remain unequal.”

3 Rothbard traces this recognition of the impossibility of equality through the history of Western though, finding Ancient Greek acknowledgment of this essential truth and approvingly quoting the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, who “was also sound on the inherent inequality and diversity of man: 'Nothing', he pointed out, 'can prevent some seats in the theatre from being better than others'.

5 Similarly, Destutt de Tracy reasoned in the early 19th century that one cannot “expect equality of income, since men differ widely in abilities and talents.”

6 The doctrine of absolute inequality is an empty chimera, but one which is dangerous because of its ignorance of the natural role of inequality.

---

5 Rothbard, Economic Thought Before Adam Smith (Auburn: Mises Institute, 2006), 21.
6 Rothbard, Classical Economics (Auburn: Mises Institute, 2006), 5.
Inequality in attributes, talents, and interests provide humanity with its distinctiveness and the market with its means of promoting welfare. Rothbard argues that “the glory of the human race is the uniqueness of each individual, the fact that every person, though similar in many ways to others, possesses a completely individuated personality of his own.”

This inequality serves as the foundation for mutually beneficial exchange and economic progress. The free market coverts the potential for abuse raised by inequality into a potential for gain. Mises argues that “in the precapitalistic society the superior men knew no other method of utilizing their own superiority than to subdue the masses of inferior people. But under capitalism the more able and more gifted men can profit from their superiority only by serving to the best of their abilities the wishes and wants of the majority of less gifted men.”

The market leaves each man to be continually tested according to his ability to aid in the satisfaction of his fellows. Failure to contribute to the fulfillment of other’s preferences is punished with a loss of wealth. Even inherited fortunes do not protect from this continuous readjustment, and can indeed often make adaptation more difficult.

This dynamic of reward for service can only function if there is a differential between potential profit and loss. Thus, “the inequality of incomes and wealth is an inherent feature of the market economy. Its elimination would entirely destroy the market economy.”

Inequality is the inducement to productivity, for “it

---

forces all those engaged in production to the utmost exertion in the service of the consumers. It makes competition work.”\textsuperscript{11} The operation of the free market even encourages increased inequality of attributes between men. The division of labor “intensifies the innate inequality of men,”\textsuperscript{12} and the increasing intellectual diversity found in civilization is in itself inequality. Such differences are hardly malicious, Rothbard notes, for “civilized human beings, therefore, are unequal in most of their personalities. This fact of inequality, in tastes, and in ability and character, is not necessarily an invidious distinction. It simply reflects the scope of human diversity.”\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, as inequality is vital for the operation of economic calculation and entrepreneurship, even economic inequality is a source of gain. Mises says “even those who look upon the inequality of wealth and incomes as a deplorable thing, cannot deny that it makes for progressing capital accumulation. And it is additional capital accumulation alone that brings about technological improvement, rising wage rates, and a higher standard of living.”\textsuperscript{14} Thus, “inequality of wealth and incomes is the cause of the masses’ wellbeing, not the cause of anybody’s distress,”\textsuperscript{15} and “the prerequisite for more economic equality in the world is industrialization.”\textsuperscript{16} Whatever lessening of hardship and even economic

\textsuperscript{12} Mises, \textit{Human Action}, 163.
\textsuperscript{13} Rothbard, \textit{Education: Free and Compulsory} (Auburn: Mises Institute), 4.
\textsuperscript{14} Mises, \textit{Human Action}, 847.
\textsuperscript{15} Mises, “Inequality of Wealth and Incomes,” 47.
\textsuperscript{16} Mises, \textit{Economic Policy: Thoughts for Today and Tomorrow} (Auburn: Mises Institute, 2006), 86.
inequality achieved in the world is due to the harnessing of man’s innate inequalities and the incentives provided by inequality of income.

