

## *Rule-following, Praxeology, and Anarchy*

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### **Abstract**

The aim of Ludwig Wittgenstein's "rule-following paradox" is to diagnose a seductive error that Wittgenstein sees as underlying a variety of different philosophical mistakes: the implicit assumption of the need for and/or possibility of a *self-applying rule*. A further implication of Wittgenstein's diagnosis is that human action is not reducible either to purely mentalistic or to purely behavioural phenomena.

If, as I shall argue, Wittgenstein's analysis is correct, then, I shall further argue, the rule-following paradox has important implications for two aspects of Austrian theory.

First, Wittgenstein's argument sheds light on the relation between economic theory and economic history – *i.e.*, between the aprioristic method of *praxeology* and the interpretive method of *thymology*, as Ludwig von Mises uses those terms in *Theory and History*. In particular, it shows that, just as thymological interpretation involves praxeological categories, so the possession of praxeological categories involves thymological experience – thus enabling a reconciliation of the superficially opposed insights of Mises' Kantian approach, Murray Rothbard's Aristotelean approach, and Don Lavoie's hermeneutical approach to Austrian methodology.

Second, Wittgenstein's argument provides a way of defending the stateless legal order advocated by Rothbard, Lavoie, and others. Critics of free-market anarchism often charge that a stateless society lacks, yet needs, a "final arbiter" or "ultimate authority" to resolve conflicts; but what such critics mean by a "final arbiter" turns out to be yet another version of the "self-applying rule" that Wittgenstein has shown is neither needed nor possible.