While Mises and Rothbard do reject the pursuit of an absolute equality of men or an equalization of wealth or incomes, they affirm equality before the law as a fundamental tenet of classical liberalism. The sense of fairness which is troubled by economic inequality ought to truly be troubled by violations of legal equality. Roderick Long notes that “it’s tempting to conclude that equality is not a central libertarian value at all. Yet earlier thinkers in the libertarian tradition placed far more emphasis on equality.”17 Rothbard traces this historical understanding, where “the concept of equality achieved its widespread popularity during the classical-liberal movements of the eighteenth century, when it meant, not uniformity of status or income, but freedom for each and every man, without exception.”18 He examines’ Burke’s apparent discussions of economic inequality and discovers he “is writing not about social classes but about social castes, i.e., he is referring to the artificial inequalities of wealth resulting from state actions and not to the inequalities resulting from free action.”19 State enforcement of economic privilege, with unequally treated castes, was the target of the classical liberals. Thus Rothbard finds through study of the development of the Declaration of Independence “that when Jefferson wrote that "all men are created equal," he did not assert everyone's right to an equal income and he did not intend the absurdity that

18 Rothbard, “Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism, and the Division of Labor,” 278.
everyone is equal in capacity or natural endowments… Man's equality lies in his equal right to liberty.”\textsuperscript{20} For Mises, this “demand for equality under the law can by no means be grounded in the contention that equal treatment is due to equals.”\textsuperscript{21} Rather, it is the benefits of capitalism which require the institution of equality before the law to shift away from the abuses of feudalism.\textsuperscript{22} Equality before the law is an essential underpinning of capitalism and for Mises and Rothbard reflects the area where equality ought to be a paramount concern.

Where, however, do all of these concerns about equality originate? “The current veneration of equality is, indeed, a very recent notion in the history of human thought,” notes Rothbard.\textsuperscript{23} Indeed, Mises argues that the emerging liberal advocacy of equality before the law “could triumph only within an environment in which the ideal of income equality was very weak.”\textsuperscript{24} The regimented, enforced division of castes in feudal European society had rendered any discussion of equality of wealth and income fanciful, while Asiatic societies had a stronger tradition of attempts at equity in land distribution. This distinction, Mises claims, allowed equality before the law to be advanced in Europe without being bogged down in a parallel and quixotic promotion of income inequality.\textsuperscript{25} From this positive innovation, however, the seeds of future concerns with economic inequality are sown. Mises notes that “The suffering from frustrated ambition is peculiar

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{20} Rothbard, \textit{The Revolutionary War: 1775-1784} (Auburn: Mises Institute, 1999), 179.
\item\textsuperscript{21} Mises, \textit{Liberalism}, 28.
\item\textsuperscript{22} Mises, \textit{The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality}, 6-7.
\item\textsuperscript{24} Mises, \textit{Human Action}, 838.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Mises, \textit{Human Action}, 844.
\end{itemize}
to people living in a society of equality under the law,” as the ordering of society on the basis of unequal talents and skills reveals the disparity between people’s self-assessed worth and their true abilities. Economic progress, sparked by liberalism, also reduced the disparities of the feudal system. Counter-intuitively, this eventually fueled intense interest in addressing the lessened degree of inequality which continues to remain. W. Allen Wallis reminds that “De Tocqueville pointed out in 1840 that democracy in America seems to cause the pressures to solve a problem to mount as the problem itself dwindles. He applied this particularly to inequality.” The gains of voluntary exchange were misinterpreted as a first step towards a total leveling of society and even humanity. Thus, amongst the precursors of communism in the French Revolution, “the ultimate ideal of Babeuf and his Conspiracy was absolute equality.” Even is less radical elements, such as the founder of the colony of Georgia, an egalitarian mood prevailed. The acreage of land which could be owned was strictly capped; until the authorities discovered that the policy left the colonists frequently idle, lacking an incentive to work. The lack of a developed idea of economic equality in Europe allowed for the emergence of equality before the law, which in turn both lessened actual disparities in income and wealth and helped drive the development of a dangerous rhetoric of total and economic equality.

26 Mises, The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality, 15.
28 Rothbard, Classical Economics, 305.
Those who advocate for equality in the sense of the elimination of disparities are not, according to Mises and Rothbard, driven by an altruistic humanism, but rather by envy and the lust for power. “What those people who ask for equality have in mind is always an increase in their own power to consume,” says Mises, “In endorsing the principle of equality as a political postulate nobody wants to share his own income with those who have less.”

Equality is a path toward self-aggrandizement, in terms of both resources and coercive control. W. T. Couch notes that “most of us want equality, and the meaning that we give to equality is, all the power that we have the power to get. We work for or against equality as we think it works for or against getting power for us.”

The source of remonstrations about equality is thus not the poor or oppressed, Rothbard argues, but a “new coercive elite” often centered in academia. Calls for equality are not a function of charity, but of envy. In this area, Rothbard praises Helmut Schoeck and his important 1966 work *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior*. “Schoeck has pointed out that modern egalitarianism is essentially an institutionalization of envy,” says Rothbard of the book, which “makes a powerful case for the view that the modern egalitarian drive for socialism and similar doctrines is a pandering to envy of the different and the unequal.”

Schoeck’s book opens by explaining that “Throughout history, in all stages of cultural development, in most languages and as members of widely differing societies, men have

---

33 Rothbard, “Egalitarianism and the Elites,” 49.
34 Rothbard, “Freedom, Inequality, Primitivism, and the Division of Labor,” 287.
recognized a fundamental problem of their existence and have given it specific names: the feeling of envy and being envied. Envy is a drive which lies at the core of man’s life and social being, and which occurs as soon as two individuals become capable of mutual comparison.”

Schoeck reveals that envy has always been a key structure in social relations. It is also, however, a force which is recognized (when it is recognized) as a destructive condition. Schoeck contends that the progress of society is the restriction of envy, as “most of the achievements which distinguish members of modern, highly developed and diversified societies from members of primitive societies- the development of civilization, in short- are the result of innumerable defeats inflicted on envy.” In order for this progress to occur, “envy’s culture-inhibiting irrationality in a society is not to be overcome by fine sentiments or altruism, but almost always by a higher level of rationality, by the recognition, for instance, that more (or something different) for the few does not necessarily mean less for the others” The guise of equality is thus employed as an expression for basic human envy, a force drives coercive intervention and restricts cooperative progress.

Doctrines of economic equality face significant practical and logical problems at even the most superficial levels. Mises marvels at the hypocrisy of the advocate of income equality on a national level, for “all the arguments advanced in favor of income

equalization within a country can with the same justification or lack of justification also be advanced in favor of world equalization.”\textsuperscript{38} Such global equalization, if it were possible, would obviously not be in the interests of most of those who stand to gain from national equalization in industrialized countries, and thus this logical extension is not made. Poorer nations, however, can recognize these applications and “same considerations which push the masses within a country toward a policy of income equality drive the peoples of the comparatively overpopulated countries into an aggressive policy toward the comparatively underpopulated countries.”\textsuperscript{39} The same envy which drives calls for equality can spark war, and the influence of this envy destroys the logical consistency of equality’s proponents. Furthermore, these advocates rail against the excesses that result from inequality without considering the role luxuries play in long-term economic development. Luxury markets provide vital proving grounds for innovations and technology that are then spread through society. These markets are the laboratories of economic progress and “the luxury of today is the necessity of tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{40} Perhaps the greatest error made in discussions of economic inequality is the assumption that the distribution of wealth and income (which is, necessarily, unequal) results from a process of “distribution.” Mises writes “The notion of “distribution” is

\textsuperscript{38} Mises, “Profit and Loss,” in \textit{Planning for Freedom} (South Holland, IL: Libertarian Press, 1974), 137.

\textsuperscript{39} Mises, \textit{Omnipotent Government}, (Auburn: Mises Institute, 2010), 285.

\textsuperscript{40} Mises, \textit{Liberalism}, 32.
itself preposterous.”⁴¹ Rothbard concurs as “On the free market, however, there is no such thing as a separate “distribution”… “Distribution” is simply the result of the free exchange process.”⁴² These results reflect increases in social utility, given the nature of voluntary exchange. Distribution only arises as a separate process in state action, where coercion prevents any assurance about social utility. To critique the distribution of income throughout a society is to attack the subjective preferences of the consumers, not some vile process of exploitation. The internal logic of arguments for income equality is under-considered, erroneous, and often contradictory.

The absurdity of arguing for the elimination of all human differences or even the equalization of wealth and income has led to attempts to shift the meaning of equality. Pure Marxist egalitarianism gradually collapsed into an ideology of interventionism, where the terms socialism and communism persevere primarily as political tools.⁴³ As the equalization of income no longer becomes a viable goal, equality faces the rather vital question “what, exactly, is supposed to be rendered equal?”⁴⁴ One proposed answer is opportunity, but “this too, is as meaningless as the former concept. How can the New Yorker’s opportunity and the Indian’s opportunity to sail around Manhattan, or to swim

---

⁴² Rothbard, “Toward a Reconstruction of Utility and Welfare Economics” (Mises Institute, 2002).
in the Ganges, be “equalized”?

By the last quarter of the twentieth century, Rothbard argues, egalitarianism was beginning to adopt the language and orientation of preventing “group oppression.” The rhetoric of racial, gender, or cultural victimization allows proponents to call for the same redistribution of resources, but from a more specific ground of alleged victimization. The concept of equality therefore adapts and takes root in new ways, as a function of the ulterior aims of its advocates.

There are many who might agree that a total leveling or equalization of society is impossible and perhaps even undesirable, but that the potential to lessen inequality by degrees remains as an attractive option. Mises recognizes that “Other people are more considerate in their reformist zeal… But both groups, the party of the thoroughgoing socialists and that of the more cautious reformers, agree on the basic doctrine according to which profit and interest are “unearned” income and therefore, morally objectionable.” Because of this shared belief, Mises reject the “moderates” belief that their viewpoint results in any less drastic implications than the total egalitarians. While they say “We want merely to substitute a lower degree of inequality for a higher degree, … They do not assert that a definite degree of inequality which can be exactly determined by a judgment free of any arbitrariness and personal evaluation is good and has to be preserved unconditionally.” Thus, “then there is logically in their doctrine no

point at which the endeavors toward equalization would have to stop.”

In declaring inequality to be evil, Mises argues, they begin a slippery slope to full socialist egalitarianism that cannot be stopped midway. The dispute between capitalism and socialism is not one to be balanced, for it is a clash of mutually exclusive systems. While Interventionists claim to present a third way lying in the middle of the two combatants, “The conflict of the two principles is irreconcilable and does not allow for any compromise. Control is indivisible. Either the consumers’ demand as manifested on the market decides for what purposes and how the factors of production should be employed, or the government takes care of these matters.” Mises therefore places heavy emphasis on the identical practical outcomes of socialism and the supposedly more moderate interventionist position. Rothbard acknowledges the presence of the moderates as well, noting that “many will take these considerations into account by settling for some cuts in living standards in order to gain more equality.” While he seems to concur with Mises observations regarding practical results, he frames the matter as the manipulation of the moderates by the true egalitarians. To advocate for a limited reduction of inequality “misses the essential nature of, as well as the most effective rebuttal to, the egalitarian program: to expose it as a mask for the drive to power of the now ruling left-liberal intellectual and media elites.” While this is consistent with the ethical emphasis Rothbard adopts in his response to equality, it is questionable whether this charge of manipulation

50 Rothbard, Man, Economy, and State, 1309.
will be strongly persuasive to those moderates who believe they see both an evil in both excessive inequality and excessive equality. Roderick Long offers a nuanced exploration of the situation in his essay “Equality: The Unknown Ideal.” He admits that the envy-based view of egalitarians as consciously self-interested may be “a fair analysis of some, but only some, socioeconomic egalitarians. Most of the socioeconomic egalitarians I know personally are sincere in their egalitarianism and well-meaning in their statism.”

While these interventionists are not innocent, it is generally because they are ignorant of the alternatives to state-based reduction of inequality. This certainly does not challenge the validity of the arguments Mises and Rothbard make against egalitarianism, but it does suggest some problems in communicating with these moderates or interventionists.

Rothbard, to a far greater degree than Mises, argues that the damning argument against equality and egalitarianism is one of morality, rather than just practicality. “In no area has the Left been granted justice and morality as extensively and almost universally as in its espousal of massive equality,” he laments. Opposition centered in the practicality of an argument cannot stand against a doctrine granted this ethical presumption “for if one side is granted ethics and the “ideal” from the start, then that side will be able to effect gradual but sure changes in its own direction; and as these changes accumulate, the stigma of “impracticality” becomes less and less directly relevant.”

Rothbard claims that a more effective response is to recognize that the practicality of a norm is a key part of whether it can be considered ethical. “Philosophically, there can be no divorce

---

52 Rothbard, “Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature,” in Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays (Auburn: Mises Institute, 2000), 1.
between theory and practice. Egalitarian measures do not “work” because they violate the basic nature of man, of what it means for the individual man to be truly human.”

Attempts to destroy inequality are in fact attempts to destroy the very diversity that gives human life value, and “being antihuman in the deepest sense, the egalitarian goal is, therefore, evil and any attempts in the direction of such a goal must be considered evil as well.” For Rothbard then, equality is simply a tactic of moral deception. In being a cover for envy and coercion, it is a rhetorical tool appropriated by the basest human instincts. Egalitarianism “does not couch its demands in terms of stamping out diversity; what it seeks to achieve sounds semantically far more pleasant: equality.” The gloss conceals radical agendas of technocratic direction and utopian planning. Rejecting inequality is a revolt “against the ontological structure of reality itself, against the “very organization of nature”; against the universe as such. At the heart of the egalitarian left is the pathological belief that there is no structure of reality; that all the world is a tabula rasa that can be changed at any moment in any desired direction by the mere exercise of human will.” Rothbard finds the threat posed by this supreme arrogance to be dire, and thus “egalitarians do not have ethics on their side unless one can maintain that the destruction of civilization, and even of the human race itself, may be crowned with the laurel wreath of a high and laudable morality.”

---

54 Rothbard, “Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature,” 8.
56 Rothbard, “Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature,” 17.
responses to the question of equality, and rather urges a moral consideration of the question.

While Rothbard strenuously argues against equality on moral grounds through what he views as a reassertion of the traditional and correct understanding of natural law philosophy, Mises disparages the natural law terminology because of its legacy of misuse. Rothbard, however, is not convinced that the critique of equality can be grounded in utilitarian considerations alone. “In the opinion of the natural law school all men are biologically equal and therefore have the inalienable right to an equal share in all things,” Mises states.\(^{58}\) Thus, “from the point of view of “natural law” the only just state of affairs is equality of income.”\(^{59}\) He finds the natural law framework to lack an objective arbitrator of truth, and thus sees it as often a relativistic enterprise where “it is useless to stand upon an alleged “natural” right of individuals to own property if other people assert that the foremost “natural” right is that of income equality. Such disputes can never be settled.”\(^{60}\) These failures are such that “The poverty of the natural law argument is exposed most clearly when it deals with the principle of equality.”\(^{61}\) Elsewhere, however, Mises is clearer that he sees the project of natural law as one driven astray. The belief in fundamental equality was a deviation from a path which otherwise led to rationalism and utilitarianism.\(^{62}\) “The doctrine of natural law that inspired the eighteenth century declarations of the rights of man did not imply the obviously fallacious proposition that

---

\(^{58}\) Mises, *Human Action*, 837.


\(^{60}\) Mises, *Human Action*, 282.


all men are biologically equal,” but this was instead a later imposition by the “champions of totalitarianism.”63 He concludes, however, that private property and the inequality of its allocation are best defended not by an appeal to a natural right of property owners, but to the utilitarian impacts it provides. “It is not on behalf of property owners that liberalism favors the preservation of the institution of private property. It is not because the abolition of that institution would violate property rights that the liberals want to preserve it. If they considered the abolition of the institution of private property to be in the general interest, they would advocate that it be abolished, no matter how prejudicial such a policy might be to the interests of property owners.”64

Rothbard finds this position highly problematic. He recognizes that Mises believed economic reasoning’s role in policy evaluation is limited to providing “men with the knowledge of the consequences of various political actions,” so that those who set political goals founded in envy “would certainly not accept liberalism, and Mises would certainly never say that economic science proves them wrong.”65 While Rothbard appreciates the desire to keep economics value-free, he argues that”Economics or praxeology cannot establish the validity of ethical ideals, but even ethical goals must be framed meaningfully. They must therefore pass muster before praxeology as being internally consistent and conceptually possible. The credentials of “equality” have so far

64 Mises, Liberalism, 30.
not been adequately tested.”\(^\text{66}\) Arguments of practicality have limited weight, for as Sheldon Richman explains, “Practice fell short of theory. That ought to make people rethink the theory, but many will just chalk it up to flaws in human nature. The last thing they will conclude is that the flaw is in the theory, not ourselves.”\(^\text{67}\) Thus Rothbard critiques Mises, asking “What could Mises reply to a majority of the public who have indeed considered all the praxeological consequences and still prefer a modicum—or, for that matter, even a drastic amount—of statism in order to achieve some of their competing goals?”\(^\text{68}\) Mises cannot, from his position, dispute their value judgment and so is limited to the slippery-slope argumentation seen before. Rothbard notes that such arguments will not work against all interventionist policy options and even when applicable will have difficulty swaying a public seeking short-term gratification. He believes Mises recognized this in his conduct, and “even though Mises strongly believed that economic science was value-free, … his insight into social affairs taught him that human life and happiness were at stake, and he was willing to take the "non-objective" step of coming out squarely in favor of human life and high living standards.”\(^\text{69}\) Rothbard contends that this tacit recognition of the need for ethical argumentation must be made more formal. “While praxeological economic theory is extremely useful for providing data and knowledge for framing economic policy, it cannot be sufficient by itself to


\(^{68}\) Rothbard, “Praxeology, Value Judgments, and Public Policy,” in *The Logic of Action One* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1997), 95.

enable the economist to make any value pronouncements or to advocate any public policy whatsoever,” he says in summarizing his position. “More specifically, Ludwig von Mises to the contrary notwithstanding, neither praxeological economics nor Mises's utilitarian liberalism is sufficient to make the case for *laissez-faire* and the free-market economy.”

Arguments from pragmatism are limited in application and effectiveness, so an ethical dimension is required in treatment of the problem of equality.

An examination of Mises and Rothbard has thus revealed a logical, practical, and ethical rejection of the aim of economic equality. It is a false idol which in fact threatens equality before the law and capitalism, the great drivers of economic growth. While Mises focuses his analysis on this potential impact of equality and attempts to equate partial and total calls for equality in terms of identical consequences, Rothbard is more willing to speak in moral and ethical terminology, identifying any call for equality as a manifestation of envy ad opposition to the natural order. This discrepancy is a question of where effective argumentation is best grounded, not whether the appeal to equality is at all acceptable. How, then, is the argument against such appeals best made in the contemporary context, where explicit advocacy of total egalitarianism is somewhat diminished and many claims to equality are couched in the language of political correctness and group oppression Rothbard identified? Long suggests one intriguing reformulation. Equality before the law, he argues, must be clarified. A society in which all are accorded minimal freedom can be interpreted as adhering to the most limited understanding of equality of liberty. Thus, “socioeconomic equality and legal

---

70 Rothbard, “Praxeology, Value Judgments, and Public Policy,” 98.
equality both fall short of the radicalism of Lockean equality,” the fundamental underpinning of classical liberalism. “The equality that Locke and Jefferson speak of is equality in authority: the prohibition of any "subordination or subjection" of one person to another.” This standard of equality provides a clear defense against interventionist efforts to promote socioeconomic equity through the state, for “inequality in authority is far more offensive, from a moral point of view, than mere socioeconomic inequality; hence, whenever the demands of socioeconomic equality conflict with the demands of libertarian equality, which they generally do, preference must be given to the latter.” This kind of analysis suggests the path forward from Mises and Rothbard in the struggle against envy and coercion justified under the guise of equality. Practical argumentation regarding the harmful effects of these proposals must certainly be provided, and in this area there continues to be great success. Economically sound impacts explications of the impacts of the full range of coercive policies are available to those looking to sincerely weigh the merits of egalitarian policies. Rothbard’s analysis leads us to believe that the presence of such information may not be sufficient. Where equality is granted the status of a moral good, people will be loathe to oppose its implementation, however flawed. To better address concerns of equality in the future, economists and friends of the free market must better articulate the ethical aspects of claims of equality. Long provides an intriguing beginning, but this is an area in which continually study, advocacy, and dialogue is required. The appropriation of equality for coercive purposes is a potent threat against liberty and the response must be comprehensive in both depth and scope.
Embracing the legacy of Mises and Rothbard in this area provides a sound starting point for future work.
Bibliography


